



DESTINATION
**NORTHERN
ONTARIO**

NORTHERN ONTARIO

**Food Tourism
Implementation Plan**



Ontario

destinationnorthernontario.ca



NORTHERN ONTARIO

Food Tourism Implementation Plan

CONTENTS

- 03** Introduction
- 04** Background
- 05** National Focus on Food Tourism
- 06** Provincial Focus on Food Tourism
- 07** Northern Ontario's Current Food Tourism Situation
- 08-09** SWOTT Analysis
- 10** Types of Food Tourism Experiences
- 11-13** Steps to Support the Development of Food Tourism in Northern Ontario
- 14-19** Food Tourism: The Current Context & Research Findings



Prepared by Destination Northern Ontario Staff / February 2019

Vision

Northern Ontario will be a unique and distinctive tourism destination wherein high-quality products and experiences resonate with consumers, entrepreneurship is valued, and tourism provides local, regional and global connections for the entire region.

Mission Statement

Destination Northern Ontario will take a leadership role to strategically guide and champion growth in Northern Ontario's tourism industry, through strong communication, collaboration and partnerships with industry.

Values

Destination Northern Ontario's Board is committed to focusing on the vision in an "innovative, results-based, effective and fiscally responsible manner, with a foundation of strong governance and management leadership." Destination Northern Ontario's Board also recognizes the following values as important aspects of the strategic plan:

- **Accountability**
- **Leadership**
- **Collaboration**
- **Integrity**
- **Transparency**
- **Innovation**
- **Teamwork**

Goals for Northern Ontario Tourism Sector

- Innovation and entrepreneurship are supported by research/educational tools
- Critical mass of high-quality products/ experiences are brought to market
- Realistic/sustainable tourism development (i.e., product-market match) is underway
- Streamlined services for operators are available

Destination Northern Ontario's Roles in achieving Sector Goals

- Leadership
- Communication
- Strategy
- Relationship-building
- Champion for industry growth (bringing the operator perspective to government)
- Professionalism (setting a standard of high quality for the industry)

BACKGROUND

Culinary tourism includes any tourism experience in which one learns about, appreciates, and/or consumes food and drink that reflects the local, regional, or national cuisine, heritage, culture, tradition or culinary techniques. It has emerged as a central facet to any tourist experience.

In its 2010 *The State of the Culinary Tourism Industry Readiness Index*, the World Food Travel Association (formerly the International Culinary Tourism Association) cited Ontario as one of three world-wide leaders in culinary tourism among the nine countries surveyed. Scotland and Louisiana were identified as the other two leaders.

Dining is consistently one of the top three favourite tourist activities. There is a high correlation between tourists who are

interested in wine/cuisine and those interested in museums, shows, shopping, music and film festivals and outdoor recreation, making them bigger spenders.

Destination Canada's *National Tourism Indicators* reports that in 2017 the nation's tourism sector benefitted from an increase of 6.3% in tourism spending from the previous year. One of the largest gains in revenues was registered with the food and beverage services (+5.2%).





NATIONAL FOCUS ON FOOD TOURISM

In *Canada's Tourism Vision 2018*¹, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada outlines a 20-point MAP (marketing, access, product) to growth. Action item # 15 focuses on growing culinary tourism. It states:

"Culinary tourism is the pursuit of unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences. Meals have become as essential to a tourist's experience as climate, geography and accommodations.

This exciting new trend includes tourism experiences like food trails, agro-tourism (i.e., visiting agricultural regions), vineyard or brewery tours, and taste-of-place experiences, where tourists visit a venue such as a restaurant, market or food festival.

Canada has a rich variety of culinary offerings, and there is tremendous potential to grow this niche in the tourism industry.

The government will work with the tourism and food industries to develop a national culinary tourism strategy".

¹ <https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/095.nsf/eng/00002.html>



PROVINCIAL FOCUS ON FOOD TOURISM

In 2011, the Province of Ontario, through the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport launched its Four-Year Culinary Tourism Strategy and Action Plan (2011-2015), which was informed by the thoughts, ideas and analysis of many within the culinary tourism and hospitality sectors and reflected their aspirations to ensure a sustainable culinary tourism sector in Ontario.

