

# Tourism in Northwest British Columbia

Operations, Initiatives and Opportunities  
May 2020



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## Operations, Initiatives and Opportunities

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First edition April 2018, updated April 2020

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The tourism industry in British Columbia (BC) is based on BC's natural offerings, and utilizes the slogan 'Super Natural British Columbia'. Due to the province's size, it has six tourism regions. The region known as Northern British Columbia covers the northern half of the province from Highway 16 north to the Yukon border, and includes northwest BC, which is the focus of this report.

The rationale for completing this report reflects changes underway in northwest BC.

In 2013, following a significant economic slump due to a flat-lined forestry industry, \$60 billion worth of industrial projects were proposed for northwest BC. This gold rush of projects resulted in conversations - some of which were confrontational - about how the region might develop.

Now, with construction of a liquefied natural gas (LNG) export facility and associated pipeline underway in Kitimat, regional residents are discussing how to maintain the lifestyle and quality of life they love, while protecting the Skeena watershed's ecosystems and advancing development which promotes stability and resilience.

Residents have indicated that their version of responsible development is development that supports healthy salmon, clean water, clean air, and resilient communities. As such, SkeenaWild Conservation Trust is conducting a research-based Responsible Development Initiative (RDI) to advance conversations about economic development in northwest BC that supports both healthy salmon populations and healthy communities. This tourism report is part of that initiative.

The Responsible Development Initiative fills a knowledge gap, providing solid research to support economic conversations beyond the benefits and drawbacks of large industrial projects. Rather than further polarize the resource development debate, the RDI encourages respectful dialogue between those who primarily support industrial development and those who are more cautious or have concerns about the social, environmental and lifestyle ramifications of large developments, by providing up-to-date information about specific sectors, current initiatives, challenges, and opportunities.

The purpose of this report is to assess the tourism industry in northwest BC and provide insight into community and business initiatives that support the sector. The report also describes sector challenges and opportunities, in hopes of spurring discussion about how the industry can help provide stability to northwest BC's communities.

The scope of the project includes providing information about the:

- a. Number of people employed in northwest BC's tourism industry
- b. Financial contribution that the tourism industry makes to northwest BC's economy
- c. Current initiatives within northwest BC's tourism industry, and
- d. Opportunities to develop responsible tourism in northwest BC.

However, there is limited data available specifically for the northwest BC tourism industry, because the northwest BC region is included in the Northern British Columbia tourism region that encompasses the entire northern half of the province. This lack of current, useful data regarding northwest BC's tourism industry suggests limited understanding of the sector.

## What is Tourism?

Tourism is the activities of people traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for leisure, business or other purposes, for not more than one consecutive year.

Tourism depends on almost everything, and as more regions and countries develop their tourism industries, there are ever-greater impacts on natural resources, consumption patterns, pollution and social systems. So sustainable tourism is defined as tourism that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. Responsible tourism is like sustainable tourism, however, as the word 'sustainability' is often overused and not understood, responsible tourism has been adopted as a term used by the tourism industry. Responsible tourism is any form of tourism that can be consumed in a more responsible way.

Certification programs in the tourism industry serve as important tools for distinguishing genuinely responsible companies, products, or services from those that are merely using 'eco-' or 'sustainable' as a marketing tool to attract consumers. There are many tourism certifications worldwide, but Green Tourism is one of the first sustainable tourism certification programs in the world, and has remained one of the most sought-after eco-labels and certification programs.

## BC Tourism Industry

Around the globe, tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors so it's not surprising that tourism provides great value to BC's economy, is one of BC's largest employers, and one of its largest small business generators.

In 2016, 4.8 million overnight visitors travelled to BC. In 2015, the BC tourism industry generated \$15.7 billion in revenue, and tourism-related provincial tax revenue was \$1.1 billion.

In 2015, the tourism industry contributed \$7.4 billion of value added to the BC economy, as measured through Gross Domestic Product (GDP; in 2007 constant dollars). This means tourism contributed more to GDP than any other primary resource industry including oil & gas extraction (\$7.2B), mining (\$3.8B), forestry (\$1.9B), and agriculture and fishing (\$1.5B).

BC's tourism industry employs approximately 127,500 people and in 2015, the BC tourism industry paid \$4.5 billion in wages and salaries. Average compensation was \$35,000 per annum.

In 2012, labour market projections for the tourism industry in BC concluded that tourism will continue to be a growth industry in the province and will require more than 100,000 new workers by 2020.

## Northwest BC Tourism

Tourism in northern BC is generally related to outdoor recreation and visiting friends and family. Visitors from other parts of BC, Canada, the USA and Europe are drawn by wildlife, wilderness areas, outdoor recreation opportunities, and Indigenous cultural sites. The tourism industry in northern BC is part of the region's economic base, driving employment as well as attracting and retaining workers. Northwest BC is part of the larger Northern British Columbia tourism region so most of the available statistics relate to the whole Northern BC tourist area.

In 2014, there were over one million overnight travellers in northern BC that spent over \$391

million. The region garnered only 5% of BC's total overnight visitation tourism, and 5% of related expenditures.

During 2016, 73% of overnight visitors to northern BC were from BC, 10% were from Alberta and 10% were from USA with the rest coming from other parts of Canada, Germany, Switzerland and other international locations.

In 2015, there were 6,500 people employed in the tourism industry in northern BC and there were 1,180 tourism establishments.

Key tourism strengths in the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine include pristine wilderness and natural beauty, fishing and hunting opportunities, RVing and camping, and Indigenous cultural tourism. From 2014 to 2016, the number of tourism small businesses with employees in the North Coast and Nechako economic region decreased from 445 to 412.

In 2015, ferry passenger visitor traffic increased 2.3% on the north-south Prince Rupert to Port Hardy run, 13.5% from the mainland to Haida Gwaii between Prince Rupert and Skidegate, and 4.3% between Skidegate and Alliford Bay in Haida Gwaii. In 2016, BC Ferries' Port Hardy to Prince Rupert route had over 38,000 passengers, plus Prince Rupert had over 7,000 cruise ship passengers.

## Northwest BC Tourism Findings and Initiatives

Northwest BC tourism industry findings include brief snapshots of the unique aspects of areas from Haida Gwaii to Burns Lake plus initiatives which are occurring or underway in 2018 that will assist in developing the northwest BC tourism industry.

Haida Gwaii is a popular destination for travelers seeking beautiful coastal landscapes and a fascinating First Nations culture, and three tourism initiatives have been identified on Haida Gwaii that will substantially contribute to tourism on the islands over the longer term. These include Green Tourism certified resorts, indigenous tourism efforts, and an economic development data collection initiative for the tourism sector.

The Prince Rupert and coastal area encompasses the Great Bear Rainforest in the south, and Khutzeymateen Valley - Canada's only grizzly bear sanctuary - in the north, plus a multitude of First Nations' villages and cultures. Three initiatives were identified that contribute to Prince Rupert and area's greater tourism industry, including Great Bear Rainforest marketing efforts, Metlakatla Wilderness Trail upgrades, and a Remarkable Experiences Pilot Project.

Tourism is a significant contributor to the local and regional economy of the Terrace-Kitimat-Nass area and four tourism sector initiatives were identified in the area, including an elevator at the Kitimat Museum, partnering to showcase the region, a regional branding initiative, and expansion of University of Northern BC tour offerings.

Kitwanga is best known for its totem poles and highway junction, while the Stewart area is known for glaciers and bears. Farther north, Iskut, Dease Lake and Telegraph Creek have spectacular mountains and rivers, strong First Nations cultures and offer hunting, fishing, fly-in hiking and extended river trips. Two tourism sector initiatives were identified in the Kitwanga to Dease Lake area, including the completion of the Gitwagak Battle Hill National Historic Site management plan and a tourism development initiative by Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine.

The Hazeltons encompass several small non-indigenous and First Nation communities surrounding the junction of the Bulkley and Skeena Rivers. Kispiox Valley farm land is located north of the Hazeltons while Witset (formerly Moricetown) is situated upstream of the Hazeltons on the Bulkley River. Tourism sector initiatives identified for these areas include upgrades to K'san Historical Village and Museum, Moricetown Band RV Park and Campground upgrades, and upper Skeena tourism development initiatives by the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine.

The Town of Smithers has an outdoor vibe with an alpine-themed downtown while the Village of Telkwa is a quaint community situated at the confluence of the Telkwa and Bulkley Rivers. Two tourism initiatives for the Smithers and Telkwa areas include documented support for the tourism industry and the Steelhead Paradise campaign.

The lakes district between Houston and Burns Lake includes several smaller communities and First Nation villages as well as the larger communities of Houston and Burns Lake. Initiatives underway in this area include Burns Lake mountain biking developments, documented support for growing the tourism industry, Fort Babine Lodge and Lake Babine Nation tourism strategy, and development of a Granisle community campsite.

In addition to the initiatives previously presented, there are two tourism initiatives which are relevant to larger areas of northwest BC, including destination development planning and Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako district-wide tourism initiatives.

## Tourism Opportunities in Northwest BC

Thirteen opportunities have been identified to help develop the northwest BC tourism sector. Each opportunity fits into one of three categories and includes the following.

### 1. Opportunities that social and economic circumstances support

- a. Developing communities through tourism
- b. Non-consumptive experiences
- c. Sustainable, responsible, green certification.

### 2. Opportunities that the regional tourism sector supports

- a. Creating marketing material for explorer types
- b. Estimating visitor volumes
- c. Inventorying tourism operations
- d. Providing media resources and image data banks
- e. Using available data to encourage visitation.

### 3. Opportunities that the time is right for

- a. Catering to millennial travellers
- b. Circle routes
- c. Expanding indigenous tourism offerings
- d. Promoting a regional tourism vision
- e. Ski tourism development

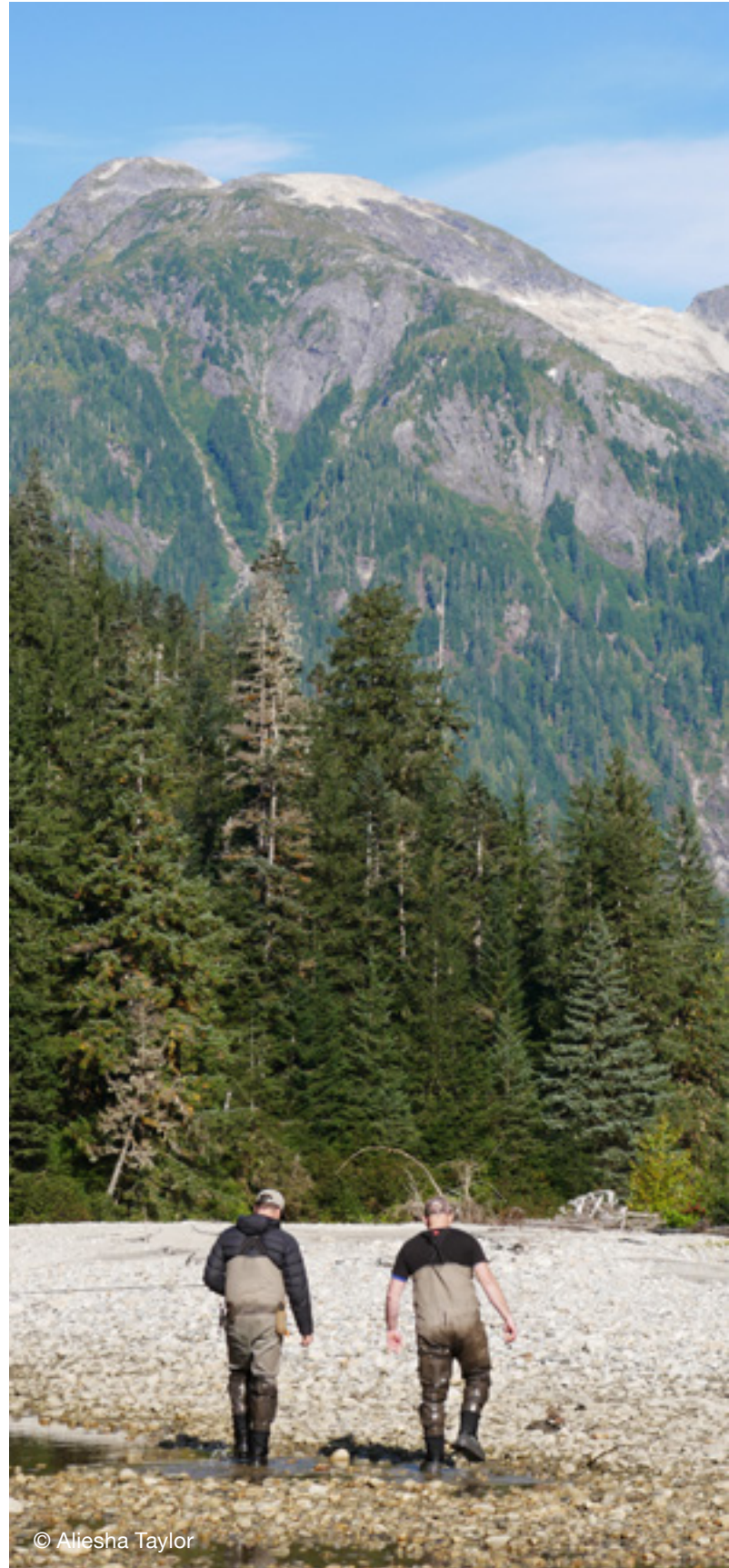


Undoubtedly, there are many other opportunities available throughout northwest BC, but those listed provide a great starting point for discussion and action regarding how best to develop the regional tourism industry.

## Conclusions

Although the tourism industry in northwest BC appears to be relatively healthy and contribute to the region's economy, there also appears to be considerable room for growth particularly in the areas of certified sustainable/responsible tourism and indigenous offerings. It's also important to note that as time moves on, regional initiatives, challenges and opportunities will change or become outdated, and new ones will take their place so it's worth considering these initiatives and opportunities as starting places for action and discussion.

Finally, many of northwest BC's attributes – from healthy salmon ecosystems to wild viewscapes – must remain intact for tourism industry stability and growth. Therefore, balancing tourists' needs with the desires of regional residents are important considerations when discussing regional economic development.



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A middle-aged man with a goatee and a white bandana is smiling broadly. He is wearing a white t-shirt with a graphic of Luigi and Mario. He is holding a large, fresh salmon fillet on a silver foil tray. The background is a kitchen or food preparation area with various items visible.

# INTRODUCTION

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry in British Columbia (BC) is based on BC's natural offerings, and utilizes the slogan 'Super Natural British Columbia'. Due to the province's size, it has six tourism regions. The region known as Northern British Columbia covers the northern half of the province from Highway 16 north to the Yukon border, and includes northwest BC, which is the focus of this report.

For this report, northwest BC is considered the area covered by Statistics Canada's North Coast and Nechako economic regions. The North Coast economic region includes Haida Gwaii, Prince Rupert, Terrace and Kitimat, while the Nechako economic region stretches from the BC–Yukon border south to the Central Lakes District. Within northwest BC, different areas have different tourism offerings – primarily due to regional geography and culture.

The purpose of this report is to assess the tourism industry in northwest BC, including its value, and provide insight into community and business initiatives that support the sector. The report also describes tourism opportunities in the hopes of spurring discussion about how the industry can help provide stability to northwest BC's communities.

