



DESTINATION
**NORTHERN
ONTARIO**

NORTHERN ONTARIO

**Accessible Tourism
Product Development Strategy**

Ontario 

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NORTHERN ONTARIO

Accessible Tourism Product Development Strategy

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Prepared by Destination Northern Ontario – March 2026

¹ Destination Northern Ontario, *Destination Master Plan, 2025*

² Research Resolutions & Consulting, *Overview of Tourism Opportunities for Northern Ontario (RTO13), July 2014.*

Introduction

Destination Northern Ontario (DNO) is the largest of 13 Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs) funded by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Gaming. With a mandate to drive growth through destination development, DNO focuses on key initiatives in tourism product development, investment attraction, workforce development and industry training, marketing and collaborative partnerships within the industry.

Destination Northern Ontario is governed by a pan-Northern Ontario Board of Directors who are recognized industry leaders and who collectively provide vast knowledge, experience, and insight as they set the strategic directions for the organization. The organization maintains representation on the Board from the private sector at more than 50%.

The Board of Directors regularly consults with and is provided with guidance by an advisory group comprised of key government officials in tourism-related ministries and agencies. The advisory group is a key component to the Board of Directors' strategic planning and consultation process.



Vision & Mission

Destination Northern Ontario envisions Northern Ontario as a distinctive tourism destination offering high-quality experiences, fostering entrepreneurship, and connecting communities on local, regional, and global scales. Its mission is to provide leadership in strategically guiding and championing the region's tourism industry through communication, collaboration, and strong partnerships.

Core Values

Destination Northern Ontario's Board of Directors remains firmly committed to realizing the Vision in an innovative, result-based, effective, and fiscally responsible manner, grounded in strong governance and leadership. In addition to its historical values, the Board now places greater emphasis on environmental responsibility, accessibility, and inclusive practices.

- | | | | |
|------------------|--------------|-----------------|-------------|
| ✓ Accountability | ✓ Leadership | ✓ Collaboration | ✓ Integrity |
| ✓ Transparency | ✓ Innovation | ✓ Teamwork | |

Goals for Northern Ontario Tourism Sector:

- Supporting innovation and entrepreneurship through research and education.
- Bringing a critical mass of high-quality tourism products and experiences to market.
- Ensuring sustainable tourism development and strong product-market alignment.
- Streamlining services for operators to improve industry efficiency.

Business Development & Operational Excellence Goals DNO's organizational objectives include:

- Conducting industry research to enhance product development and visitor experiences.
- Establishing organizational excellence through corporate services, improved communication, and enhanced financial systems.
- Strengthening the workforce through specialized training and strategic partnerships.
- Promoting industry leadership in product development, investment attraction, workforce training, marketing, and partnership initiatives.

Three Development Streams for Northern Ontario

01

> Defend & Maintain

Preserve and enhance existing tourism assets.

02

> Inspire & Grow

Develop new experiences to drive industry expansion.

03

> Rise & Shine

Elevate Northern Ontario's tourism offerings to be best-in-class.



Destination Northern Ontario Product Development Plan & Research

Destination Northern Ontario (DNO) has long prioritized research to shape strategic tourism development, aligning efforts to create meaningful visitor experiences that respond to evolving market dynamics.

A shift from traditional marketing to focused product development has been central to strengthening Northern Ontario's position as a robust and compelling tourism region. This approach continues to be informed by comprehensive research appealing to a wide range of traveller segments, now further enriched by the Destination Master Plan¹. With this evolution in its approach to tourism product development, it reallocates resources, refines its research methodologies, and sharpens its strategic priorities based on research from a post-pandemic lens.

Over the past decade, DNO has built a strong evidence base through market and segment research², including studies on North American motorcycle tourists, hunters, anglers, snowmobilers, high-yield nature/ outdoor visitors, festivals and events, and attraction-motivated travellers in Northern Ontario. These studies consistently underscore that the outdoors is a core trip motivator, that targeted segments such as motorcycle touring and hunting are smaller but highly committed, and that distance, transportation corridors, and climate shape both the region's constraints and its competitive advantage.

Earlier work also highlighted reliance on roofed accommodation among U.S. visitors, the role of festivals and attractions as "one of many" trip activities, and the importance of aligning product development with realistic market size and access conditions.