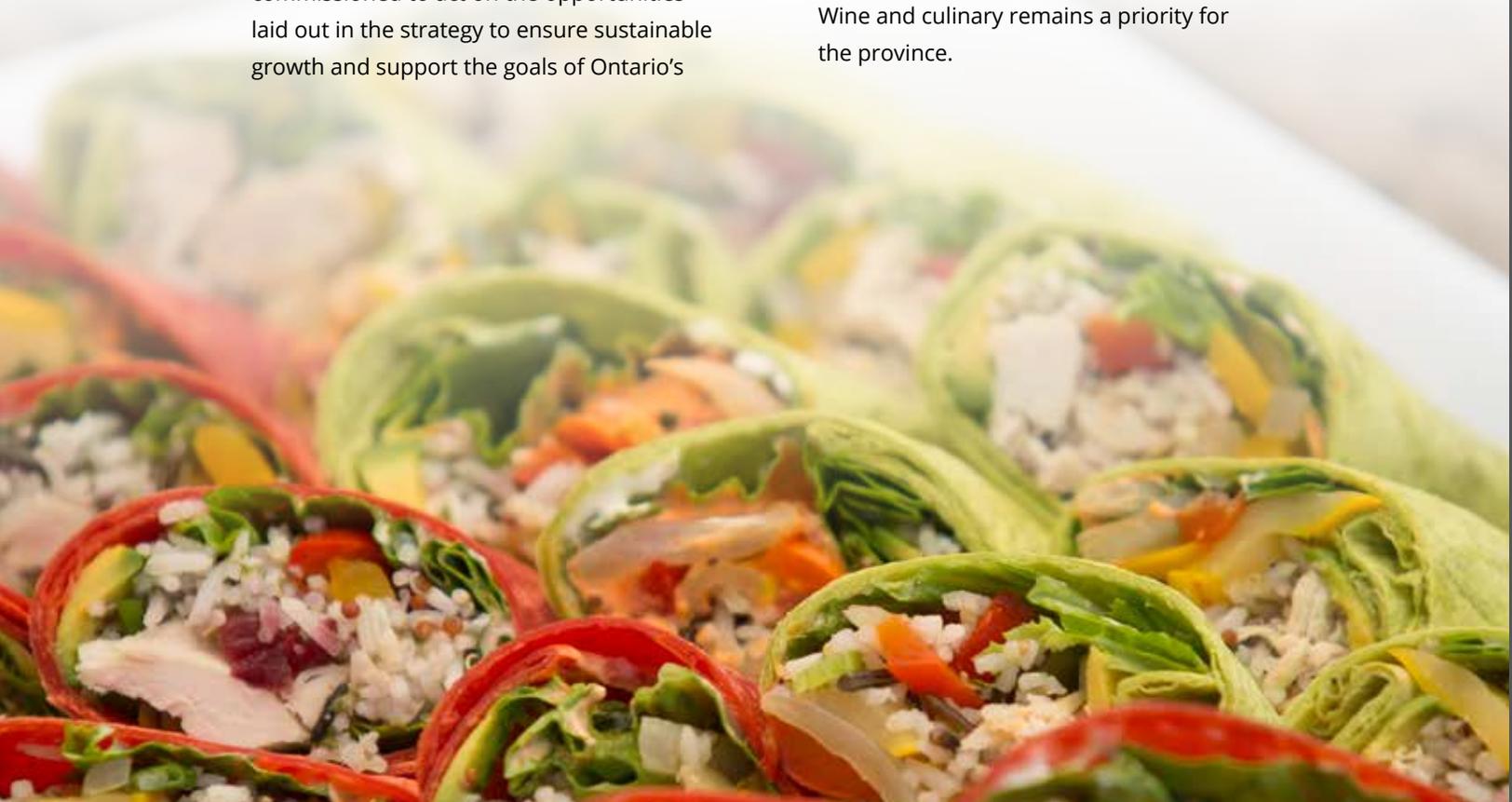
The strategy updated and built on the Province's 10-Year Culinary Tourism Strategy and Action Plan (2005-2015) and responded to the changes and challenges in the provincial and global environment that had an impact on the sector over the previous five years. The new strategy was commissioned to act on the opportunities laid out in the strategy to ensure sustainable growth and support the goals of Ontario's

Competitiveness Study – *Discovering Ontario, a Report on the Future of Tourism.*

One of the study's four strategies was "Reach Out", calling on the province and the tourism industry to "focus on unique product offerings of regions, including natural experiences, great water assets as well as niche tourism experiences such as sports, culture, culinary and eco and agricultural tourism."