The scope of the project includes providing information about the:

1. Number of people employed in northwest BC's tourism industry
2. Financial contribution that the tourism industry makes to northwest BC's economy
3. Current initiatives and challenges within northwest BC's tourism industry, and
4. Opportunities to develop responsible tourism in northwest BC.

Information and data was sourced from many groups and individuals, including BC Stats, Chambers of Commerce, First Nations, individuals, municipal governments, non-profit organizations and business groups, regional and local economic development agencies and economic development websites, Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako, Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine, and North Coast Regional District, social media sites, and Statistics Canada. Sources are footnoted where applicable.

## 1.1 Background

SkeenaWild Conservation Trust is conducting a research-based Responsible Development Initiative (RDI) to advance conversations about economic development in northwest BC, and this tourism report is part of that effort.

SkeenaWild believes that salmon are the backbone of the cultures, economy and ecosystems of the Skeena region. Hence protecting salmon is fundamental to maintaining and building a healthy Skeena watershed, including the communities within it. Responsible development, where human and salmon populations coexist, is part of that. So the rationale for the

Responsible Development Initiative, and this report, is to further conversations about economic development that supports both healthy salmon populations and healthy communities.

In 2013, following a significant economic slump due to a flat-lined forestry industry, \$60 billion worth of industrial projects were proposed for northwest BC. This gold rush of projects resulted in conversations - some of which were confrontational - about how the region might develop.

Now, with construction of a liquefied natural gas (LNG) export facility and associated pipeline underway in Kitimat, regional residents are discussing how to maintain the lifestyle and quality of life they love, while protecting the Skeena watershed's ecosystems and advancing development which promotes stability and resilience. Residents have indicated that their version of responsible development is development that supports healthy salmon, clean water, clean air, and resilient communities. So responsible development:

- a. Is well planned, which means government playing an active role in determining appropriate sites for developments, which will in turn prevent crisis and division in our communities.
- b. Includes projects that are assessed objectively, in the interest of communities and the environment.
- c. Ensures a fair share of benefits remain in the communities where development takes place.
- d. Embraces the shift towards First Nations' co-management.
- e. Takes a long view.

The Responsible Development Initiative fills a knowledge gap. It provides solid research to support economic conversations beyond the benefits and drawbacks of large industrial projects. Rather than further polarize the resource development debate, the RDI encourages respectful dialogue between those who primarily support industrial development and those who are more cautious or have concerns about the social, environmental and lifestyle ramifications of large developments, by providing up-to-date information about specific sectors, current initiatives, challenges, and opportunities. This report attempts to

1. Understand the current status and potential future contributions of northwest BC's tourism sector.
2. Provide information to further conversations about tourism development that maintains the values of northwest BC's communities, and promotes economic stability.

With good information, planning, engaged communities, and a long view, better resource development decisions are possible.

## 1.2 Limitations

There is limited data available specifically for the northwest BC tourism industry, because the northwest BC region is included in the Northern British Columbia tourism region that encompasses the entire northern half of the province. Also, much of the information that was available specifically for northwest BC is out-of-date. The lack of current, useful data regarding northwest BC's tourism industry suggests limited understanding of the sector. Having said that, initiatives are underway throughout the region by local regional and provincial tourism organizations to fill gaps and further understand the sector in efforts to assist tourism businesses in developing products that northwest BC visitors are seeking.

A photograph of three people practicing yoga on a beach. They are in a downward dog pose, with their hands and feet on the ground and their hips lifted. The beach is covered in grey pebbles and large pieces of weathered driftwood. In the background, there are green mountains with patches of snow under a cloudy sky. The text "DEFINING TOURISM" is overlaid in white on a semi-transparent dark band across the middle of the image.

# DEFINING TOURISM

## 2 DEFINING TOURISM

Tourism is the activities of people traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for leisure, business or other purposes for not more than one consecutive year. It's a dynamic and competitive industry that requires the ability to adapt constantly to customers' changing needs and desires, as customer satisfaction, safety and enjoyment are the focus of tourism businesses.

Tourism encompasses outbound tourism, inbound tourism and domestic tourism, and it's the latter two which primarily effect northwest BC's tourism industry. Outbound tourism is people going from British Columbia to other provinces, territories or countries, so is not considered part of this report. Inbound tourism describes tourists coming to BC from other places, and BC competes globally to attract tourists from the United States, Japan, Germany and many other countries plus travellers from other parts of Canada.

Domestic tourism encompasses tourists which reside in BC themselves. These tourists make up almost half of the tourists in BC every year. BC Stats and Destination BC consider those travelling beyond their usual environment (typically more than 80 km from home) for business or for pleasure, to be tourists<sup>1</sup>.

There are twelve sectors of the economy which have been internationally recognized by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) that provide products and/or services to tourists<sup>2</sup>. They include:

1. Travel agencies, reservations and services
2. Air transport
3. Water transport
4. Road transport (ie bus)
5. Rail transport
6. Car rental
7. Accommodation
8. Food and beverage
9. Cultural
10. Sports and recreational
11. Area-specific retail goods (tourist trinkets)
12. Area-specific experiences and activities

It's easy to see that tourism constitutes a wide variety of sectors that provide diverse products and services to visitors; however, these businesses also provide products and services to local residents so it can be challenging to determine what constitutes tourism.

The first seven sectors listed above are easily defined. The first sector connects businesses and people, generating destination awareness and information among potential travelers. It encompasses event and conference planning organizations, travel companies and organizations, as well as associations, government agencies and companies that specialize in serving the needs of the tourism sector as a whole. It also covers organizations that are responsible for packaging, booking and ticketing travel products<sup>3</sup>.

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1 2017 go2 Tourism HR Society.  
[www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/what-tourism](http://www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/what-tourism)

2 [www.tourismsociety.org/page/88/tourism-definitions.htm](http://www.tourismsociety.org/page/88/tourism-definitions.htm)

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3 [www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/what-tourism/travel-services](http://www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/what-tourism/travel-services)



© Kim Hoekstra

The next five sectors listed above relate to transportation, which is not just about getting people from here to there, but – for the tourism sector – is also about the journey. From air travel to luxury cruise ships, transportation experiences often set the tone for travel and leave impressions that last a lifetime. The transportation sector plays a crucial role in BC’s tourism industry, with air, rail, ground and water being major transportation modes serving travelers, and it’s the only tourism sector employing more men than women and fewer younger workers<sup>4</sup>.

The accommodation sector includes hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts as well as resort-style staycations, and is one of the largest sectors in BC’s tourism industry<sup>5</sup>.

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4 [www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/what-tourism/transportation](http://www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/what-tourism/transportation)

5 [www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/what-tourism/accommodation](http://www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/what-tourism/accommodation)

The food and beverage sector encompasses all types of establishments that supply food and beverages for consumption, from fine dining enterprises, ethnic restaurants and institutional food outlets to catering firms, pubs and lounges. In BC, food and beverage establishments are also a major employer of youth and a training ground for many employees who are beginning their working careers<sup>6</sup>.

The last four sectors listed above are key components of the tourism industry, and often differentiate tourism areas from each other. They offer visitors a chance to explore the sights, facilities and wonders of their destination, and generally include historic sites, heritage homes, museums, halls of fame, art galleries, botanical gardens, ski hills, aquariums, zoos, water parks, amusement parks, casinos and cultural attractions.

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6 [www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/what-tourism/food-and-beverage-services](http://www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/what-tourism/food-and-beverage-services)

In BC, these sectors also include outdoor activities ranging from bird watching and salmon fishing to horseback riding, whitewater rafting, mountain biking, alpine snow sports, golfing, wilderness trekking, and educational visits to First Nations' sites. Regardless of size, these venues need people to work in gift shops and restaurants, as well as help maintain facilities, manage operations and promote attractions<sup>7</sup>.

Differentiating tourism activities is how operations convince potential visitors to try their products. Certification is another way. It brands the experience according to a set of values that tourists have shown are important to them, and that they may be willing to pay more for. Sustainable and responsible tourism are types of experiences and activities that cater to a specific tourist segment, and which may be of particular interest to northwest BC operators. They're discussed below.

## 2.1 Sustainable and Responsible Tourism

Tourism depends on almost everything, and as more regions and countries develop their tourism industries, there are ever-greater impacts on natural resources, consumption patterns, pollution and social systems. Sustainable and responsible tourism is about re-focusing and adapting – finding a balance between limits and usage so that tourism can be planned, managed, and economic, social and environmental impacts mitigated.

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation defines sustainable tourism as tourism that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. It establishes a suitable balance between the

environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and plays an important role in conserving biodiversity. It attempts to minimize its impact on the environment and local culture so that it will be available for future generations, while contributing to generate income, employment, and the conservation of local ecosystems.

Rather than being a type of product, it is an ethos that underpins all tourism activities. As such, it is integral to all aspects of tourism development and management rather than being an add-on component. The objective of sustainable tourism is to retain the economic and social advantages of tourism development while reducing or mitigating any undesirable impacts on the natural, historic, cultural or social environment. This is achieved by balancing the needs of tourists with those of the destination. By doing so, sustainable tourism maximizes the positive contribution of tourism to biodiversity conservation and thus to poverty reduction and the achievement of common goals towards sustainable development.

Sustainable tourism provides crucial economic incentives for habitat protection. Revenues from visitor spending are often channelled back into nature conservation or capacity building programmes for local communities to manage protected areas. Furthermore, tourism can be a key vehicle in raising awareness and fostering positive behaviour change for biodiversity conservation among the millions of people travelling the globe every year<sup>8</sup>.

Responsible tourism is like sustainable tourism, however, as the word 'sustainability' is often overused and not understood, responsible tourism has been adopted as a term used by the tourism industry.

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<sup>7</sup> [www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/what-tourism/recreation-and-entertainment](http://www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/what-tourism/recreation-and-entertainment)

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<sup>8</sup> [www.sdt.unwto.org/content/about-us-5](http://www.sdt.unwto.org/content/about-us-5)



Responsible tourism is any form of tourism that can be consumed in a more responsible way, so it's considered tourism which<sup>9</sup>:

- Minimizes negative social, economic and environmental impacts.
- Generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities.
- Improves working conditions and access to the industry.
- Involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances.
- Makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage embracing diversity.
- Provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues.
- Provides access for physically challenged people.
- Is culturally sensitive, encourages respect between tourists and hosts, and builds local pride and confidence.

### 2.1.1 CANADIAN CONTEXT

Canada's Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism was established in 2005 by the Canadian Tourism Commission, Parks Canada and the Tourism Industry Association of Canada. The code promotes triple bottom-line practices that balance economic objectives with respect for our natural, cultural and social heritage. It also acknowledges that living up to these principles requires action from a full range of players – tourism services and businesses, local governments, marketing organizations

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9 [www.sustainabletourism.net/sustainable-tourism/definitions](http://www.sustainabletourism.net/sustainable-tourism/definitions)

and travellers themselves<sup>10</sup>. The Code emphasizes that sustainable tourism

- Fosters appreciation and stewardship of natural, cultural and historical resources and places by residents, industry, governments and visitors.
- Is viable over the long term as it results in net benefit for social, economic, natural, and cultural environments in which it takes place.
- Is guided by the values of respect, integrity and empathy.
- Promotes sensitive appreciation and enjoyment.
- Balances economic objectives with safeguarding and enhancing integrity.
- Fully participates in and contributes to sustainability.

## 2.2 Certification Options

Certification programs in the tourism industry serve as important tools for distinguishing genuinely responsible companies, products, or services from those that are merely using 'eco-' or 'sustainable' as a marketing tool to attract consumers. Three globally recognized certification options are presented below.

### 2.2.1 GREEN TOURISM CANADA

Green Tourism is one of the first sustainable tourism certification programs in the world, and has remained one of the most sought-after eco-labels and certification programs. Unlike many other sustainable business certification programs that allow self-assessments and grading, every member is individually assessed by trained green

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10 Canadian Tourism Commission, Parks Canada and the Tourism Industry Association of Canada. *Canada's Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism*. 2005.



© Greg Knox

business experts, who review everything from energy efficiency to food sources. This thorough assessment process gives members insight into how to further reduce their businesses' impact on the environment, how to best manage future projects, as well as a personalized action plan about how to build their green business.

Green Tourism program has been recognized by Totem Tourism as the most credible sustainability certification program for the tourism industry, in a comparison to 143 different green tourism certification programs around the world.

The Green Tourism program criteria are aligned with ISO 14001 and exceed the Global Sustainable Tourism Council Criteria, as the criteria cover indirect impacts such as travel and transport, in addition to taking a holistic approach to sustainability covering categories from management to cultural and heritage practices to waste, water, and energy.

Criteria include: management and marketing, social and communication, energy, water and effluent, sustainable purchasing, reducing waste, travel, nature and cultural heritage, innovation, and tourism experiences<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> [www.greentourismcanada.ca](http://www.greentourismcanada.ca)

Northwest BC Green Tourism certified operators include:

- Bear Claw Lodge, Kispiox. Gold.  
[www.kispioxriver.com](http://www.kispioxriver.com)
- Haida House at Tlall, Haida Gwaii. Silver.  
[www.haidahouse.com](http://www.haidahouse.com)
- West Coast Resorts – Englefield Lodge and Hippa Lodge, Haida Gwaii. Silver.  
[www.westcoastresorts.com](http://www.westcoastresorts.com)

### 2.1.2 QUALITYCOAST

QualityCoast is the largest international certification programme for sustainable tourism destinations. Since 2007, more than 140 tourism destinations including coastal towns, resorts and islands in 23 countries, have been selected for a QualityCoast Award.

QualityCoast offers Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum awards, depending on the score an applicant receives when compared to set criteria. The criteria makes sustainable development concrete, objective, and measurable, and destinations can adapt their sustainability management system and implement actions according to the criteria, in order to obtain recognition for their efforts. The system is compatible with the ISO 14001 standard, among others, and consists of 100 policy criteria, covering six main themes<sup>12</sup>:

1. Destination Management
2. Nature & Scenery
3. Environment & Climate
4. Culture & Tradition
5. Social Well-being
6. Business & Hospitality.

QualityCoast is a programme by the Coastal & Marine Union - European Union Certification Commission, and part of the

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<sup>12</sup> [www.qualitycoast.info](http://www.qualitycoast.info)

Green Destinations Award and Certification Programme. The development and inception of the QualityCoast programme was funded by the European Union Certification Commission.

### 2.1.3 RAINFOREST ALLIANCE

The Rainforest Alliance works with hotels, inbound and outbound tour operators and other tourism businesses to help them improve their environmental, social and economic practices. The Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Tourism Standards for Hotel and Lodging Services and Inbound Tour Operators are GSTC-Recognized standards, which means they include all of the elements of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Criteria for Hotels and Tour Operators.

Those enterprises that become interested in also becoming certified by Rainforest Alliance, can apply to be audited against the sustainable tourism standard in a separate procedure and if meeting the requirements, are eligible to receive promotional benefits, including the use of the Rainforest Alliance Certified™ seal<sup>13</sup>.