In response to this research, DNO's 2014 Product Development strategy recommended a more deliberate product first approach and led to the creation of sector-based product development committees for angling, auto and RV touring, cycling, gateways and community destinations, Group of Seven, nature and adventure, and snowmobiling, later expanded to include boating, Francophone, 2SLGBTQI+, motorcycle touring, and now accessibility and sustainability. These committees have helped advance the sector-specific plans, identify product gaps, and inform investments that enhance the quality and readiness of Northern Ontario's tourism experiences. The Destination Master Plan¹ now builds on this foundation, shifting from primarily sector-based work to a more integrated, region-wide model that connects product development, infrastructure, research, and stewardship under a common vision.

¹ Destination Northern Ontario, *Destination Master Plan*, 2025

² Research Resolutions & Consulting, *Overview of Tourism Opportunities for Northern Ontario (RTO13)*, July 2014.

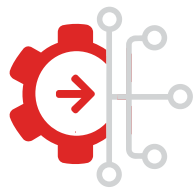
STRATEGIC GOALS FOR ADVANCING THE SECTOR

The Master Plan details four interconnected strategic goals¹:



Develop Integrated Experiences in All Seasons

Investments in Indigenous and outdoor experiences, luxury accommodations, and all-season programming are prioritized to counteract pronounced seasonality and drive visitation year-round. Regional accommodation tax models will be explored to establish a sustainable fund for ongoing development.



Foster Regional Collaboration & Industry Evolution

There is a focus on unified visitor journeys through coordinated marketing, training, and product development, with an emphasis on inclusivity, digital readiness, and service quality. Diversity and technology training, alongside workforce recruitment and retention programs, are key action areas.



Advocate for Strategic Infrastructure & Connectivity Solutions

Strategic infrastructure enhancements for improved roadways, airports, and rail lines to digital connectivity and wayfinding systems are vital for overcoming geographic barriers and ensuring visitor satisfaction and economic impact.



Champion Authentic Northern Identity & Environmental Stewardship

Embracing Northern Ontario's natural and cultural assets includes supporting Indigenous-owned experiences, sustainable event practices, and comprehensive accessibility improvements. Investments in walkability, cycling trails, and EV infrastructure underscore a commitment to sustainable travel and responsible growth.

Product Development & Research Evolution

Building on pre-pandemic research and sector-specific committees (e.g. angling, snowmobiling, Indigenous events, 2SLGBTQI+, nature and adventure, sustainability, accessibility), the Master Plan has moved towards an integrated, data-driven approach¹. DNO's priorities focus less on traditional marketing and more on product development that enriches visitor experiences and responds to new travel motivations emerging from the pandemic reset.

Key findings underscore:

- **The outdoors** and **Indigenous** experiences remain core tourism draws.
- **Visitors**, both **local** and **international**, seek high-quality and sustainable lodging solutions.
- **Focused sectors** (motorcycle touring, hunting) exist alongside broader appeal markets (festivals, attractions).
- **Physical distance, infrastructure gaps**, and **climate** define both challenges and opportunities for market growth.
- **A collaborative, regionally coordinated approach** offers compelling multi-destination itineraries and extends visitor stays, broadening economic benefits.

Current Opportunities & Challenges

The pandemic catalyzed a “Great Reset,” pushing the industry to rethink delivery, sustainability, accessibility, and conservation. Northern Ontario’s vast, pristine environments and community pride continue to create authentic hospitality and distinctive visitor experiences. However, access barriers, aging accommodation stock, workforce shortages, and digital infrastructure gaps persist as critical issues requiring collaborative solutions.

Stakeholder and resident engagement indicates strong support for sustainable tourism aligned with local values. Quality, respectful tourism, and protection of natural resources are higher priorities than simply maximizing economic returns. The region’s resources are a higher priority than simply maximizing economic returns, and commitment to inclusion, environmental stewardship, and authentic cultural connection is essential for long-term competitiveness and resilience.

Forward Momentum: Implementation and Oversight

The master plan sets a continuous improvement cycle¹, with DNO steering implementation supported by a dedicated committee and clear public reporting to highlight progress and maintain accountability. Funding strategies, potentially including new taxes and private-public partnerships, will be critical to realizing the vision and goals.