The vision of the Strategy was to ensure that: *"By 2015, culinary tourism in Ontario is valued as a leading contributor to a vibrant and sustainable tourism economy in the province"*. It looked at the role of the new RTO's in achieving this vision.

Wine and culinary remains a priority for the province.

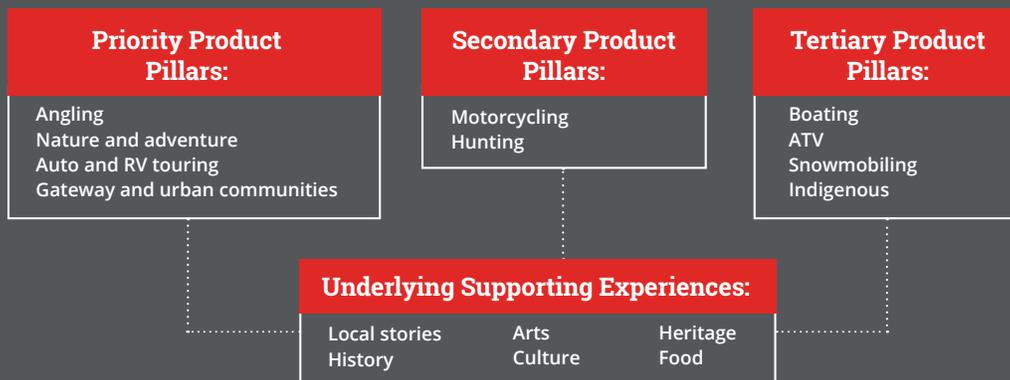


Northern Ontario's Current Food Tourism Situation

In 2014, Destination Northern Ontario completed the Northern Ontario Product Development Strategy. While food tourism development was not identified as a priority in the strategy, it was clear that food and beverage experiences were part of or could enhance all of the priority product pillars identified (angling, nature and adventure, auto and RV touring and gateway and urban communities) as well as its secondary products (motorcycling and hunting) and tertiary products (boating, ATV, snowmobiling and Indigenous). The strategy noted that there are also overlaps and connections between and among the priority areas that, when combined, create new products. In addition, it said, support for the development of a range of underlying supporting experiences that showcase local stories, history, arts, culture and heritage and food will further enrich all other products. The strategy stated: "Northern Ontario must build off its successes and opportunities by focusing on best bet product areas for the future". In light of the trends in food tourism, developing food tourism was viewed as a "best bet" product area to develop.

In 2015-16, Destination Northern Ontario began to explore interest in and the potential for food tourism development in sub-region 13C, specifically in Thunder Bay and the surrounding region by staging a local food forum. Subsequently, food forums were held in Kenora, Algoma, Sudbury, North Bay and Temiskaming Shores and on Manitoulin Island. All of these events were well attended, and considerable interest was expressed at each in developing food tourism. The first regions to enter into a partnership with Destination Northern Ontario to develop a food tourism plan were the Sudbury Region and Algoma (2017-18), followed by Temiskaming Shores and North Bay (2018-19). Also, in 2018-19, Destination Northern Ontario entered into a partnership with Indigenous Tourism Ontario to prepare an Indigenous Food Tourism plan in Northern Ontario as a pilot project for all on Ontario and, ideally, beyond.

This Northern Ontario Food Tourism Implementation Plan identifies the key findings and recommendations of the plans that have been developed to date and recommends a path to continue to move forward.





SWOTT ANALYSIS

Strengths

- › Unique cultural groups
- › Slower pace of life
- › Affordable real estate
- › Sense of community
- › Natural beauty
- › Waterfronts
- › Four season destination
- › Agricultural regions
- › Existing food and drink establishments
- › Grassroots support for food tourism development
- › Strong cultural and local influences on food and beverage

Weaknesses

- › Limited food culture
- › Lack of food processing capacity
- › Vast geography and transportation issues
- › Limited recognition outside the area
- › Many agricultural products are exported out of region or cannot be readily accessed locally
- › Lack of value-added food and drink products
- › Limited regional collaboration
- › Lack of recognizable, compelling brand
- › Lack of coordination amongst stakeholders