The criteria requires:

1. Protection of nearby ecosystems
2. Wise use of natural resources
3. Climate change mitigation
4. Benefits to the social and cultural development of surrounding communities

To date 70 hotel and tour operators in Central America, South American and the Caribbean have been Rainforest Alliance certified<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> [www.rainforest-alliance.org/business/tourism/certification](http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/business/tourism/certification)

<sup>14</sup> [www.rainforest-alliance.org/green-vacations](http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/green-vacations)

# BC'S TOURISM INDUSTRY



### 3 BC'S TOURISM INDUSTRY

Around the globe, tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors. So it's not surprising that tourism provides great value to BC's economy, is one of BC's largest employers, and one of its largest small business generators<sup>15</sup>.

In 2016, 4.8 million overnight visitors travelled to BC, with over 1.5 million of them travelling to the province in July and August<sup>16</sup>.

In 2015, the BC tourism industry generated \$15.7 billion in revenue – a 5.3% increase over 2014, and a 37.3% increase from 2005. Tourism-related provincial tax revenue was \$1.1 billion in 2015, an increase of 8.9% over 2014, and an increase of 38.0% since 2005<sup>17</sup>.

In 2015, BC tourism exports generated \$4.1 billion in revenue - similar to that of agriculture and fish (\$3.8B) and mineral (\$4.4B) primary resource industries, but lower than that of energy (\$5.8B) and forest (\$12.8B) products. Note that tourism export revenue is considered the revenue generated by foreign visitors.

In 2015, the tourism industry contributed \$7.4 billion of value added to the BC economy, as measured through Gross Domestic Product (GDP; in 2007 constant dollars). This means tourism contributed more to GDP than any other primary resource industry including oil & gas extraction (\$7.2B), mining (\$3.8B), forestry (\$1.9B), and agriculture and fishing (\$1.5B)<sup>18</sup>.

The industry is fueled by a competitive business climate, industry innovators and access to valuable resources, providing great value for communities across British Columbia.

- There are more than 19,000 tourism-related businesses in six tourism regions (Cariboo Chilcotin Coast, Kootenay Rockies, Northern British Columbia, Thompson Okanagan, Vancouver Coast & Mountains).
- Most tourism businesses are locally-owned small and medium enterprises that directly contribute to the local community economy, with 35% of tourism operations having less than four employees. Between 2014 and 2016, there were approximately 412 new small businesses in BC's tourism sector, an increase of 2.6%<sup>19</sup>.
- Nearly half the tourism businesses (42%) are located outside the Vancouver, Coast & Mountains region. Vancouver Island (16%) and Thompson Okanagan (13%) have the largest number of businesses outside the Lower Mainland.

Together, BC's tourism and hospitality industries employ 274,000 people on a full year equivalent basis, in diverse sectors such as transportation, travel services, recreation and entertainment, accommodation and food and beverage services. BC's tourism industry employs approximately 127,500 people<sup>20</sup>.

In 2015, the tourism industry paid \$4.5 billion in wages and salaries, and average compensation was \$35,000 per annum<sup>21</sup>.

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15 [www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/tourism-immigration/tourism-resources](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/tourism-immigration/tourism-resources)

16 Destination BC. *Provincial Tourism Indicators: 2016 Year to Date*. December 2016.

17 Destination British Columbia. *A Snapshot of Tourism in BC: Value of Tourism in 2015*. February 2017.

18 Destination British Columbia. *A Snapshot of Tourism in BC: Value of Tourism in 2015*. February 2017.

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19 *Small Business Profile 2017: a Profile of Small Business in British Columbia*. Produced by BC Ministry of Jobs, Trade and Technology and prepared by BC Stats. 2017.

20 [www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/industry-overview/industry-development-resources](http://www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/industry-overview/industry-development-resources)

21 *Small Business Profile 2017: a Profile of Small Business in British Columbia*. Produced by BC Ministry of Jobs, Trade and Technology and prepared by BC Stats. 2017.

While the largest share of jobs (64%) are in the Vancouver Coast & Mountains region, the fastest growth over the last decade has been in the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast (up 50%)<sup>22</sup>.

Accommodation is one of the largest sectors in the tourism industry and in 2011, approximately 43,000 workers were employed in hotels and other lodging operations in British Columbia<sup>23</sup>. Attractions, adventure tourism and recreation offer a variety of employment opportunities within the tourism sector, with more than 46,000 people employed in the sector in 2011. Recreation and entertainment is expected to be the fastest-growing tourism sector in the province, with an anticipated labour demand by 2020 of 20,530 full-year workers<sup>24</sup>. Events and conferences also contribute substantial dollars to communities. Not only do travelers spend money on the event or conference itself, but spin-off dollars are spent on everything from accommodation to transportation to souvenirs.

In 2012, labour market projections for the tourism industry in BC concluded that tourism will continue to be a growth industry in the province and will require more than 100,000 new workers by 2020<sup>25</sup>.

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22 [www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/tourism-immigration/tourism-resources/value-of-tourism](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/tourism-immigration/tourism-resources/value-of-tourism)

23 [www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/what-tourism/accommodation](http://www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/what-tourism/accommodation)

24 [www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/what-tourism/recreation-and-entertainment](http://www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/what-tourism/recreation-and-entertainment)

25 [www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/industry-overview/tourism-labour-market-growth](http://www.go2hr.ca/bc-tourism-industry/industry-overview/tourism-labour-market-growth)



© Cameron Prest



# NORTHWEST BC TOURISM INDUSTRY

## 4 NORTHWEST BC TOURISM INDUSTRY

Tourism in northern BC is generally related to outdoor recreation and visiting friends and family. Visitors from other parts of BC, Canada, the USA and Europe are drawn by wildlife, outdoor recreation opportunities and Indigenous cultural sites<sup>26</sup>. Northwest BC is part of the larger Northern British Columbia tourism region so most of the available statistics relate to the whole Northern BC tourist area.

In 2014, the northern BC tourism region garnered only 5% of BC's total overnight visitation tourism, and 5% of related expenditures. However, the northern BC tourism region is by far the largest area covering 569,000 square kilometers<sup>27</sup>.

The tourism industry in northern BC is part of the region's economic base, driving employment as well as attracting and retaining workers<sup>28</sup>.

In 2014, there were over one million overnight travellers in northern BC that spent over \$391 million. Of those travellers, approximately 394,000 were overnight leisure travellers, who spent \$200 million<sup>29</sup>.

Tourism indicators for northern BC suggest that tourism grew modestly from 2014 through 2016, and that the tourism outlook

continues to be positive<sup>30</sup>. Data indicated that visitor centre travellers increased 2.5% in 2015, while airport travellers declined 2.8%.

In 2016, there were over 109,000 travel parties who utilized visitor centres in northern BC, the second lowest visitation in the province<sup>31</sup>.

In 2016, 73% of overnight visitors to northern BC were from BC, 10% were from Alberta and 10% were from USA with the rest coming from other parts of Canada, Germany, Switzerland and other international locations<sup>32</sup>.

In 2015, there were 6,500 people employed in the tourism industry in northern BC - an increase of 3.2% over 2014 - and there were 1,180 tourism establishments<sup>33</sup>.

Only 36% of respondents in 2012 had a positive overall impression of the northern BC region, primarily due to lack of knowledge about the area. Northern BC is rated the lowest of all six tourism regions in BC. The majority of future trips planned for northern BC are planned for the summer, and to participate in outdoor recreational activities<sup>34</sup>.

Key tourism strengths in the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine include pristine wilderness and natural beauty, fishing and hunting opportunities, RVing and camping, and Indigenous cultural tourism<sup>35</sup>.

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26 Tourism BC and eNRG Research Group. *2012 In-Market Research Report, Northern BC*.

27 Destination British Columbia. *Regional Tourism Profile, Northern British Columbia*. January 2015.

28 Northern Development Initiative Trust. *State of the North Report*. January 2018.

29 Destination British Columbia. *Regional Tourism Profile, Northern British Columbia*. January 2015.

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30 Northern Development Initiative Trust. *State of the North Report*. January 2018.

31 Destination British Columbia. *Provincial Tourism Indicators: 2016 Year to Date*. December 2016.

32 Northern Development Initiative Trust. *State of the North Report*. January 2018.

33 BC Stats. Tabulated Annual Tourism Indicators. Sourced at [www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/data/statistics/business-industry-trade/industry/tourism](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/data/statistics/business-industry-trade/industry/tourism)

34 Tourism BC and eNRG Research Group. *2012 In-Market Research Report, Northern BC*.

35 Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine. *Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine Economic Development Commission Strategic Economic Development Plan 2016*.



For example, guided angling in the Lower Skeena region is of increasing importance to the local economy and British Columbia's economy as a whole. Direct angler expenditures totalled over \$10.5 million in 2016, producing \$16.5 million in total domestic output across BC and \$8.7 million in terms of Gross Domestic Product. Taken together, 2016 guided angling in the Lower Skeena region supported 190 local jobs and 224 jobs across BC, generating more than \$2.7 million in taxes province-wide<sup>36</sup>.

## Summary of Northwest BC Population and Employment

North Coast and Nechako economic regions are some of the least populated regions in the province, and are home to just over 2 percent of B.C.'s population. In 2015, 39,200 people lived in Bulkley-Nechako Regional District, 38,000 lived in Kitimat-Stikine Regional District and 18,800 lived in Skeena-Queen Charlotte Regional District for a total regional population of 96,000. Prince Rupert is northwest BC's largest population centre.

In October 2017, northwest BC's working population (aged 15 to 64) was 67,000, which accounts for about 68% of the region's total population. Total regional employment was 44,300 people, and the unemployment rate was 5.9%. The ten year average unemployment rate for North Coast and Nechako economic regions from 2005 to 2015 was 8.3%, compared to BC's average of 6.2%.

Northwest BC's unemployment rate in the first nine month of 2019 was 4.4%, a drop from 5.9% in 2018<sup>37</sup>.

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36 Big River Analytics Ltd. *Guided Angling in the Lower Skeena Region*. Prepared for Skeena Angling Guides Association.

37 Northern Development Initiative Trust. *State of the North Report*. January 2020.

In 2019, the living wage<sup>38</sup> for Terrace was \$18.17 and for Kitimat was \$20.61<sup>39</sup>. Both substantially greater than BC's \$13.85 minimum wage in June 2019 and the proposed June 2020 minimum wage for BC of \$14.60<sup>40</sup>. Median wages for those employed in Northwest BC in the accommodation, food service, and retail occupations – generally part of the tourism sector – are below the living wage<sup>41</sup>.

The following figure provides tourism employment as percentage of the labour force in BC as a whole, Kitimat, Prince Rupert and Terrace from 1991 to 2016.

The data indicates that Prince Rupert had the highest rates of tourism employment for all years when compared to Terrace and Kitimat. Rates of tourism employment were lowest in Kitimat, while Terrace tourism employment rates approximately emulate BC tourism employment rates. Tourism employment rates in Prince Rupert exceed BC rates in every year<sup>42</sup>.

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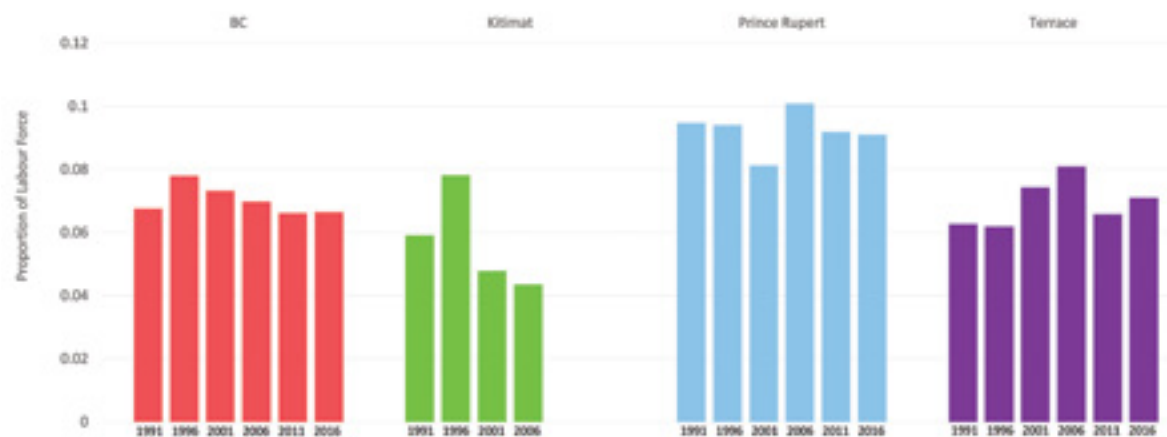
38 Wage that is high enough to maintain a normal standard of living.

39 Northern Development Initiative Trust. *State of the North Report*. January 2020.

40 Retail Council of Canada. [www.retailcouncil.org/resources/quick-facts/minimum-wage-by-province](http://www.retailcouncil.org/resources/quick-facts/minimum-wage-by-province)

41 Northern Development Initiative Trust. *State of the North Report*. January 2020.

42 Big River Analytics Ltd.



## Regional Tourism Statistics

From 2014 to 2016, the number of tourism small businesses with employees in the North Coast and Nechako economic region decreased from 445 to 412, a loss of 33 small businesses<sup>43</sup>.

In 2015, ferry passenger visitor traffic increased 2.3% on the north-south Prince Rupert to Port Hardy run, 13.5% from the mainland to Haida Gwaii between Prince Rupert and Skidegate, and 4.3% between Skidegate and Alliford Bay in Haida Gwaii<sup>44</sup>.

In 2016, BC Ferries' Port Hardy to Prince Rupert route had over 38,000 passengers, an increase of 4.2% from 2015 plus Prince Rupert had over 7,000 cruise ship passengers of which over 2,700 arrived in May<sup>45</sup>.

Vehicle and passenger traffic on two BC Ferries routes in Northwest BC increased from January to September 2019. On the Port Hardy to Prince Rupert ferry route, there was an increase of 3.2% in vehicle traffic, and an increase of 1.7% in passengers. While on the Prince Rupert to Skidegate (Haida Gwaii)

route, there was an increase in vehicle traffic of 7.6% and an increase in passenger traffic of 5.1%<sup>46</sup>.

In 2016, Smithers Airport had over 61,000 passenger visits, a decrease of 6.8% from 2015<sup>47</sup>. However, passenger volume for Smithers Airport from January to September 2019 increased 1.5%<sup>48</sup>.

Meanwhile, the Northwest Regional Airport located south of Terrace serves over 278,000 passengers annually, making it the largest airport in Northwest British Columbia<sup>49</sup>.

Northern Development Initiative Trust's January 2020 *State of the North* report states, 'Indicators suggest that tourism in Northern B.C. declined in 2017 and 2018 due in part to the wildfires in the region that caused evacuations and closures of tourism businesses. In 2019 passenger volumes at regional airports and ferry traffic increased year-over-year. This is consistent with increased visitation and suggests that 2019 has been a better year for tourism businesses in the region.'

43 *Small Business Profile 2017: a Profile of Small Business in British Columbia*. Produced by BC Ministry of Jobs, Trade and Technology and prepared by BC Stats. 2017.