Northern Ontario’s future as a sought-after, sustainable, and inclusive destination relies on the successful alignment of local pride, natural wealth, strategic investments, and the collaborative spirit embodied in this next stage of destination planning.



Accessible Tourism – the Current Context & Research Findings

Definition of Accessible Tourism

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act³, 2005 (AODA)* is intended to reduce and remove barriers for people with disabilities, making Ontario more accessible and inclusive for everyone. Collaboration among businesses, organizations, communities, and all levels of government is key to reaching this goal.

The Government of Canada defines barrier-free accessibility to be anything physical, architectural, technological or attitudinal, anything that is based on information or communications or anything that is the result of a policy or a practice that hinders the full and equal participation in society of persons with an impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment or a functional limitation.

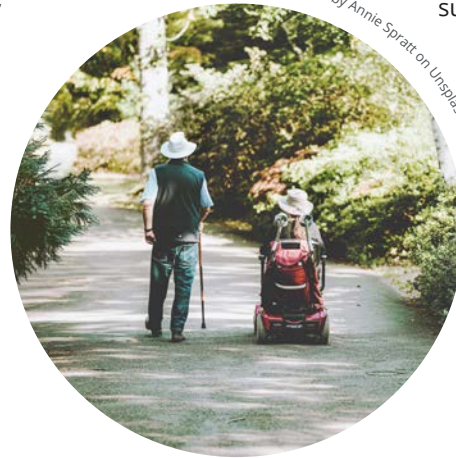
- **Employment:** Addresses how employers will make their employment practices and workplaces more accessible to potential and existing employees with disabilities.
- **Information and Communications:** Outlines how organizations must make their information and communications accessible to people with disabilities.
- **Transportation:** It will make it easier for everyone to travel in Ontario.
- **Design of Public Spaces (DOPS):** This initiative will make public spaces—such as recreational trails, walkways, play areas, and parking—more accessible to people with disabilities.
- **Customer Service:** Removing barriers for people with disabilities to access goods, services, or facilities.

Accessible environments benefit not only people with disabilities, but also seniors, families with strollers, and people with temporary mobility limitations. Businesses that prioritize accessibility not only welcome people with disabilities but also attract a broader customer base. For people living with disabilities and older adults, comprising a large and growing consumer demographic, choosing a business that ensures easy access to products is crucial.

³ Government of Ontario – AODA, Government of Canada – Accessibility Standards]

Accessible tourism represents a fast-growing, multi-billion-dollar market internationally, with one industry study⁴ estimating that travellers living with disabilities spend nearly \$59 billion per year in the United States alone. In Canada, new data from the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability show that about 27% of Canadians aged 15 and over—around 8.0 million people—have at least one disability, up from about 22% in 2017. As Canada's population ages, this demographic is expected to grow further, underscoring the increasing importance of accessible tourism both globally and within Canada.

In Ontario⁵, 2.6 million people live with a disability, representing 24% of the province's population, and over 40% of this population is over the age of 65. As the population ages, these numbers will continue to rise. Businesses have a unique opportunity to tap into this demographic, both as customers and potential employees, by proactively removing barriers to access.



Enhanced accessibility in tourism presents a significant economic opportunity for Canada, with studies suggesting that greater inclusivity could lead to billions of dollars in additional visitor spending.⁶ In Ontario, provincial and sector reports

suggest that better accessibility could add hundreds of millions of dollars in new tourism spending over the coming years, especially as the population ages and demand for inclusive experiences grows.⁷

By making Ontario open for business and jobs for everyone, businesses can not only meet legal requirements but also foster a welcoming and inclusive environment that benefits both the community and their bottom line. This approach aligns with Ontario's original commitment under the AODA to achieve full accessibility by 2025, a transformative goal that continues to drive barrier removal efforts despite implementation challenges post-deadline.