Opportunities

- › Potential to leverage the creative food economy
- › Pending municipal accommodation tax
- › All regions have unique selling points to capitalize on
- › Available social, intellectual, cultural, experiential, financial, living, material and spiritual capital
- › Numerous potential partners and funders

Threats

- › Access to services
- › Lack of and inadequate infrastructure
- › Population decline
- › Limited market size
- › Labour shortages
- › Climate
- › Social challenges

Trends

- › Very rapid increase in interest in food tourism worldwide

TYPES OF FOOD TOURISM EXPERIENCES

The Culinary Tourism Alliance (CTA), a nonprofit organization that consults on food- and beverage-themed tourism development worldwide states that, “Food tourism is any tourism experience in which one learns about, appreciates, and/or consumes food and drink that reflects the local, regional or national cuisine, heritage and culture.

The food tourism value chain includes any visitor-facing business that can contribute to and benefit from the development of food tourism. It can include accommodations; attractions; beverage producers; culinary schools; farmers’ markets; festivals and events; growers, producers and suppliers; restaurants; retailers; and tour operators.

Agri-tourism is not universally-defined; however, it most often includes agriculturally-based activities or activities that take place in food production spaces that connect people with what is grown, raised and harvested in an area, along with the people being involved in this production.

According to the CTA, the primary difference is that food tourism has to include a taste or taste experience while agritourism does not, and agritourism has to take place at the place of production or be facilitated by producers whereas food tourism does not.

The most successful food and agri-tourism products are the ones that build upon the unique ways in which businesses and communities express their foodways; that is, the history, heritage, and culture behind the food that is grown, harvested, prepared, and consumed in a particular area. Foodways address the who, what, where, when, why, and how food becomes part of the fabric of a community, and they shed light on the physical, social, cultural, economic, and spiritual factors that inform experiences of food.

6 Six Steps to Support the Development of Food Tourism in Northern Ontario:

01

02

03

04

05

06

STEP 1: Research

Food tourism development is underway in sub-regions 13A and 13B and a number of food tourism initiatives are taking place in Thunder Bay. However, the opportunities identified in the food forums held on Manitoulin Island and in Kenora have yet to be explored. The Lake Superior North Shore Tourism Strategy (2018) has identified developing food tourism as a priority for development. More research is also needed in the development of the Northern Ontario Indigenous Food Tourism Strategy.

Review findings of food forums, consult with potential partners and identify next steps in terms of encompassing sub-region 13C and the rest of 13A.

- Support the development of local food and local and other significant food event inventories.
- Explore options for curated itineraries.
- Continue to undertake research in support of a Northern Ontario Indigenous Food Tourism Strategy.

While some marketing activities are identified in this strategy as a later step, opportunities still exist to market Northern Ontario's food tourism experiences. These include:

- Continue to develop the "food and beverages experiences" section of the northernontario.travel portal.
- Participate with partners on an annual basis in the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair's "Spotlight on Local" event.



STEP 2: Training

Training in both customer service and food interpretation/story telling has been identified as a key need in each of the regions.

- › Integrate food tourism training into Tourism Excellence North's training solutions where appropriate i.e., best practice missions, self-assessment, training in interpretation, storytelling, menu writing, presentation, etc. within its group learning.
- › Facilitate industry training to develop new food tourism product.
- › Work with other partners to deliver food tourism, customer service and other workshops as identified.
- › Facilitate awareness of training with communities, DMOs, etc.



STEP 3: Product Development

The existing four food tourism strategies identify priority products to be developed. For the Temiskaming Shores region, an enhanced version of the Lake Temiskaming Tour ("One lake, two provinces, three cultures") that would build ties between communities in the region and their unique food and drink offerings was chosen. In Algoma, developing curated, themed itineraries along the Trans-Canada Highway from Spanish to White River (a 500 km stretch) was identified. For Sudbury, the need to build capacity and enhance collaboration was viewed as the highest priority. North Bay will be focusing on outreach among suppliers and operators and training as a priority. Consideration will need to be given as to how to support the implementation of the priority initiatives.