44 Northern Development Initiative Trust. *State of the North Report*. January 2018.

45 Destination British Columbia. *Provincial Tourism Indicators: 2016 Year to Date*. December 2016.

46 Northern Development Initiative Trust. *State of the North Report*. January 2020.

47 Destination British Columbia. *Provincial Tourism Indicators: 2016 Year to Date*. December 2016.

48 Northern Development Initiative Trust. *State of the North Report*. January 2020.

49 City of Terrace. *City of Terrace Investment-Ready Community Profile*. 2016.



# FINDINGS AND INITIATIVES

## 5 FINDINGS AND INITIATIVES

Tourism industry findings for areas across northwest BC are presented below, including brief snapshots of the unique aspects of each area plus statistical information, where available. Tourism initiatives that are occurring or underway and which will assist in developing the northwest BC tourism industry, are also summarized.

### 5.1 Haida Gwaii Findings and Initiatives

Haida Gwaii is a popular destination for travelers seeking beautiful coastal landscapes and a fascinating First Nations culture. The islands contain some of the world's richest heritage treasures, with more than 500 archeological sites. According to National Geographic Traveler Magazine, Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site is North America's #1 national park, and it's a popular destination for wilderness kayak trips. It's also becoming known for luxury cultural getaways, with Ocean House at Stads K'uns Gawga making Luxury Travel magazine's short-list of *The most anticipated hotel openings for 2018*<sup>50</sup>.

GoHaidaGwaii is the website of Haida Gwaii Tourism, providing visitors with ample information about activities and what to do on the islands. The business directory lists 220 operations connected to the tourism trade including accommodation, transportation, places to eat, shopping, artists, guides, experiences and adventures.

There are also four visitor centres on Haida Gwaii, in Queen Charlotte City, Masset, Sandspit and Port Clements<sup>51</sup>.

In 2015, Misty Isles Economic Development Society (MIEDS) and Parks Canada conducted a visitor exit survey of tourists on Haida Gwaii and found that:

- 81% of visitors to Haida Gwaii were over 45 years old
- 52% of visitors were from BC, 20% from Alberta and 12% from the USA
- Three quarters of respondents had an annual income over \$40,000
- 30% of visitors spent \$1,000 to \$2,000 on the islands during their trip<sup>52</sup>.

Three tourism initiatives identified on Haida Gwaii that will substantially contribute to tourism on the islands over the longer term are summarized below.

#### 5.1.1 GREEN TOURISM CERTIFIED RESORTS

Haida Enterprise Corporation (HaiCo) is a business entity of the Haida Nation and is committed to stewardship of Haida Nation resources in a manner that provides for future generations. HaiCo's focus is on building enterprises that reflect Haida cultural values, creating careers, and improving the lives of the Haida people and the economy of Haida Gwaii.

HaiCo currently operates five brands, three of which are tourism-related. Two of these brands operate resorts that are Green Tourism Certified at the Silver level, while the third resort opened in 2018.

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50 [www.oceanhouse.ca/blog/2018/01/luxury-travel-magazine-most-anticipated-hotel-openings-2018](http://www.oceanhouse.ca/blog/2018/01/luxury-travel-magazine-most-anticipated-hotel-openings-2018)

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51 [www.gohaidagwaii.ca](http://www.gohaidagwaii.ca)

52 [www.mieds.ca](http://www.mieds.ca)

1. Westcoast Resorts<sup>53</sup> operates two fishing lodges on Haida Gwaii, The Lodge at Englefield Bay and The Lodge at Hippa Island. Both are floating barges which celebrate great food, excellent service, deluxe amenities and world class guided fishing adventures.
2. Haida House at Tlall<sup>54</sup> is a cultural lodge based near Tlell, which offers exclusive adventures and memorable excursions, as well as visits cultural sites and unique Haida experiences.
3. Ocean House at Stads K'uns Gawga<sup>55</sup> offers a 12 room floating wilderness lodge focused on providing guests with a luxurious retreat with a relaxing spa, complimented by Haida history and cultural education.

### 5.1.2 INDIGENOUS TOURISM EFFORTS

Indigenous Tourism BC (ITBC) is a non-profit organization that is committed to growing and promoting a sustainable, culturally rich Indigenous tourism industry. It's a one-stop resource for First Nations entrepreneurs and communities in British Columbia who are operating or looking to start a tourism business, and operates the Indigenous Tourism BC website which lists member business across BC's six tourism regions<sup>56</sup>.

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53 [www.westcoastresorts.com](http://www.westcoastresorts.com)

54 [www.haidahouse.com](http://www.haidahouse.com)

55 [www.oceanhouse.ca](http://www.oceanhouse.ca)

56 [www.indigenoustourismbc.com/about](http://www.indigenoustourismbc.com/about)

There are six members of Indigenous Tourism BC that are situated on Haida Gwaii<sup>57</sup>, including:

- Eagle Feast House in Masset, which provides visual, aural and gourmet delights
- Haida Fishing Charters, which offers fishing adventures on the west coast along
- Haida Heritage Centre at Kay Lnagaay, an award-winning oceanfront cultural complex
- Haida House at Tlall, mentioned above
- Haida Style Expeditions, which is the only 100% Haida-owned and operated cultural ecotourism company operating on Haida Gwaii
- Hiellen Longhouse Village, which offers traditional longhouse style lodging, owned and operated by Old Massett Village Council's Economic Development Team<sup>58</sup>.

### 5.1.3 MIEDS DATA COLLECTION INITIATIVE

Misty Isles Economic Development Society in partnership with Parks Canada, Destination BC and Northern BC Tourism, developed a comprehensive visitor survey was implemented in 2018 to provide data in support of Haida Gwaii's tourism industry<sup>59</sup>.

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57 [www.indigenoustourismbc.com/places-to-go/northern-british-columbia](http://www.indigenoustourismbc.com/places-to-go/northern-british-columbia)

58 [www.haidalonghouses.ca](http://www.haidalonghouses.ca)

59 [www.mieds.ca](http://www.mieds.ca)

## 5.2 Prince Rupert and Coastal Area Findings and Initiatives

The Prince Rupert and coastal area encompasses the Great Bear Rainforest in the south, and Khutzeymateen Valley - Canada's only grizzly bear sanctuary - in the north, plus a multitude of First Nations' villages and cultures. The port city is known for its seafood and funky Cow Bay walking area.

Tourism Prince Rupert operates the VisitPrinceRupert website, which has a business directory listing 81 operations connected to the tourism industry<sup>60</sup>. Listings include accommodation, transportation, places to eat, shopping, plus experiences and adventures. There is one visitor centre in Prince Rupert, which also hosts the Prince Rupert Port Interpretive Centre<sup>61</sup>.

Prince Rupert is BC's northern-most cruise ship port of call and is a highlight for many Alaskan cruise itineraries. In 2015, Vancouver to Alaska cruise passengers tended to be older (67% were aged 55 or older), well educated (61% university graduates), and affluent (50% had a household income greater than \$100,000)<sup>62</sup>.

The most recent primary tourism data identified for Prince Rupert area was from 2007, and the information collected can be summarized as follows<sup>63</sup>.

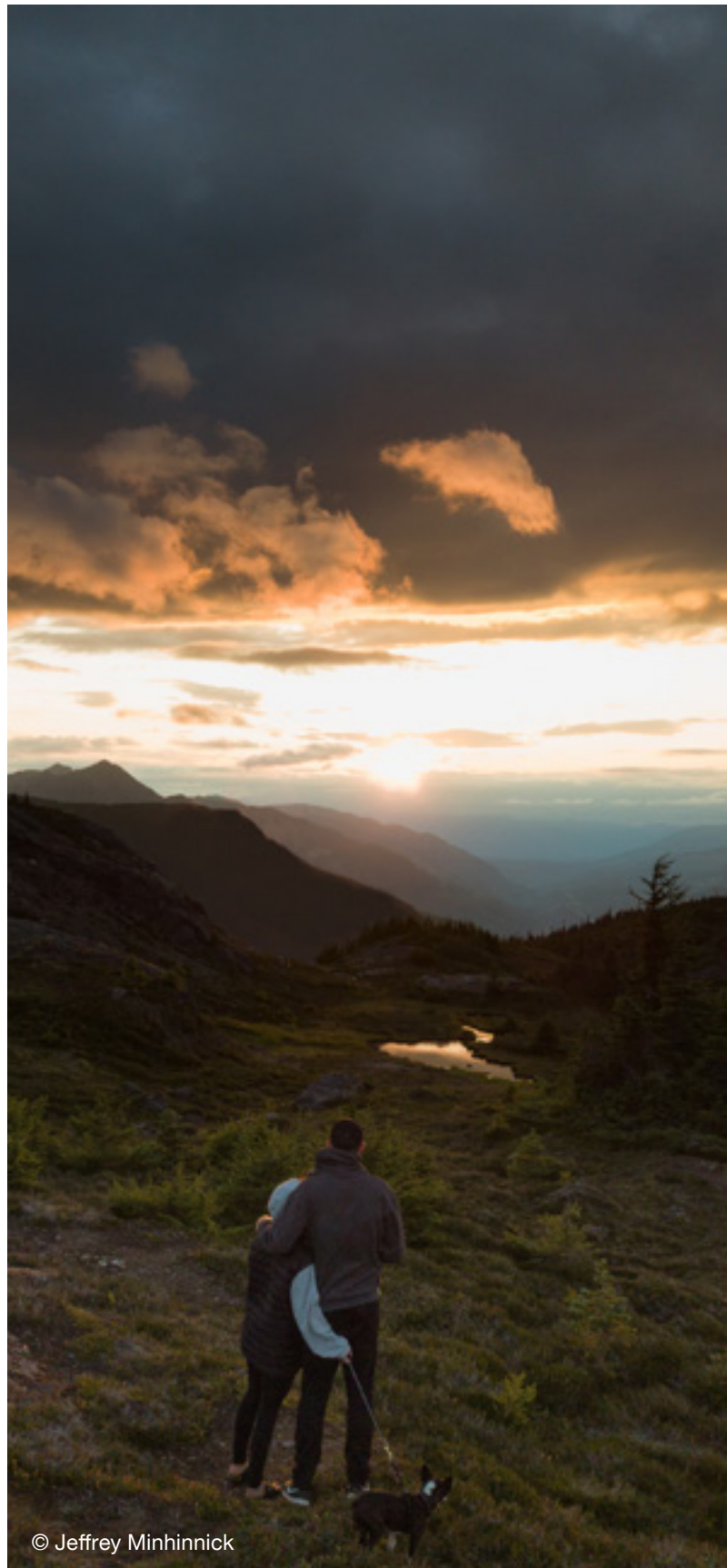
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60 [www.visitprincerupert.com](http://www.visitprincerupert.com)

61 [www.rupertport.com/community/port-interpretive-centre](http://www.rupertport.com/community/port-interpretive-centre)

62 Destination British Columbia. *Tourism Sector Profile, Cruise*. July 2016.

63 Tourism British Columbia, Research and Planning. *2007 Prince Rupert Visitor Study Findings, Final*. June 2008



© Jeffrey Minhinnick

- Between June and August 2007, approximately 190,000 travellers visited Prince Rupert.
- Those travellers spent \$52.2 million in the Prince Rupert area.
- 79% of all travellers were leisure travellers, with 21% business travellers. Leisure travellers accounted for 57% of all traveller revenue, with business travellers accounting for 43%. Cruise ship passengers made up 46% of all travellers.
- 55% of overnight leisure travellers were from somewhere in Canada, with 29% from BC. Residents from USA and international areas each accounted for 22% of travellers. 84% of international travellers were European.
- 56% of overnight leisure travellers were aged 55 or older, and over 47% had a university degree, Masters or PhD.
- 87% of parties were only adults, with more than one third of them earning over \$100,000.
- 36% of overnight leisure travellers had previously been to Prince Rupert and approximately 35% did not have a destination (were touring around).
- The average length of a trip away from home was 28 days, with 16 days spent in BC and 3 days in Prince Rupert.
- The most popular activities that overnight leisure travellers participated in were wildlife viewing (75%), visiting a municipal, provincial or national park (73%), and visiting a museum, heritage or historical site (66%).
- Approximately two thirds of visitors travelled to and from Prince Rupert by road (car, motorbike, RV).

- Over 10,000 guided and over 4100 non-guided anglers visited Prince Rupert between June and August 2007, and there were an estimated 68 fishing charter companies operating.
- 97% of cruise ship passengers were from the USA and 50% were older than 50.
- 79% of business travellers were from BC, and 71% had previously been to Prince Rupert. Their average trip length was 30 days away from home with 21 days spent in BC and 8 days spent in Prince Rupert.

There are some very unique tourism offerings in the Prince Rupert area – from tours of Port of Prince Rupert to North Pacific Cannery National Historic Site, and grizzly bear viewing in Khutzeymateen Provincial Park – and three initiatives were identified that contribute to the greater tourism industry. They're summarized below.

### 5.2.1 GREAT BEAR RAINFOREST MARKETING

The Great Bear Rainforest is a pristine natural area, 85% of which is protected. It has a variety of wildlife, including the Kermode (Spirit) bear and is home to approximately 27 First Nations who are working hard at preserving their culture<sup>64, 65</sup>. The area provides a multitude of activities for tourists including wildlife and grizzly viewing, whale watching, cultural exploration, hiking, kayaking, boating and fishing, and it attracts adventure seekers, outdoor enthusiasts and those looking for off-the-beaten-path types of experiences.

*National Geographic* included the Great Bear Rainforest as one of its Best Trips of 2013 and in 2017, it made the Global Top

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64 [www.coastalfirstnations.ca](http://www.coastalfirstnations.ca)

65 [www.hellobc.com/great-bear-rainforest.aspx](http://www.hellobc.com/great-bear-rainforest.aspx)

100 2017 Sustainable Destinations List<sup>66</sup>. The Global Top 100 competition is organised by Green Destinations in cooperation with 20 other international sustainable tourism organisations. Selection involves formal nomination followed by evaluation by a panel of 100 international experts. Winners are destinations considered most dedicated to the following GREEN values:

Genuine and authentic: supporting the celebration of local culture and tradition

- Responsible: defending people against exploitation and human rights violation, and enhancing accessibility for people with disabilities
- Economically sustainable: involving the local business community and enhancing local community employment during and beyond the holiday season
- Environmentally sustainable: ensuring public health, safety and sound environmental management
- Nature & scenery: protecting scenic views, habitats and wildlife, and respect animals that are used in tourism.

## 5.2.2 METLAKATLA WILDERNESS TRAIL

Metlakatla First Nation operate two social enterprises, one of which is the Metlaktala Wilderness Trail which is administered by Metlakatla Stewardship Society<sup>67</sup>. The trail is an eco-tourist attraction that both celebrates the natural beauty of the land and provides gainful employment to locals. The trail starts in the village of Metlakatla which is a 15 minute ferry ride from Prince Rupert, and runs approximately 10 km (one way) along the Tsimshian Peninsula, crossing three tidally

influenced rivers on suspensions bridges and includes a forest canopy walkway to a tower viewpoint. Due to storm in 2015, the trail requires maintenance and repair.

In August 2019, Northern Development Initiative Trust approved over \$79,000 for the Metlakatla Wilderness Trail structure rehabilitation project<sup>68</sup>. With these funds, the trail will see much needed repairs to its three suspension bridges and its 72-foot viewing tower. Over 1,000 visitors from Northern BC frequented the trail when it was open, contributing to the local economy through hotel stays, restaurant visits and other tourism related benefits. The trail is expected to re-open May 2020.