8M / 27%
CANADIANS AGED 15+ HAVE AT LEAST ONE DISABILITY

2.6M / 24%
PEOPLE IN ONTARIO LIVE WITH A DISABILITY

40%
OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN ONTARIO ARE OVER THE AGE OF 65

⁴ Open Doors Organization. *Economic Impact of Disability Travel in the United States: 2020 Market Study*. Chicago, IL: Open Doors Organization; 2020

⁵ Government of Ontario, Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility, *Accessibility Is Good for Business* (fact sheet, 2019) Government of Ontario, "Ontario Raising Awareness About Accessibility" (news release)

⁶ Institute for Work & Health. *The economic benefits of a fully accessible and inclusive Canada*. Toronto: Institute for Work & Health, 2004.

⁷ Government of Ontario, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming. *Published Plans and Annual Reports 2025–2026*. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2025; Government of Ontario, Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility. *Published Plans and Annual Reports 2025–2026*. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2025.

CASE STUDY #1

Portugal

Portugal has earned global acclaim as a trailblazer in the development and implementation of accessible tourism products. This recognition culminated in the prestigious 'Accessible Tourist Destination 2019' award bestowed by the World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism). The Country's commitment to inclusivity is exemplified by the creation of itineraries for 20 cities, meticulously designed to facilitate safe and enjoyable exploration of everything Portugal has to offer.

As part of this comprehensive program, Portugal introduced various initiatives, including accessible roadmaps available at Visit Portugal and the formulation of good proactive guides for the tourism sector. A dedicated financing line was established to support accessibility projects in tourism, resulting in the successful backing of 116 projects to date.

This strategic approach not only positions Portugal as a global leader in accessible tourism but also underscores its commitment to ensuring that all individuals, regardless of ability, can fully experience the beauty and richness of the country.

CASE STUDY #2

Toronto

Toronto stands as a shining example of accessibility, ensuring that everyone, regardless of ability, can experience the city's vibrant offerings. The public transportation system boasts extensive accessibility features, from ramps to priority seating.

The public transportation system boasts extensive accessibility features, from ramps to priority seating. Iconic attractions, such as the CN Tower, prioritize inclusivity with tactile exhibits and ramps. Toronto's parks, including High Park and the Toronto Islands, provide barrier-free spaces for outdoor enjoyment. Museums, like the Art Gallery of Ontario, offer guided tours and sensory-friendly exhibits, contributing to the city's cultural richness. Major events, including TIFF, implement accessibility measures for a truly inclusive experience. The hospitality industry provides accessible accommodations, featuring widened doorways and roll-in showers. Toronto's urban planning ensures well-maintained sidewalks, curb cuts, and audible signals, making navigation a breeze. Recognized with the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification, Toronto goes beyond compliance, making accessibility a fundamental aspect of its identity.

CASE STUDY #3

Vancouver

Vancouver, nestled against coastal mountains and the Pacific Ocean, stands as a model of accessibility on Canada’s West Coast.

The city’s public transportation system features low-floor buses and accessible SkyTrain stations, ensuring seamless mobility. Iconic attractions like the Vancouver Art Gallery prioritize inclusivity with ramps and elevators. Outdoor enthusiasts find accessible trails in Stanley Park, complementing the city’s commitment to inclusive natural experiences. Vancouver’s cultural venues, including the Museum of Vancouver, offer exhibits and tours accommodating diverse needs. Major events like the Vancouver International Film Festival implement accessibility measures, and the waterfront is thoroughly designed for accessibility. From hotels to urban planning, Vancouver ensures a welcoming environment, inviting all to explore its diverse offerings with comfort and ease.

ADDITIONAL INSPIRATION

Numerous success stories in the world highlight communities, countries, and businesses which have effectively captured and served the accessibility market. Seattle, Montreal, Sydney, Australia, Barcelona, Apple, and Microsoft stand out as exemplary models, offering valuable lessons in successful strategies for embracing and meeting the needs of diverse audiences.

Current Context

As of the early 2020s, the the World Health Organization (WHO) ⁸ estimates that approximately 1.3 billion people, about 16% of the global population, experience significant disability. As noted previously, provincial data from Ontario indicates that roughly 2.6 million residents, about one in four people, are living with a disability.⁹

The senior travel market remains robust, with several recent analyses indicating that adults aged 60 and above account for roughly one-third of all travellers as of 2023¹⁰. Surveys of adults 50+ show strong interest in travel and suggest that, given the right incentives, many are willing to travel during off-peak periods, particularly when trips offer good value and less crowding¹¹. Their preferences increasingly emphasize accessibility, comfort and convenience, underscoring the need for tailored infrastructure and services that meet mobility and health needs¹².