- › Integrate findings into existing product development areas such as angling, cycling, gateways and community destinations, snowmobiling, francophone, auto/rv touring.
- › Support enhancement of existing events/festivals and other non-food/beverage spaces and places with food and drink experiences and development of new event/festivals with an emphasis on food and drink.
- › Support packaging of food and drink experiences.
- › Create web platform or use existing platform to collect and share local food and drink experiences/vignettes/stories. These could contribute to a Tourism Excellence North case study.
- › Look at ways to support implementation of existing and future food tourism strategies (funding opportunities, coordination, communication and outreach, etc.).



STEP 4: Investment

Destination Northern Ontario can leverage its role as a source of information on investment opportunities and sources of funding in support of food tourism initiatives.

- Help to leverage resources through funders to accomplish food tourism development priorities (preparation of grant applications etc.).
- Include in Destination Northern Ontario investment attraction outreach activities.
- Monitor and track investments.



STEP 5: Partnerships

- Build collaborative leadership. Implementation will depend significantly on local leaders in the public, private, and non-profit sectors.
- Integrate the above with partnership program, core budgets and identify funding sources to leverage resources.



STEP 6: Marketing

- Promote successful existing products through Trip Planner and other marketing initiatives.
- As new products are developed, integrate into Trip Planner tool and other marketing initiatives.
- Highlight existing, enhanced and new food tourism products on northernontario.travel and culinary sub-portal.

FOOD TOURISM – THE CURRENT CONTEXT & RESEARCH FINDINGS

Case studies from Ontario, across Canada and abroad.



CASE STUDY #1

Developing products in Ireland.

As Ireland's national DMO, Fáilte Ireland initiated its food tourism strategy by identifying on-the-ground travel products that gave visitors the opportunity to interact with Ireland's local cuisine and its producers. Then the organization developed a set of standards called the National Quality Assurance Framework, which vetted tourism suppliers and labeled their products to assure credibility.

Following that, Fáilte Ireland launched the "Discover Ireland" marketing campaign to spread awareness of the country's culinary roots and new products. The DMO provided visitors with an endless array of compelling reasons to visit the country, including new food-themed events and activities like the Sheridan's Irish Food Festival, Ballymaloe Literary Festival, the Irish Whiskey Trail, and the TASTE of Kilkenny Food Trail.

From the outset, Fáilte Ireland actively encouraged business owners and destinations to showcase their culinary expertise and provided the B2B tools to help them do so. For example, the DMO's website outlines the process of developing a food trail in step by step detail.

It reads: "In order for it to be successful, a food trail must deliver for both the visitor and the stakeholders. For the visitor it must offer unique food experiences that are enticing and distinctive enough to motivate them to travel. For the stakeholders, success could be measured by increased business and more profitable and sustainable businesses."

The Burren Food Trail, developed in part through consultations with the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance, is an example of a food trail done right. The network features 25 members, each of whom have signed a Burren Food Trail Customer

Promise and are collectively bound by their commitment to building a sustainable future for the region. Trail visitors are encouraged to attend "Burren Food Trail Mondays" to participate in special events offered by members between April to October. Past experiences have ranged from afternoon tea in locals' homes to kayaking trips with a gourmet picnic.

Fáilte Ireland also actively encourages local communities and individuals to become involved in promotional efforts by awarding communities that excel at marketing initiatives. In partnership with The Restaurants Association of Ireland and Admailer.ie, the organization promotes the annual "Ireland's Top Foodie Town" competition. The award is given to towns and communities that best share their culinary experiences and why their local food community is unique.

Ireland is a great example of an emerging culinary destination because it is not necessarily top of mind for culinary tourists. Following up on its efforts, the DMO conducted a study of 1,514 visitors to Ireland in 2013. The results showed that 39% of overseas travelers agreed that their trip exceeded their expectations, with quality of food listed as one of the top factors.

CASE STUDY #2

Focusing on Authenticity in South Australia

One of Australia's most popular tourist destinations is the state of South Australia, home to Adelaide and Barossa Valley wine country. In terms of food tourism, Yarra Valley is equal in scope to other New World wine destinations like Napa, Cape Town and Mendoza.

The South Australian Tourism Commission (SATC) is actively developing programming around food and wine to build its food tourism branding. The official "Tasting Australia" festival highlights local food and wine producers during more than 80 free and ticketed events over the course of eight days. Individual events include farmland feasts, food and wine master classes, producer picnics, and other activities as unique as a nine-course mushroom tasting in a limestone cave. Most importantly, attendees can interact with hospitality professionals, renowned chefs, and local food and wine personalities.