## 5.2.3 REMARKABLE EXPERIENCES PILOT PROJECT

Northern BC Tourism is working with Prince Rupert stakeholders on a Remarkable Experiences pilot project. This project is a province-wide development initiative designed to help improve the visitor experience in BC. It assists tourism stakeholders in becoming savvy digital and social media marketers, teaches them how to increase positive word-of-mouth recommendations, and ultimately helps them receive more referrals and repeat visitors.

Hoteliers, restaurant owners and adventure tourism operators in Prince Rupert completed a series of four modules covering strategy and traveler profiling, digital marketing and the customer journey, social media, and experience design. Participants will apply their new skills during summer seasons and provide feedback on the program. More Remarkable Experiences programs are planned for northern BC and the rest of the province<sup>69</sup>.

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66 [top100.greendestinations.org/?dest=great-bear-rainforest](http://top100.greendestinations.org/?dest=great-bear-rainforest)

67 [www.metlakatla.ca/things-do/metlakatla-wilderness-trail](http://www.metlakatla.ca/things-do/metlakatla-wilderness-trail)

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68 [www.northerndevlopment.bc.ca/news/northern-development-announces-more-than-500000-for-economic-development-projects-in-northern-b-c/](http://www.northerndevlopment.bc.ca/news/northern-development-announces-more-than-500000-for-economic-development-projects-in-northern-b-c/)

69 [www.travelnbc.com/remarkable](http://www.travelnbc.com/remarkable)



## 5.3 Terrace, Kitimat and Nass Valley Area Findings and Initiatives

Tourism is a significant contributor to the local and regional economy of the Terrace-Kitimat-Nass area. The Northwest Regional Airport, located south of Terrace, serves over 278,000 passengers annually, making it the largest airport in Northwest British Columbia<sup>70</sup>.

Terrace is an adventure playground and home of the Kermode spirit bear. With fishing, mountain biking and hiking prevalent in summer, plus skiing at the locally owned ski area and snowmobiling in the winter, there's lots of reasons to get outside.

Kermodei Tourism operates the VisitTerrace website, which has a business directory listing approximately 220 operations connected to the tourism industry<sup>71</sup>. There is one visitor centre in Terrace along Highway 16, plus visitor information provided at George Little House<sup>72</sup> near downtown Terrace, which also houses the Via Rail Station. In 2008, the Terrace area (with the exception of fishing lodges) saw direct visitor expenditures over \$38 million<sup>73</sup>.

Data from Terrace Visitor Centre for 2011 through 2015 indicated that 5,200 to 7,600 tourists visited the centre every year. In 2015, 30% of those visitors were from BC, 18% were from Europe, and 14% were from USA and Mexico<sup>74</sup>. Terrace's current

visitor offerings best meet the needs of two experiential tourist types:

1. Cultural Explorers: love travel and opportunities to embrace, discover and immerse themselves in culture, people and settings.
2. Authentic Experiencers: understated travellers looking for authentic, tangible engagement with the places they visit, with a particular interest in understanding the history of places they visit<sup>75</sup>.

South of Terrace, Kitimat provides access to fjords, First Nations' villages and islands along the coast, hot springs, fishing and bear viewing. Tourism Kitimat operates TourismKitimat website, and there is one visitor centre located on the outskirts of Kitimat<sup>76</sup>. Most tourism activities in Kitimat revolve around recreation, soft adventure and nature based activities, and are pursued independently. Key features that are considered primary motivators for tourists to visit the area include accessible salt and fresh water fishing, and Kitimat's history as a planned community built in the 1950's<sup>77</sup>.

Kitimat Visitor Centre statistics indicate that:

- Visitation declined in 2002 then gradually increased to 2008, followed by considerable decline in visitation from 2008 to 2010.
- Visitors are almost 52% local, 34% from BC and 11% from USA and Mexico.
- 48% of visitors travel to Kitimat for the day, while 16% stay one night<sup>78</sup>.

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70 City of Terrace. *City of Terrace Investment-Ready Community Profile*. 2016.

71 [www.visitterrace.com/stage.php/events/listings](http://www.visitterrace.com/stage.php/events/listings)

72 [www.georgelittlehouse.com](http://www.georgelittlehouse.com)

73 City of Terrace. *City of Terrace Economic Development Strategy 2016-2018*. 2016.

74 Destination British Columbia. *Tourism Planning Workshop, Terrace*. March 9, 2016.

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75 Destination British Columbia. *Tourism Planning Workshop, Terrace*. March 9, 2016.

76 [www.tourismkitimat.ca](http://www.tourismkitimat.ca)

77 Tourism BC. *Tourism Planning Workshop Report, Kitimat, BC*. April 29, 2011.

78 Tourism BC. *Tourism Planning Workshop Report, Kitimat, BC*. April 29, 2011.

North of Terrace, the wild Nass Valley is Nisga'a Nation Territory, with four Nisga'a villages, Nisga'a Museum<sup>79</sup> and the youngest lava flow in Canada. Between 2005 and 2010, Nisga'a Memorial Lava Bed Park camping statistics indicated that between 600 and 1,150 people stayed at the campground every year, and day use visitors to Nisga'a Lava Bed Provincial Park ranged from less than 5,000 visitors per annum to almost 25,000 per annum. Total attendance at the Nisga'a Museum in Laxgalts'ap in 2012 – the first full year of operation – was 1,012 people<sup>80</sup>.

There are several tourism amenities in the Nass Valley, and the Nisga'a Lisims Government is keen to support additional tourism business development that fits their vision for the valley<sup>81</sup>.

The following tourism sector initiatives were identified in the Terrace and Kitimat areas.

### 5.3.1 KITIMAT MUSEUM ELEVATOR INSTALLATION

Kitimat Museum received grants in 2018 and 2019 to install a lift between the first and second floors of the museum building. The lift will ensure easier access from the facility's ground floor to its second floor for people in wheelchairs or with medical conditions, plus will assist in moving items between the first and second floors of the building. The installation is slated for completion in May 2020<sup>82</sup>.

### 5.3.2 PARTNERING TO SHOWCASE THE REGION

Tourism Kitimat has partnered with Kermodai Tourism, Economic Development

Commission of Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine, Tourism Smithers, Burns Lake & District Chamber of Commerce, and Regional District of Burns Lake to showcase northwest BC by jointly setting up booths at larger tourism trade shows such as the Vancouver Outdoor Show<sup>83</sup>.

### 5.3.3 REGIONAL BRANDING INITIATIVE

A consortium of the Economic Development Commission of Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine, Nisga'a Lisims Government, Kermodai Tourism and Kitimat Tourism received funding from Northern Development Initiative Trust (NDIT), Destination BC, and the BC Rural Dividend Fund to conduct a regional tourism marketing initiative. The initiative includes research, branding, a shared online landing page, and actionable tactics to visitors and visitor spending in the region<sup>84</sup>.

### 5.3.4 UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BC TOUR EXPANSION

University of Northern BC (UNBC) Continuing Studies Program continues to expand its educational adventure tours in northwest BC, with seven tours in 2020<sup>85</sup>. The tours range from weekend to week long adventures, and cover ghost towns, grizzly bears, photography, and Skeena River history. The tours are included as an initiative because past tour participants have developed quite a few media articles which provide insights for potential regional visitors. So while they are educational programs, they have also substantially contributed to regional tourism marketing materials.

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79 [www.nisgaamuseum.ca](http://www.nisgaamuseum.ca)

80 Basi, Sandip, ISIS Sauder School of Business, University of British Columbia. *Nisga'a Tourism Development Strategy*. Summer 2012.

81 [www.nisgaanation.ca/economic-development-department](http://www.nisgaanation.ca/economic-development-department)

82 Kitimat Museum and Archives. *The Museum Post*. Winter 2019-2020.

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83 Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine. *Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine Economic Development Commission Strategic Economic Development Plan 2016*.

84 City of Terrace. *Minutes of the Regular Council Meeting Held in the Municipal Council Chambers on December 11, 2017 at 7:30 pm*. Available online.

85 [www.unbc.ca/continuing-studies/programs](http://www.unbc.ca/continuing-studies/programs)

## 5.4 Kitwanga North to Stewart and Dease Lake Findings and Initiatives

Kitwanga is best known for its totem poles and highway junction, while Stewart area is the land of glaciers and bears. Farther north, Iskut, Dease Lake and Telegraph Creek have spectacular mountains and rivers, strong First Nations cultures and offer hunting, fishing, fly-in hiking and extended river trips.

There are currently no formal visitor centres along Highway 37 north (Stewart-Cassiar Highway), although tourist information is available in Stewart, Bell II, Tatogga Lake Resort, and Dease Lake<sup>86</sup>.

Data from Stewart Visitor Centre (currently not operating) indicated that from 2002 to 2009, there were between approximately 6,700 and 11,000 people who annually visited the centre. In 2008, almost 30% of the annual visitors came from Europe, 32% were from Canada, and almost 35% from USA and Mexico. Also in 2008, 60% of visitors stayed one night in Stewart, with over 30% staying for two nights<sup>87</sup>.

No other information was found regarding tourist visits to the region, and designated online tourist resources were limited; however, the following tourism sector initiatives were identified in the Kitwanga to Dease Lake area.

### 5.4.1 GITWANGAK BATTLE HILL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site (GBH) is located in Kitwanga and a new

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86 [www.hellobc.com/driving-routes/29/stewart-cassiar-highway.aspx](http://www.hellobc.com/driving-routes/29/stewart-cassiar-highway.aspx)

87 Community Tourism Foundations. *Tourism Workshop Report, Stewart*. February 17, 2010.

management plan has been created for the site. Parks Canada, with input and support from the Simigiet'm Gitwangak Society (hereditary leaders), has developed a plan that provides direction for the management of Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site for the next 10 years.

The plan was prepared after reviewing the goals for and challenges of the site in terms of visitors, location, and cultural resource management. The current state of Gitwangak Battle Hill was also assessed with input and support from the Simigiet'm Gitwangak Society. The new management plan was signed by all parties in 2019<sup>88</sup>.

### 5.4.2 RDKS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

From 2016 onwards, one of four tourism development priorities for Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine Economic Development Commission has been collaborating and further developing tourism marketing focussed on drive markets that travel Highway 37 North and Highway 16. Partners include District of Stewart, Nisga'a Lisims Government, Destination BC and Northern BC Tourism Association<sup>89</sup>.

This initiative is ongoing, and includes building out the Discover British Columbia's Stewart-Cassiar website<sup>90</sup>, plus inviting social media influencers like Snow Seekers to experience the area. Some of the social media results are at #SkiNorthBC, others in photos on the Stewart-Cassiar website<sup>91</sup>.

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88 [www.pc.gc.ca/en/lhn-nhs/bc/gitwangak/info/index/gestion-management-2018](http://www.pc.gc.ca/en/lhn-nhs/bc/gitwangak/info/index/gestion-management-2018)

89 Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine. *Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine Economic Development Commission Strategic Economic Development Plan 2016*.

90 [www.stewartcassiarhighway.com](http://www.stewartcassiarhighway.com)

91 [www.snowseekers.ca/expedition/ski-north-bc-2](http://www.snowseekers.ca/expedition/ski-north-bc-2)

## 5.5 Hazeltons and Witset Findings and Initiatives

The Hazeltons encompass several small non-indigenous and First Nation communities surrounding the junction of the Bulkley and Skeena Rivers. Kispiox Valley farm land is located north of the Hazeltons while Witset (formerly Moricetown) is situated upstream of the Hazeltons on the Bulkley River.

First Nations culture and outdoor oriented activities are the focus of this area, and there is one visitor centre located in New Hazelton. District of New Hazelton and Village of Hazelton both contribute funds to the Economic Development Commission of Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine, for economic development to be conducted on their behalf. This has resulted in the creation of the new website Hazeltons Tourism, aimed at increasing tourism in the Hazeltons<sup>92</sup>.

No statistics were found regarding tourist visits to the region, however, the following tourism sector initiatives were identified for the Hazeltons and Witset areas.

### 5.5.1 K'SAN HISTORICAL VILLAGE AND MUSEUM UPGRADES

K'san Historical Village and Museum (K'san) is located near the ancient village of Gitanmaax at the confluence of the Bulkley and Skeena Rivers in Hazelton.

In 2018, the wood shingle roofs of the long houses were replaced as they were beyond their lifecycle. Plus, Gitanmaax Band is committed to increasing tourist visits to the site and ensuring the operation is financially viable over the long term and as such are considering all options.

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92 [www.hazeltonstourism.ca](http://www.hazeltonstourism.ca)

### 5.5.2 MORICETOWN BAND RV PARK AND CAMPGROUND UPGRADES

The Moricetown Band RV Park and Campground has undergone major upgrades including new bathrooms with handicap accessible showers, upgraded sites to accommodate a wide range of mobility needs, level surfaces, accessible picnic tables, 30 and 50 amp electrical service, high-speed Internet, a new children's playground, a security system and fencing, an onsite caretaker unit, a direct trail to the canyon and convenience store via hillside stairs, laundry services, plus professional guided Witsuwit'en Cultural Tours at the onsite Museum/Interpretive Center.

### 5.5.3 RDKS UPPER SKEENA TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

One of four Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine Economic Development Commission tourism initiatives is developing tourism products (brochures, photos, website and advertising) for the Hazeltons and Upper Skeena area. Partners include District of New Hazelton, Village of Hazelton and Northern BC Tourism Association<sup>93</sup>.

This initiative is ongoing, and includes building out the Hazeltons Tourism website<sup>94</sup>, plus inviting social media influencers to experience the area and write online articles that highlight the region.

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93 Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine. *Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine Economic Development Commission Strategic Economic Development Plan 2016*.

94 [www.hazeltonstourism.ca](http://www.hazeltonstourism.ca)

## 5.6 Smithers and Telkwa Findings and Initiatives

The Town of Smithers has an outdoor vibe with an alpine-themed downtown while the Village of Telkwa is a quaint community situated at the confluence of the Telkwa and Bulkley Rivers which generally receives drive-thru travellers.

A ski hill overlooks Smithers, offering skiing in winter and hiking in summer, while fishing, cultural events and resort vacations are all offered, too. Tourism Smithers creates and manages tourism marketing programs for the area, manages the TourismSmithers website<sup>95</sup>, and manages the Smithers District Chamber of Commerce which acts as a resource for visitors coming to the area. The Telkwa Visitor Information Centre is located right on Highway 16.

In 2015, Smithers Visitor Centre received 124,100 visitors – almost half of the 250,400 visitors across the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako. Visitors provided Smithers, Telkwa and surrounding area with annual direct visitor expenditures over \$28 million. Of the people who attended the Visitor Centre, 15% were local, 15% were American, 24% were from BC, and 31% were European. Of travellers, 27% were visiting for the day, while 51% stayed one night<sup>96</sup>.

Two tourism initiatives for the Smithers and Telkwa areas are summarized below.

### 5.6.1 DOCUMENTED SUPPORT FOR GROWING THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

There are four official plans representing Smithers and Telkwa areas which support growth in the tourism industry.

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95 [www.tourismsmithers.com](http://www.tourismsmithers.com)

96 Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako. *2017 Value of Tourism Study: Smithers and Area Tourism Profile*. 2017.