Tasting Australia was also the first culinary festival in the country to host a bloggers' conference during a food-themed event to gain low-cost international exposure of the state's culinary offerings.

Other events in South Australia work to pair local cuisine with one-of-a-kind settings. The Kangaroo Island Seafood Festival organizes tasting menus, campfire cooking experiences, and all-day seafood barbecues along the seashore, often with participation from celebrity Australian chefs.

When building a food tourism brand, businesses within the region should be encouraged to introduce their own hyper-local products and events, ideally in a way that will feed into and complement the tourism board's promotional efforts; SATC does this exceptionally well. For example, Kangaroo Island's Southern Ocean Lodge hosts culinary events throughout the year for its guests. Tour operators including Life is a Cabernet, A Taste of South Australia, and Exceptional Kangaroo Island curate their own food and wine experiences throughout the year.



Photo by Louis Hansel on Unsplash



CASE STUDY #3

Photo by Louis Hansel on Unsplash

Food Tourism Scotland Action Plan

It's 2030 and Scotland is a globally recognized food tourism destination where high quality, memorable food and drink experiences are delivered by proud and passionate local ambassadors.

A new plan to boost food and drink tourism in Scotland will aim to deliver an additional £1 billion to Scotland's economy by 2030.

The industry-led Food Tourism Scotland Action Plan sets out a range of actions to maximize the potential of two of Scotland's most successful sectors - tourism and food and drink.

Visitors to Scotland already spend around £1 billion a year on food and drink and the action plan aims to unlock the growth potential and secure an extra £1 billion spend on local food and drink.

Measures in the plan include:

- The creation of a food tourism apprenticeship program
- Supporting the top 100 visitor attractions achieve 'Taste Our Best', our quality assurance accreditation scheme promoting local sourcing
- Improved marketing for food and drink tourism
- Creating the next generation of agri-tourism monitor farms to stimulate diversification
- A further program of Showcasing Scotland events – bringing regional buyers and suppliers together

<http://scottishtourismalliance.co.uk/uploads/TS2020/FoodTourismStrategy.pdf>

CASE STUDY #4

Taste of Nova Scotia

Taste of Nova Scotia is a unique, province-wide marketing program, whose members are committed to offering the most exceptional local culinary experiences the province has to offer. Launched in 1989 as a joint marketing initiative between Nova Scotia's private and public sectors, its key mandate is to facilitate the growth of its members while promoting the unique quality of Nova Scotia food and beverage products to consumers, both locally and around the world.

Currently there are over 200 members who set and maintain the Taste of Nova Scotia quality standards for food, service and hospitality. They include producers, processors and an outstanding collection of restaurants. Businesses interested in joining Taste of Nova Scotia undergo an in-depth application process to ensure that they adhere to their membership criteria.

The Taste of Nova Scotia Awards were launched in 2007 to recognize and celebrate the culinary leaders in Nova Scotia; the people and products that are at the heart of Nova Scotia's great culinary experiences and successes. The Taste of Nova Scotia Awards are the only province-wide awards program that celebrates Nova Scotian culinary producers, developers, exporters, and servers.