The goal of Smithers' 5-Year Strategic Tourism Plan (2017-2021) is to grow the tourism industry and increase visitation to the Smithers area by 20% by 2022. Smithers' 2014 Official Community Plan identifies tourism as an economic asset that provides year round benefits to local businesses and community residents. The plan calls for development of recreation, sport and trails infrastructure to enhance tourism opportunities<sup>97</sup>.

The 2015 Smithers Telkwa Rural Official Community Plan indicates that tourism is an increasing important component of the economy and a significant contributor. As such, the plan states that bed and breakfasts and agritourism operations will be supported along with enhancement of outdoor tourism recreation in an effort to increase tourism. Telkwa's Official Community Plan adopted in 2011 recognizes opportunities for economic growth through tourism and sets an objective of tourism development in the Village of Telkwa<sup>98</sup>.

In an effort to support development of the regional tourism industry, Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako has included tourism initiatives as part of their economic development strategies.

### 5.6.2 STEELHEAD PARADISE CAMPAIGN

Tourism Smithers is partnering with Northern BC Tourism Association, RDKS Economic Development Commission, Kermodei Tourism, District of New Hazelton, Village of Hazelton, and District of Houston on a Steelhead Paradise<sup>99</sup> campaign to

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97 Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako. *2017 Value of Tourism Study: Smithers and Area Tourism Profile*. 2017.

98 Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako. *2017 Value of Tourism Study: Telkwa and Area Tourism Profile*. 2017.

99 [www.steelheadparadise.com](http://www.steelheadparadise.com)

demonstrate to potential visitors, alternative fishing opportunities and activities that are available when rivers are closed to fishing<sup>100</sup>. The campaign includes developing the Steelhead Paradise website.

## 5.7 Houston, Babine Lake, and Burns Lake Areas Findings and Initiatives

The Houston to Burns Lake area is known as the lakes district, and includes several smaller communities and First Nation villages as well as Houston and Burns Lake.

Houston is known as the ‘Steelhead Capital of the World’ because so many anglers flock here for the mighty fish, but hiking, snowmobiling and cross country skiing are also popular. The Houston Visitor Information Centre is open year-round and is operated by the Houston and District Chamber of Commerce, which also has a visitor page on its website specifically tailored to tourists<sup>101</sup>.

In 2015, there were 12,301 visitors to the Houston Visitor Information Centre, of which 44% were from BC and 25% were local. Approximately 93% of the visiting parties were same-day visitors who did not stay overnight in the community<sup>102</sup>.

The Village of Granisle is situated on Babine Lake and caters to recreationalists and retirees. Granisle Visitor Centre sits at the entrance to the newly developed Granisle Memorial Park and is home to the Granisle Museum presenting local artifacts, history and replicas of locally discovered mammoth bones. The visitor centre also provides

internet access plus shower and laundry facilities<sup>103</sup>.

In 2015, 5,900 travellers visited Granisle and 47% of the visitors attending the Visitor Centre were from BC, while almost 42% were local. Almost 63% of visitors to Granisle did not stay overnight, while almost 20% stayed for two nights. Annual direct visitor expenditures by visitors was \$1.4 million<sup>104</sup>.

Lake Babine Nation is the third largest First Nations band in British Columbia with a total registered membership of over 2,438 in 2014, plus 27 reserve lands and five communities, all situated near Lake Babine<sup>105</sup>. Investment in cultural tourism opportunities are of interest to the band, which is well positioned to secure tangible economic benefits through indigenous tourism. In 2014, industry and market analysis plus an inventory of local assets and potential for growth indicated that there is clear evidence of tourism opportunities for Lake Babine Nation<sup>106</sup>.

Burns Lake and the surrounding area are known for fishing, mountain biking, boating, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, and guide outfitting plus the community hosts numerous festivals and events including the second largest Indigenous Day celebration in the province. Burns Lake & District Chamber of Commerce operates the Burns Lake Visitor Information Centre and the VisitBurnsLake website<sup>107, 108</sup>. There is also a visitor centre on the south side of Francois Lake<sup>109</sup>.

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100 Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine. *Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine Economic Development Commission Strategic Economic Development Plan 2016*.

101 [www.houstonchamber.ca/default.aspx?PageID=1003](http://www.houstonchamber.ca/default.aspx?PageID=1003)

102 Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako. *2017 Value of Tourism Study: Houston and Area Tourism Profile*. 2017.

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103 [www.hellobc.com/visitorcentrelisting/4548280/granisle-visitor-centre.aspx](http://www.hellobc.com/visitorcentrelisting/4548280/granisle-visitor-centre.aspx)

104 Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako. *2017 Value of Tourism Study: Granisle and Area Tourism Profile*. 2017.

105 [www.lakebabine.com](http://www.lakebabine.com)

106 Indigenous Tourism BC. *Lake Babine Nation: Regional Indigenous Tourism Report and Strategic Recommendations*. 2015

107 [www.burnslakechamber.com](http://www.burnslakechamber.com)

108 [www.visitburnslake.ca](http://www.visitburnslake.ca)

109 [www.opportunities.rdbn.bc.ca/tourism](http://www.opportunities.rdbn.bc.ca/tourism)

In 2015, Burns Lake saw 30,000 travellers which producing annual direct visitor expenditures of \$6.3 million<sup>110</sup>. There were 4,516 visitors to the Burns Lake Visitor Information Centre, of which 31% were local, 26% were from BC and 21% were European. Approximately 46% of the visiting parties were same-day visitors that did not stay overnight in the community, while 30% stayed one night<sup>111</sup>.

The following initiatives are underway to assist in growing Houston, Babine Lake and Burns Lake area tourism.

### 5.7.1 BURNS LAKE MOUNTAIN BIKING DEVELOPMENTS

The BLMBA is a not-for-profit society whose mandate is to develop a world class mountain biking trails destination in and around the community of Burns Lake, BC, and which intends to conduct trail construction, maintenance, promotion, and stewardship of a trail network within the Boer Mountain Recreation Site (BMRS).

In January 2020, the Burns Lake Mountain Biking Association rebranded as Ride Burns. Additionally, the club has been on the cutting edge of grooming single track trail, with club-organized winter events planning as winter fat-bike riding gains in popularity<sup>112</sup>.

The club's 2020 operating and management plan includes building trail, maintaining trails, refurbishing infrastructure, competing maps and adding signs, among other tasks<sup>113</sup>.

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110 Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako. *2017 Value of Tourism Study: Burns Lake and Area Tourism Profile*. 2017.

111 Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako. *2017 Value of Tourism Study: Burns Lake and Area Tourism Profile*. 2017.

112 [www.burnslaketrails.ca/index.php/press-releases](http://www.burnslaketrails.ca/index.php/press-releases)

113 Burns Lake Mountain Biking Association. *Burns Lake Mountain Biking Association Operating Agreement, Operating and management Plan 2020*.

### 5.7.2 DOCUMENTED SUPPORT FOR GROWING THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

There are ten official documents which support growth of the Houston to Burns Lake area tourism industry.

Houston's 2014 Economic Development Strategy found tourism was rated highly as an economic development opportunity and as such, one of the five strategic objectives that came from the strategy was to expand tourism opportunities. The 2011 Houston, Topley, Granisle Rural Official Community Plan has an objective to improve recreational opportunities that enhance the liveability and tourism potential of the area. The 2010 Houston Official Community Plan identified a number of strategies and actions related to tourism development that would help diversify the economy<sup>114</sup>.

Granisle's 2017 Official Community Plan identifies five tourism related strategic priorities, and it recognizes that tourism will play a significant role in future economic development. The 2016 Granisle Economic Development Strategy builds on the areas strengths including the beautiful natural area and Babine Lake. The 2015 Granisle Sustainability Plan identifies outdoor recreation and tourism as forming the largest part of the economy<sup>115</sup>.

In 2015, *Lake Babine Nation Regional Indigenous Tourism Report and Strategic Recommendations* stated that appropriate cultural tourism development by Lake Babine Nation would offer economic benefits to the community, and provide opportunities to be out on the land, share the band's history, and steward and monitor the land and waters of the territory. It would also strengthen revitalization of cultural knowledge, and provide suitable

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114 Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako. *2017 Value of Tourism Study: Houston and Area Tourism Profile*. 2017.

115 Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako. *2017 Value of Tourism Study: Granisle and Area Tourism Profile*. 2017.

employment and career opportunities<sup>116</sup>. The report also makes nine short term recommendations and eight longer term recommendations on ways to pursue tourism development.

Burns Lake 2016 Official Community Plan identified tourism as one of two key priorities for diversifying the local economy. The plan also recognizes recreational and tourism opportunities specifically related to outdoor tourism. Burns Lake 2016 Economic Development Strategic Plan listed tourism development as one of four priorities. The overall goal of the 2012 Community Tourism Plan is to increase tourism to diversify the economy. The 2009 Burns Lake Rural and Francois Lake Official Community Plan recognized tourism as a significant contributor to the local economy, and one objective is to improve outdoor recreational opportunities that increase the liveability and tourism potential of the area<sup>117</sup>.

Additionally, in an effort to support development of the regional tourism industry, Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako has included tourism initiatives as part of their economic development strategies.

### 5.7.3 FORT BABINE LODGE AND LAKE BABINE NATION TOURISM STRATEGY

Fort Babine Lodge is a commercial operation on the northern end of Babine Lake, near the community of Fort Babine and Rainbow Alley Provincial Park. In 2014, an incremental treaty agreement (ITA) was signed between the Province of BC and Lake Babine Nation to support eco-tourism opportunities. As part of that agreement, Fort Babine Lodge

- a resort situated on the shores of Babine Lake, offering accommodation in cabins and access to recreational opportunities such as fishing, hunting and hiking - was transferred to Lake Babine Nation<sup>118</sup>.

In 2016, Lake Babine Nation had KCD Consulting Incorporated and the Legacy Tourism Group review opportunities for developing a tourism economy in the Lake Babine area. As part of that work, Legacy Tourism Group is assisting with resort concepts and finance-ready business plans for identified potential tourism sites<sup>119</sup>.

In 2017, as part of the Lake Babine Nation Tourism Strategy Implementation Project, a business plan and three plans for new cultural tourism developments were under development, including a plan for Fort Babine Lodge<sup>120</sup>.

### 5.7.4 GRANISLE COMMUNITY CAMPSITE

There is a much-needed community campsite being developed on the grounds of the Granisle Visitor Centre property, which will be administered through the visitor centre<sup>121</sup>.

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116 Indigenous Tourism BC. *Lake Babine Nation: Regional Indigenous Tourism Report and Strategic Recommendations*. 2015

117 Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako. *2017 Value of Tourism Study: Burns Lake and Area Tourism Profile*. 2017.

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118 [www.news.gov.bc.ca/stories/lake-babine-nation-agreement-creates-new-opportunities](http://www.news.gov.bc.ca/stories/lake-babine-nation-agreement-creates-new-opportunities)

119 [www.legacytourism.com/legacy-projects/lake-babine-first-nations](http://www.legacytourism.com/legacy-projects/lake-babine-first-nations)

120 Lake Babine Nation. *Lake Babine Nation 19<sup>th</sup> Annual General Assembly: Honoring Our Ancestor's Words By Respecting Our Beliefs To Live By*. 2017.

121 [www.hellobc.com/visitorcentrelisting/4548280/granisle-visitor-centre.aspx](http://www.hellobc.com/visitorcentrelisting/4548280/granisle-visitor-centre.aspx)



## 5.8 Findings for Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako

Over the past few years, Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako (RDBN) has researched the tourism industry within its district, which extends from Smithers in the west to Vanderhoof in the east, encompassing Fort St. James to the north and Francois Lake and Ootsa Lake areas to the south. Some research results have been presented in previous sections, however, when the statistics are combined, a larger picture emerges for the region<sup>122</sup>. Note that the portion of the region district located east of Burns Lake is not part of this report; however the regional profile presented below includes that area.

- In 2015, there were 250,400 annual visitors to the RDBN, of which almost half (124,100) visited the Smithers/Telkwa area.
- In 2015, annual visitor expenditures were \$58.6 million.
- All ages of visitors travel to the region, from under 18 to over 55.
- Approximately half of the visitors have been to the region before on multiple occasions.
- 40% of RDBN visitors spend more than 6 nights in the region.
- Primary accommodations include camping (38%), hotels/motels (27%) and family and friends (25%).

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<sup>122</sup> Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako. *2017 Value of Tourism Study: Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Tourism Profile*. 2017.

- The most popular activities that visitors participate in are local events (51%), cultural activities and hiking (36% each), and fishing (33%).
- 64% of visitors spend up to \$100 per day, and half of those spend less than \$50 per day.
- 99% of RDBN visitors will recommend the area to family and friends.

## 5.9 Northwest BC Regional Initiatives

In addition to the initiatives previously presented, the following two initiatives are relevant to larger areas of northwest BC.

### 5.9.1 DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Together with the province's tourism regions, Indigenous Tourism BC and the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, Destination British Columbia is working in new ways to develop products and destinations, increase quality of visitor experiences, and ensure a high standard of services and amenities are in place to generate and sustain long-term demand for BC's tourism industry.

The Destination Development Planning program gathers local, regional, and provincial governments, Indigenous partners, economic development, industry organizations, tourism businesses, communities and other stakeholders for an iterative planning process to identify and discuss opportunities and impediments to development and tourism growth. From this information, 10-year destination development strategies will be created which will inform the development of six regional strategies (one of which will be for the Northern BC region, which includes northwest BC), as well as a single provincial destination development strategy.

A coordinated approach to destination development planning will result in better alignment of collective long term efforts to support strategically targeted and well-informed investments. It will also increase tourism revenues by looking to ensure the settings, infrastructure, and operating climate are in place for remarkable visitor experiences that will entice travellers to come back to BC and recommend BC to others.

Each planning area is led through a series of facilitated planning sessions occurring over 6 to 12 months. Planning area stakeholders who are unable to attend the planning sessions will be able to participate through a range of additional methods. As a result, a situation analysis, an asset inventory and a 10-year destination development strategy are created for each planning area.

By late 2017, the Destination Development program's first round of planning had wrapped up in eight planning areas. The next wave of planning is underway in an areas across BC.<sup>123</sup>.

### 5.9.2 RDBN DISTRICT-WIDE TOURISM INITIATIVES

In 2014, the RDBN Regional Development Action Plan identified regional tourism experiences as products that are beneficial to the regional economy. The plan also states that growth in the tourism industry is seen as a way to diversify the economy<sup>124</sup>.

Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako (RDBN) supports tourism marketing initiatives (regional brochures, tradeshow participation, and magazine advertisements), a regional image bank, and the VisitBulkleyNechako website that helps visitors with trip planning.

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123 [www.destinationbc.ca/Programs/Regions-Communities-and-Sectors/Destination-Development-Planning.aspx](http://www.destinationbc.ca/Programs/Regions-Communities-and-Sectors/Destination-Development-Planning.aspx)

124 Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako. *2017 Value of Tourism Study: Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Tourism Profile*. 2017.

The website is linked to social media accounts and provides downloadable brochures<sup>125</sup>, <sup>126</sup>.

Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako also works with district communities on a Regional Tourism Working Group to attract visitors to the area. Projects include funding a professional images data bank for the region, and the 2017 Value of Tourism Study<sup>127</sup>, <sup>128</sup>.

## 5.10 Summary of Northwest BC Tourism Findings and Initiatives

There is limited data available for northwest BC's tourism industry, however, information was gathered from a variety of sources in an attempt to understand the sector. Some of the more relevant bits of data available include the following.

- In 2015, 81% of visitors to Haida Gwaii were over 45 years old.
- Prince Rupert is BC's northern-most cruise ship port of call and is a highlight for many Alaskan cruise itineraries. In 2015, Vancouver to Alaska cruise passengers tended to be older (67% were aged 55 or older), well educated (61% university graduates), and affluent (50% had a household income greater than \$100,000)<sup>129</sup>.
- In 2008, the Terrace area (with the exception of fishing lodges) saw direct visitor expenditures over \$38 million<sup>130</sup>.

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125 [www.visitbulkleynechako.com](http://www.visitbulkleynechako.com)

126 Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako. *Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Tourism Sector Profile*. Undated.

127 [www.rdbn.bc.ca/economicdevelopment/economic-development-projects/rdbn-image-bank](http://www.rdbn.bc.ca/economicdevelopment/economic-development-projects/rdbn-image-bank)

128 Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako. *2017 Value of Tourism Study: Smithers and Area Tourism Profile*. 2017.

129 Destination British Columbia. *Tourism Sector Profile, Cruise*. July 2016.

130 City of Terrace. *City of Terrace Economic Development Strategy 2016-2018*. 2016.

- In 2015, there were 250,400 annual visitors to the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako (RDBN<sup>131</sup>), of which almost half (124,100) visited the Smithers/Telkwa area. Approximately half of the visitors have been to the RDBN region before on multiple occasions and 40% of RDBN visitors spend more than 6 nights in the region.
- In 2015, annual visitor expenditures in RDBN were \$58.6 million and 99% of RDBN visitors will recommend the area to family and friends.
- In 2015, 51% of travellers who attended the Smithers Visitor Centre stayed in town for one night.
- In 2015, Burns Lake saw 30,000 travellers which producing annual direct visitor expenditures of \$6.3 million<sup>132</sup>.

Findings regarding the financial contribution of the tourism industry in northwest BC were particularly lacking, along with visitor data for the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine.

There are 23 initiatives identified as occurring or underway in 2018 across northwest BC that will assist in developing the northwest BC tourism industry. They can generally be categorized as sustainable/responsible certification, indigenous tourism efforts, data collection initiative, marketing efforts, a pilot project, upgrading infrastructure, regional branding and partnering, documenting community support, and locational or activity specific campaigns.

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131 Note that the RDBN includes areas east of Burns Lake which are included in the RDBN statistics but which are not considered part of northwest BC and hence are not relevant to this report.

132 Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako. *2017 Value of Tourism Study: Burns Lake and Area Tourism Profile*. 2017.



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# CHALLENGES



## 6 CHALLENGES

Tourism businesses in northwest BC, like others elsewhere, may struggle with tax rates, regulations, financing, and product development, among other things. Additionally, tourism invested communities and businesses may be challenged by the effects of changing climate: altered weather patterns, increased uncertainty due to wildfires, different growing seasons, extreme fluctuations in river levels and snow pack, and unstable fish and wildlife populations.

But unique aspects of northwest BC provide additional challenges for the tourism sector, too. These include the following.

1. The use of and access to, Crown land, with complicated tenures and unceded Indigenous rights and title.
2. Limited air, land and sea access to northwest BC.
3. Linear travel routes to major communities, with potentially limited access to remote communities.
4. Lack of cell phone and wi-fi service in many parts of the region.
5. Seasonal operations means an intense workload at select times of year.
6. Seasonal employment which can limit staff commitment and encourage high turnover rates.
7. Paying hourly rates less than industrial projects currently underway in the region, thereby limiting staff availability.
8. Labour intensive work, using low technology which can limit product and market development.
9. Lack of product or service diversification that means businesses suffer if tourists don't appear.
10. Tourists are often not repeat customers so word of mouth, social media and cross-marketing is important.
11. Need for coordinated and collaborative marketing strategies between and within businesses and regions.
12. Lack of tourist information and social media presence, for the region.

Recognizing and addressing these challenges at business and regional levels will significantly assist in further developing the tourism sector in northwest BC. Specific opportunities to assist in developing tourism offerings and ensuring communities are 'open for tourism business', are outlined in the next section.

A scenic mountain landscape featuring a large glacier in the distance, a river flowing through a valley, and a red bicycle leaning against a pile of rocks in the foreground. The scene is set in a rugged, mountainous area with steep, rocky slopes and dense green vegetation. The sky is overcast, and the overall atmosphere is serene and adventurous.

# OPPORTUNITIES

# 7 OPPORTUNITIES

Thirteen opportunities have been identified to help develop the northwest BC tourism sector. Each opportunity fits into one of three categories and includes the following.

## 1. Opportunities that social and economic circumstances support

- a. Developing communities through tourism
- b. Non-consumptive experiences
- c. Sustainable, responsible, green certification.

## 2. Opportunities that the regional tourism sector supports

- a. Creating marketing material for explorer types
- b. Estimating visitor volumes
- c. Inventorying tourism operations
- d. Providing media resources and image data banks
- e. Using available data to encourage visitation.

## 3. Opportunities that the time is right for

- a. Catering to millennial travellers
- b. Circle routes
- c. Expanding indigenous tourism offerings
- d. Promoting a regional tourism vision
- e. Ski tourism development

Undoubtedly, there are many other opportunities available throughout northwest BC, but these thirteen provide a great starting point for developing the regional tourism industry. Summaries for each of these opportunities are provided below.

## 7.1 Opportunities That Social and Economic Circumstances Support

Current circumstances in northwest BC support the following opportunities in the tourism sector.

### 7.1.1 DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES THROUGH TOURISM

The tourism industry doesn't just help drive economic growth and health of communities, there are substantial social community benefits to developing the tourism industry, too<sup>133</sup>. Four advantages of developing a robust tourism industry in northwest BC, include:

1. Paying for and paving the way for, progress
2. Preserving heritage and the environment
3. Developing community pride and beautification
4. Increased quality of life

These advantages are summarised below.

### Paying for and Paving the Way for, Progress

Many of the natural and cultural amenities that attract people to the region as residents or investors are amenities that were developed to provide positive visitor experiences and many would not have been developed without the economic contribution from tourism. Tourism pays for public facilities, programs and services not otherwise affordable.

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<sup>133</sup> TourismVancouverIsland. *Tourism – What it does for you*. Accessed online. [www.valueoftourism.ca/social-benefits-of-tourism/tourism-what-it-does-for-you](http://www.valueoftourism.ca/social-benefits-of-tourism/tourism-what-it-does-for-you)

Tourism revenues fund everything from clubs and sports facilities, to local parks, street maintenance, medical facilities, and land and water rescue systems. Museums, cultural institutions, heritage sites and parks and campgrounds are all examples of good things made possible by a healthy, growing tourism industry.

## Preserving Heritage and the Environment

Our region's unique and diverse social, cultural and environmental resources are major tourism attractions. For example, guided angling in the lower Skeena River region has been a mainstay of the local and regional economy for a very long time. It generates export income through the renewable sale of world-class angling experiences to visitors from outside the region, and the revenue brought in recirculates in the local economy<sup>134</sup>. Therefore, taking care of our unique cultural assets and amenities is key to growing visitor revenues that support an even greater quality of life for communities.

## Community Pride and Beautification

Unlike many other industries, tourism has the ability to connect different parts of a community, relying on the cooperation of local government, entrepreneurs, non-profit organizations and private citizens alike. Working together to offer a positive experience to visitors usually includes steps to beautify a community and often leads to increased community pride.

Tourism helps beautify and make communities more liveable and welcoming

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134 Big River Analytics Ltd. *Guided Angling in the Lower Skeena Region*. Prepared for Skeena Angling Guides Association.

by revitalizing downtowns and funding amenities, programs and services enjoyed by residents and tourists alike. Appreciation by visitors stimulates local awareness, celebration and revival of culture and traditions.

Confident communities are resilient communities with a can-do attitude that unlocks tourism's potential. Tourism offers rural communities which might not otherwise survive, the opportunity to plan and carry out sustainable economic strategies. Rural communities with thriving tourism typically experience population growth that supports better amenities, transportation and improved quality of life for all residents.

## Increased Quality of Life

Tourism fosters appreciation and stewardship of local natural, cultural and historic resources by residents, community leaders, businesses and governments. Research indicates that healthy tourism increases quality of life for community residents in many ways, including the following.

- Tourism builds attractive, livable communities that foster our culture, heritage and environment.
- Tourism raises incomes and standard of living, contributes positively to quality of life, and grows and diversifies economies.
- Tourism educates both residents and visitors about cultural diversity, contributes to positive changes in values and customs, promotes cultural exchange, and preserves local cultural identity.
- Tourism represents an investment, not a cost to taxpayers. Tax dollars generated from tourism contribute to healthcare, medical research, education, social services, infrastructure, marinas, airports, ferry terminals and social security.



- Tourism increases demand for historical and cultural exhibits, protects ecology and natural environments, preserves historic buildings and monuments, encourages productive use of lands, and activity develops and enhances public spaces.

### 7.1.2 NON-CONSUMPTIVE EXPERIENCES

Tourists in northwest BC expect to view and experience undeveloped wild areas, so the region needs to maintain viewscales, manage visual quality objectives (VQO's), ensure wilderness areas and intact forests are available and accessible, and support non-development oriented resource use.

Due to the vast distances between communities in northwest BC, travellers tend to travel overland by vehicle or train. As such, viewscales from transportation corridors play an important part in visitor experiences and should be considered when planning regional development.

Wilderness areas attract tourists to northwest BC, whether they plan to recreate, camp, or simply travel through wilderness areas so maintaining healthy wilderness areas – forests, rivers, wildlife populations, fish, and others – is paramount to the tourism sector. This is especially pertinent when considering climate impacts on diminishing returns of salmon and steelhead.

Non-development oriented resource use includes those activities that do not depend on resource extraction or excessive development to be viable. These activities include: backcountry skiing, bear viewing, bird-watching, camping, catch-and-release fishing, cultural / educational tours, fish viewing, exploring wild lands, helicopter tours, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, ocean kayaking, paddling and rafting, paragliding, and photography.

These non-development oriented tourism activities depend – to some extent – on the conservation of wild areas and reducing the impacts of climate change. In this way, conservation and non-consumptive tourism are connected. The same trees that are needed for northwest BC tourism play an important role in the fight against climate change by capturing and storing carbon in their biomass<sup>135</sup>.

With over one tenth of the planet's 3 trillion trees and the highest number of trees per capita, it could be argued that Canadian citizens have a global responsibility to be good forest stewards. Part of that stewardship includes protecting the remaining intact tracts of temperate rainforest along the Pacific Coast of BC (which provide refuge for Pacific salmon) as these intact forest landscapes present an outstanding opportunity to contribute to global climate solutions<sup>136</sup>.

### 7.1.3 SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE CERTIFICATION

Conservation education and action often springs from tourism industry support for management, research and education initiatives that benefit everyone. In order to protect northwest BC resources that support tourism, and to capitalize on the growing global market for sustainable consumer goods and services, the northwest BC tourism industry and its suppliers would be well served by engaging in responsible tourism.

Certification of sustainable, responsible and/or green tourism offerings brand and differentiate experiences for visitors, thereby promoting responsible tourism for the increasing number of travellers who

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135 [www.cbc.ca/news/canada/how-old-trees-help-climate-1.4252888](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/how-old-trees-help-climate-1.4252888)

136 [www.thetyee.ca/Opinion/2015/12/04/Become-Better-Forest-Stewards](http://www.thetyee.ca/Opinion/2015/12/04/Become-Better-Forest-Stewards)

believe these values are important. With several experiences in northwest BC already holding certification, there is both room for expansion of certified offerings, and room to offer collaborative experiences by developing tours of certified experiences.

## 7.2 Opportunities That Support the Regional Tourism Sector

The following opportunities would be highly useful for the regional tourism sector, and have low barriers to success.

### 7.2.1 CREATING MARKETING MATERIALS AND OFFERINGS FOR EXPLORER TYPES

Explorer Quotient®, also known as EQ, was developed by Destination Canada (the Canadian Tourism Association) in partnership with Environics Research Group, and is a proprietary market segmentation system based on the science of psychographics<sup>137</sup>. So rather than marketing to or developing products for travellers based on traditional segments, such as demographics (e.g. age, gender, income, etc.) and/or geography, EQ emphasizes the importance of traveller segmentation based on their psychological characteristics, such as their attitudes, beliefs, values, motivations, and behaviours. When various psychological characteristics are combined, different types of travellers - known as Explorer Types - emerge.

Nationally, EQ was developed to align Canada's tourism industry with collective marketing and product development for different Explorer Types. At a provincial and community level, it allows tourism organizations and businesses to better understand:

- What drives people to travel to a destination, and
- Why different travellers seek out different experiences.

Explorer Quotient® is now available for free to every British Columbian tourism organization, through Destination British Columbia. There's also an EQ 101 Workshop that Destination British Columbia offers, which shares EQ information with British Columbia's tourism businesses and organizations.

By understanding the most common Explorer Type visitors to an area, tourism businesses and organizations can tailor marketing materials (including text and photos) and offerings to those visitors, thereby increasing the likelihood that the marketing materials will be effective and the offering will be purchased or experienced by tourists.

### 7.2.2 ESTIMATING VISITOR VOLUMES

Having defensible estimates of tourism's contribution to a community is central to developing an informed tourism planning approach, strengthening the support of community stakeholders and local government, and encouraging an appreciation of tourism's economic development potential.

As such, the Research, Planning and Evaluation Branch of Destination British Columbia is available to assist communities in developing conservative and a credible estimate of visitor volume and direct tourism expenditures within a community by using a Value of Tourism model<sup>138</sup>.

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137 [www.destinationbc.ca/Resources/Explorer-Quotient.aspx#.VQmmCI7F-So](http://www.destinationbc.ca/Resources/Explorer-Quotient.aspx#.VQmmCI7F-So)

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138 [www.destinationbc.ca/Resources/Monitoring-and-Evaluation/Value-of-Tourism-Model.aspx](http://www.destinationbc.ca/Resources/Monitoring-and-Evaluation/Value-of-Tourism-Model.aspx)

The Value of Tourism model provides a structured, consistent approach to estimate the volume and value of tourism within a community. The core data collection component of the model is an accommodation survey to gather the most recent annual performance data from commercial accommodation operators (including campgrounds). This information is then applied to local, regional, provincial and national tourism indicators to provide an estimate of the total number of visitors (overnight, day and visiting friends and relatives) and their expenditures in the community.

All accommodation properties within the community must participate in the survey to run the model and produce the Value of Tourism statistics and a report for the community.

### 7.2.3 INVENTORYING TOURISM OPERATIONS

It's well understood by communities and businesses that if you don't know what you have, you can't plan where you're going. This is particularly true for the tourism industry in northwest BC, which lacks inventory data regarding accommodations, adventure companies, eco-tourism activities, indigenous tourism, sightseeing attractions, etcetera. A snapshot of what is currently occurring in the tourism sector is needed. That data would be invaluable to identify gaps in offerings and drive tourism sector development.