<http://tasteofnovascotia.com/>

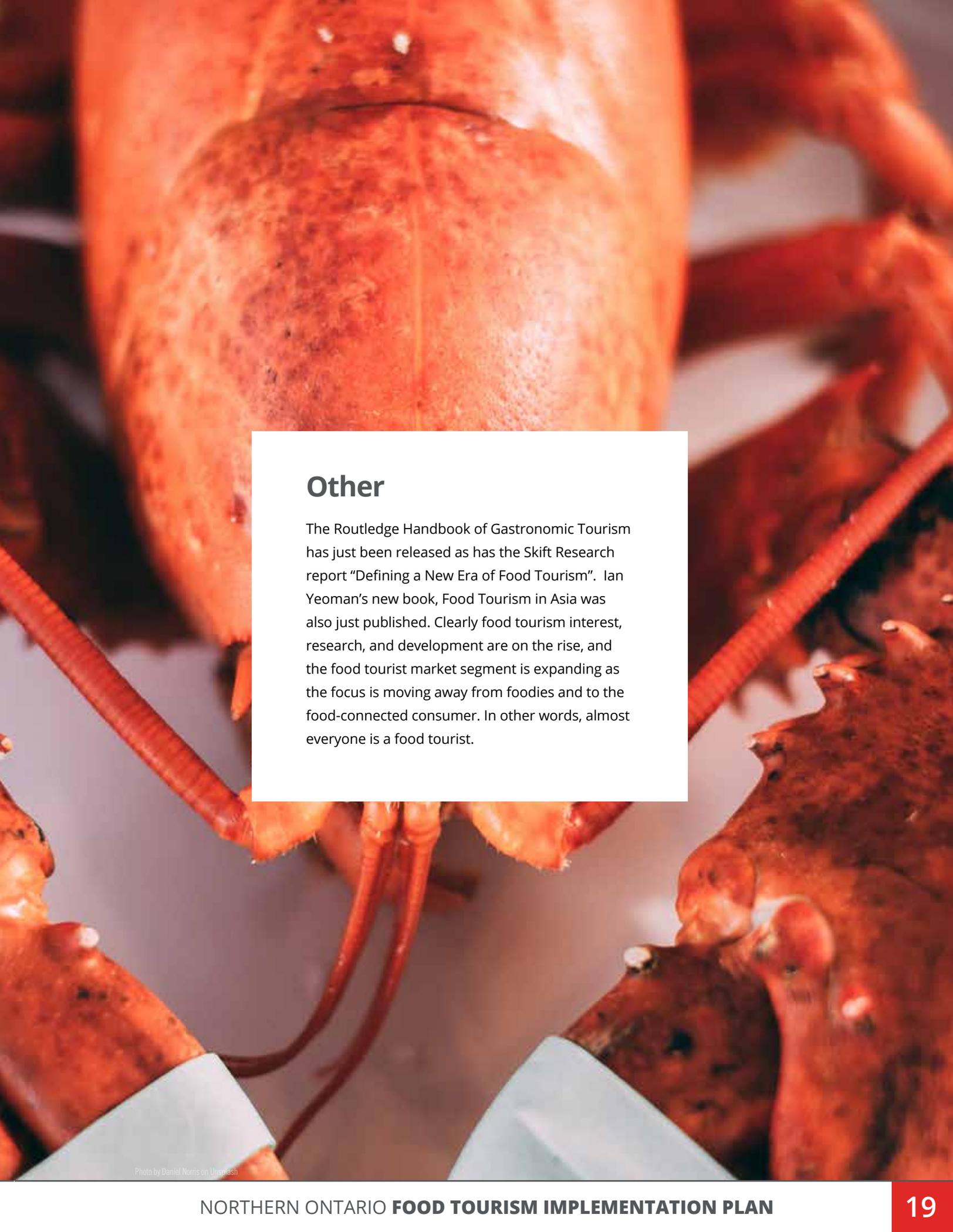
Food Island Partnership

Food Island Partnership is an industry-led organization tasked with growing the food industry through food company and food cluster development on Prince Edward Island. Our vision is to establish Prince Edward Island as an internationally recognized place of origin for premium food products and a destination for culinary excellence.

It provides a range of supports to assist PEI food companies at the startup, growth, and established stages of their development and plays a key role as a first point of contact and central coordinating body for food companies and new partnership opportunities within the PEI food cluster. Food Island Partnership provides opportunities for the PEI food industry to tell their food story to residents, existing and potential visitors, internal stakeholders, and, through partnering, to export markets through a series of activities.

<https://foodislandpei.ca/>





Other

The Routledge Handbook of Gastronomic Tourism has just been released as has the Skift Research report “Defining a New Era of Food Tourism”. Ian Yeoman’s new book, Food Tourism in Asia was also just published. Clearly food tourism interest, research, and development are on the rise, and the food tourist market segment is expanding as the focus is moving away from foodies and to the food-connected consumer. In other words, almost everyone is a food tourist.

Photo by Daniel Norris on Unsplash



DESTINATION
**NORTHERN
ONTARIO**

111 Elgin Street, Suite 304, Sault Ste. Marie, ON, Canada P6A 6L6

T » 705.575.9779 | **F** » 705.575.9780 | **E** » info@destinationnorthernontario.ca | **W** » destinationnorthernontario.ca