### 7.2.4 PROVIDING MEDIA RESOURCES AND IMAGE DATA BANKS

There is a lack of media-ready online resources for northwest BC – particularly the western portions of the region – which makes the region less media friendly.

Media resources such as story suggestions,

specific angles that destinations want to emphasize, infographics, statistics, press releases, online contacts, photos, and videos, all provided to the media for free, assist media personnel in writing stories and articles about specific destinations. By providing online media resources, tourism organizations help the media put together attractive and pertinent stories about a place or activity, which in turn helps the destination achieve greater exposure.

Online image data banks assist media by providing free visuals that can be inserted into articles and social media posts. By supplying professional quality photos, tourism organisations can help ensure that quality visuals accompany information about their destinations. Some photos also encourage tourists to try to capture the same images themselves, and in doing so, increase visitation to particular sites.

### 7.2.5 USING AVAILABLE DATA TO ENCOURAGE VISITATION

Statistical data on northwest BC's tourism industry is sorely lacking, and can be expensive to collect. However, there is some data available that provides direction for tourism market development in the region. Data from the 2012 in-market survey of northern BC tourists suggested the following ways to assist in growing the northern BC tourism market<sup>139</sup>.

- BC and lower mainland residents offer the largest potential for tourism growth as they have higher familiarity with the region and closer proximity than other potential travellers.
- Build the northern BC brand at a regional level before highlighting different areas within the region.

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<sup>139</sup> Tourism BC and eNRG Research Group. *2012 In-Market Research Report, Northern BC*.

- Leverage the association the region has with outdoor recreation activities, scenery and nature to encourage future trips, in particular for sightseeing, hiking, fishing and visiting parks. However, this should be tempered with messaging around more passive, relaxing, comfort-oriented activities so the interests of the wider market is not overlooked.
- Ensure promotional material accommodates the interests of the 'North to Alaska' driving demographic.
- Highlight shoulder seasons and activities in shoulder seasons to grow visitation to the region.
- Maintain excellent quality of service, availability of information and visibility of visitor centres. Visitors to northern BC tend to have a few activities planned but make the rest of their decisions 'on the fly', placing high importance on visitor centres and information available during visits.

## 7.3 The Time is Right

The time is right, right now, to pursue the following opportunities.

### 7.3.1 CATERING TO MILLENNIAL TRAVELLERS

Over the past decade or so, millennial travel has emerged as an increasingly important segment of the international tourism sector. Millennials are the fastest growing travel segment and one of the largest and most influential groups of travellers worldwide<sup>140</sup>. In 2010, millennials (those born in the 80s and early 90s) accounted for 20% of total global travel.

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140 [www.destinationcanada.com/en/sectors/millennial-travel](http://www.destinationcanada.com/en/sectors/millennial-travel)

Beyond the sheer size of this travel segment, the unique character of the millennial market offers many other benefits to the tourism sector. Millennials:

- Often spend more in destinations than other tourists because they travel for longer periods.
- Travel more frequently and further than other age groups.
- Are likely to return to the destination over their lifetime.
- Are pioneer travellers who discover and promote destinations not yet visited by traditional tourists.
- Play an important role in the tourism landscape and image of destinations.
- Are instigators of travel trends and thrive on influencing others.
- Are at the cutting edge of technology and are more connected than any other age group making them more likely to use technology to make recommendations.

Also, a large percentage of millennials value travel as an essential aspect of their lives.

Therefore, millennial travel is no longer regarded as a niche market but rather as a catalyst for future growth, and many destinations around the world are investing significant resources to develop the millennial-oriented tourism segment<sup>141</sup>.

Northwest BC has numerous assets that appeal to millennial travellers, so catering and marketing to millennials is an opportunity to advance tourism in the region while readying operations for future growth.

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141 Canada Tourism Commission. *Canada Millennial Domestic Travel Summary Report*. March 2015.

### 7.3.2 CIRCLE ROUTES

Tourists are forward looking, preferring to see what's around the next corner than backtracking along roads they've already travelled. As such, circle routes for driving and recreational vehicles (RV) hold great appeal in a region where vast distances can separate amenities and attractions.

Some circle routes are available in northwest BC, but expanding offerings along those routes, encouraging exploration of the routes by tourists heading north to Alaska, and marketing them to Explorer types could garner additional uptake and visitation by tourists.

### 7.3.3 EXPANDING INDIGENOUS TOURISM OFFERINGS

The 2010 Vancouver Olympics significantly raised the profile of indigenous (formerly Indigenous) cultural tourism in BC, and international and domestic demand continues to increase for authentic cultural experiences. One in four tourists are interested in adding an indigenous cultural experience to their trip.

The sector is experiencing record growth, with sector revenues doubling from 2006 to 2011. In 2015, the indigenous tourism sector provided 3,300 jobs in BC, and delivered \$50 million in revenue plus \$15 million in tax revenue to the province. Total sector revenue in 2017 is expected to rise to \$68 million, and the total number of visitors who have indigenous tourism experience in 2022 is expected to reach 2.2 million<sup>142</sup>.

However, considering the size of northwest BC and cultural diversity across the region, there are relatively few market-ready cultural experiences available. So there are opportunities for neighbouring First Nations

to strategically work together to create a critical mass of authentic indigenous experiences that are within geographical proximity, hence leveraging limited financial and human resources.

Research indicates that tourists seeking indigenous experiences in northern BC tend to be 45 and older, have at least a bachelor's university degree, and travel by car or recreational vehicle<sup>143</sup>. Activities of most interest to these tourists include:

- Wood carving
- Collecting plants to eat, and
- Outdoor survival.

Topics of greatest interest include:

- Animal and plant life in the region
- Stories and legends of indigenous culture, and
- Indigenous history post-contact.

The experiences that these tourists are most interested in, include:

- Taking photos of scenic landscapes and wildlife
- Demonstrations by artisans, and
- Drumming and dance performances.

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142 Indigenous Tourism BC. *Corporate Plan 2017 – 2022: Pulling Together*. 2016.

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143 Basi, Sandip, ISIS Sauder School of Business, University of British Columbia. *Nisga'a Tourism Development Strategy*. Summer 2012.

Furthermore, three distinct types of tourists visit northern BC for indigenous experiences, including:

1. **Culture Seeker:** interested in unique cultural experiences such as how to live off the land, trying traditional foods, and attempting to carve. Tend to be younger tourists from Canada.
2. **Nature/Culture Observer:** More interested in observing than participating and tend to be older tourists with European origins.
3. **Sightseers:** Primarily interested in taking pictures. Older demographic travelling for leisure<sup>144</sup>.

As such, the following four ways of developing indigenous tourism offerings are suggested<sup>145, 146</sup>.

1. Develop specific experiences in individual communities.
2. Develop experiences around iconic locations or events.
3. Create a collection of experiences for a multi-day tour through a specific geographic area. The experiences may not be destinations in themselves, but put together, motivate visitors to travel to an area or increase the length of their stay. Authentic indigenous experience and non-indigenous experiences could be put together if they enhance visitor interest and market demand.

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144 Basi, Sandip, ISIS Sauder School of Business, University of British Columbia. *Nisga'a Tourism Development Strategy*. Summer 2012.

145 Indigenous Tourism BC. *Northern BC Regional Indigenous Tourism Strategy*. 2014

146 Indigenous Tourism BC. *Lake Babine Nation: Regional Indigenous Tourism Report and Strategic Recommendations*. 2015

4. Offer indigenous experiences in conjunction with non-indigenous tourism operators.

#### 7.3.4 PROMOTING A REGIONAL TOURISM VISION

A regional tourism vision is a brand for a geographic area that helps potential visitors decide whether the area interests them. By developing a vision for northwest BC, visitors would have a clearer understanding of what the region offers, plus the region would differentiate itself from other areas. Additionally, regional offerings could work together to achieve the vision, while new opportunities that fit with the vision would be more apparent to potential entrepreneurs.

One example of a very strong vision that is developing tourism opportunities in ways that maintain the lifestyle of locals while providing unique and enchanting experiences to visitor is the valley of Romagna in Italy. Unlike its neighbors Tuscany and the Veneto, the Romagna area away from the coast is a very un-touristy place, where foreign (particularly English-speaking) visitors are unusual. So visitors are treated as guests, not tourists. Romagna's hinterland has not become jaded by mass tourism, and they aim to keep it that way.

Tourist experiences are organized like a group of friends having an adventure on a visit to a new and very special place, rather than like a package tour. In this way visitors have very different and natural experiences. Locals are passionate about their homeland, its beauty and its enormous larder of local, seasonal food and wine, so everybody visitors meet is enormously proud of their history, culture and above all their diligent and heartfelt hospitality.

Tourism in Romagna is sustainably-oriented, and aims to generate visitor activity which<sup>147</sup>:

- Develops a sustainable local visitor economy with financial benefits and employment and business opportunities for local people.
- Cherishes, showcases and adds value to local tangible and intangible cultural heritage in particular food and drink, art and architecture, music, dance, traditional crafts, markets and fairs and language.
- Identifies, cherishes and showcases local environments and creates opportunities for visitors to experience and benefit from them - for the benefit of the communities' environmental heritage.
- Encourages passion about Romagna.

A vision like this, which supports the unique values of northwest British Columbia, could help focus tourism efforts which synergistically support each other while ensuring the values of residents – such as their desire for clean water and fish in the rivers - are upheld.

### 7.3.5 SKI TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Skiing is an important part of Canada's tourism industry, with Canadian, American and European visitors all coming to Canada in winter to experience what the country has to offer, and ski tourism is one of the main foci of Destination Canada's tourism marketing campaigns<sup>148</sup>.

Skiing is the biggest driver of tourism revenues in BC during the winter months. In 2012, BC ski resorts saw over 6.5 million skier visits, of which 46% were destination skiers from outside BC. In the 2012/2013 season, BC accounted for one-third or 34% of all skier visits in Canada<sup>149</sup>.

Northwest BC has two very different ski hills, plus a variety of heli- and cat-skiing operations, that could all work together to promote ski tourism in the region.

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147 [www.bestofromagna.com](http://www.bestofromagna.com)

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148 [www.destinationcanada.com/en/sectors/ski-tourism](http://www.destinationcanada.com/en/sectors/ski-tourism)

149 [www.destinationbc.ca/News/Local/Ski-It-To-Believe-It!-Destination-BC-launches-annu.aspx#.WqRAPOxFzIU](http://www.destinationbc.ca/News/Local/Ski-It-To-Believe-It!-Destination-BC-launches-annu.aspx#.WqRAPOxFzIU)

# CONCLUSIONS



## 8 CONCLUSIONS

Developing a healthy tourism industry is a worthwhile investment for northwest BC communities. Tourism fosters appreciation and stewardship of local natural, cultural and historic resources by residents, community leaders, businesses and governments. Tourism also offers rural communities which might not otherwise thrive, the opportunity to plan and carry out sustainable economic strategies. Rural communities with thriving tourism typically experience population growth that supports better amenities, transportation and improved quality of life for all residents.

Although there was limited data available for northwest BC's tourism industry, the following information was gathered.

- In 2015, 81% of visitors to Haida Gwaii were over 45 years old.
- Prince Rupert is BC's northern-most cruise ship port of call and is a highlight for many Alaskan cruise itineraries. In 2015, Vancouver to Alaska cruise passengers tended to be older (67% were aged 55 or older), well educated (61% university graduates), and affluent (50% had a household income greater than \$100,000)<sup>150</sup>.
- In 2016, guided anglers in the lower Skeena region spent over \$10.5 million, supported 190 local jobs and 224 jobs across BC, plus generated more than \$2.7 million in taxes province-wide<sup>151</sup>.

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<sup>150</sup> Destination British Columbia. *Tourism Sector Profile, Cruise*. July 2016.

<sup>151</sup> Big River Analytics Ltd. *Guided Angling in the Lower Skeena Region*. Prepared for Skeena Angling Guides Association.

- In 2008, the Terrace area (with the exception of fishing lodges) saw direct visitor expenditures over \$38 million<sup>152</sup>.
- In 2015, there were 250,400 annual visitors to the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako (RDBN153), of which almost half (124,100) visited the Smithers/Telkwa area. Approximately half of the visitors have been to the RDBN region before on multiple occasions and 40% of RDBN visitors spend more than 6 nights in the region.
- In 2015, annual visitor expenditures in RDBN were \$58.6 million and 99% of RDBN visitors will recommend the area to family and friends.
- In 2015, 51% of travellers who attended the Smithers Visitor Centre stayed in town for one night.
- In 2015, Burns Lake saw 30,000 travellers which producing annual direct visitor expenditures of \$6.3 million<sup>154</sup>.
- Financial data regarding the tourism industry in northwest BC and visitor data for the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine, were notably lacking.

Additionally, 23 initiatives that assist in developing the northwest BC tourism industry, are underway. They generally include sustainable or responsible tourism certification, indigenous tourism efforts, data collection initiatives, marketing efforts, a pilot project, upgrading infrastructure, regional

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<sup>152</sup> City of Terrace. *City of Terrace Economic Development Strategy 2016-2018*. 2016.

<sup>153</sup> Note that the RDBN includes areas east of Burns Lake which are included in the RDBN statistics but which are not considered part of northwest BC and hence are not relevant to this report.

<sup>154</sup> Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako. *2017 Value of Tourism Study: Burns Lake and Area Tourism Profile*. 2017.

branding and partnering, documenting community support, and locational or activity specific campaigns.

There are also many opportunities to expand and further develop the tourism sector across the region, including:

- Marketing to specific tourism sectors such as millennials, skiers, and those interested in indigenous cultural experiences and sustainable tourism;
- Researching, utilizing, and providing data and marketing materials at local and regional levels; and
- Supporting non-consumptive activities which in turn support conservation of wilderness areas, rivers, fish and wildlife. These activities may include backcountry skiing, bear viewing, bird-watching, camping, catch-and-release fishing, cultural / educational tours, fish viewing, exploring wild lands, helicopter tours, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, ocean kayaking, paddling and rafting, paragliding, and photography.

Although the tourism industry in northwest BC appears to be relatively healthy and contribute to the region's economy, there also appears to be considerable room for growth particularly in the areas of certified sustainable/responsible tourism and indigenous offerings. It's also important to note that as time moves on, regional initiatives, challenges and opportunities will change or become outdated, and new ones will take their place so it's worth considering these initiatives and opportunities as starting places for action and discussion.

Finally, many of northwest BC's attributes – from healthy salmon ecosystems to wild viewscapes – must remain intact for tourism industry stability and growth. Therefore, balancing tourists' needs with the desires of regional residents are important considerations when discussing regional economic development.

*' ... many of northwest BC's attributes – from healthy salmon ecosystems to wild viewscapes – must remain intact for tourism industry stability and growth. Therefore, balancing tourists' needs with the desires of regional residents are important considerations when discussing regional economic development.'*

A person wearing an orange helmet and red pants is climbing a dark rock face on the left side of the image. A rope is attached to their harness and extends down to another person standing on a rocky ledge in the lower right. The background features a vast landscape with a large glacier, snow-capped mountains, and a dirt road winding through the scene. The sky is overcast.

# RESOURCES

## 9 RESOURCES

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