The Baby Boomer and 50-plus segment continues to be a crucial demographic for the tourism industry. In 2024, about 65% of Americans aged 50 and older planned to travel, and they expected to spend an average of approximately USD 6,659 on travel for the year. This group's substantial spending power and market share make them a key focus for future tourism strategies.¹³

The market for travellers living with disabilities is large and growing, fueled in part by an aging global population.¹⁴

A 2020 market study by the Open Doors Organization estimated that U.S. adults living with disabilities spent about USD 58.7 billion on travel in 2018, and that when companions are included, their total economic contribution exceeds USD 100 billion per year.¹⁵ More recent assessments show that disability related travel spending has rebounded strongly since the pandemic, underscoring the continued importance of accessibility and inclusion within the tourism industry.¹⁶

This broader market of people living with a disability is also expanding rapidly beyond travel. In the UK, the "Purple Pound", which represents the spending power of people living with a disability and their households, is estimated at £249 billion annually.¹⁷ Globally, analyses indicate that people living with disabilities control roughly USD 1.3 trillion in disposable income, and that when their families and households are included, they represent a multi-trillion-dollar opportunity for businesses worldwide.¹⁸

⁸ World Health Organization. *Disability and health. Fact sheet.* Geneva: World Health Organization, 2023.

⁹ Government of Ontario. *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Annual Report 2019.* Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2019

¹⁰ The Senior List. *Senior Travel Statistics in 2025.* 2025.

¹¹ AARP Research. *2023 Travel Trends: COVID Concerns Are Declining.* Washington, DC: AARP, 2023; AARP Research. *2024 Travel Trends: Despite High Costs and Economic Uncertainty, 50-Plus Remain Eager to Travel.* Washington, DC: AARP, 2024.

¹² TicketingHub. *Understanding Senior Tourism Trends in the Travel Industry. 2023; Dataintel.* *Senior Travel Market Research Report 2023.* 2023.

¹³ AAARP. (2024). *Travel trends for Americans aged 50 and older.*

¹⁴ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2020). *World Population Ageing 2020 Highlights.*

¹⁵ Open Doors Organization. (2020). *2020 Market Study on U.S. Adults with Disabilities: Travel and Tourism.*

¹⁶ Open Doors Organization. (2023). *2022/2023 Update on Accessible Travel Market (briefing notes and presentations).*

¹⁷ UK Department for Work and Pensions, cited in BBC News. (2017, February 21). *Disability Works: Breaking down barriers in business.*

¹⁸ The Return on Disability Group. (2024). *The Global Economics of Disability 2024.*

The Case for Accessible Product Development in Northern Ontario

In recent studies, U.S. travellers living with disabilities spend nearly \$50 billion annually on travel, and when their travelling companions' spending is included, the total economic contribution exceeds \$100 billion per year¹⁹.

Open Doors Organization notes that this reflects a rebound from pre-pandemic levels and confirms that travellers living with disabilities play a vital and growing role in the tourism economy.

CQCC's travel market guides indicate that Canadian 2SLGBTQI+ travellers spend on average about \$1,855 per trip, compared with approximately \$265 per trip for the general travelling public, or roughly seven times more per trip¹⁹. Federal briefing notes similarly state that Canadian 2SLGBTQI+ travellers spend an average of \$1,800 per domestic trip, substantially above the overall domestic travel average, and that the global 2SLGBTQI+ travel market spends over \$200 billion (U.S.) annually.²⁰ Studies of both people living with disabilities and 2SLGBTQI+ travellers highlight strong loyalty to

destinations and operators that are inclusive, accessible, and attentive to their needs, with repeat visitation and positive word-of-mouth when travellers feel safe and welcomed.²¹ Research shows that roughly one-third of 2SLGBTQI+ adults report living with a disability, indicating substantial overlap between disability and 2SLGBTQI+ communities. Safety consistently ranks as a top concern for 2SLGBTQI+ travellers.²² Northern Ontario's reputation for safe, uncrowded, nature-based experiences, combined with abundant outdoor and cultural offerings, positions the region well to serve these travellers, and expanding clearly communicated accessible tourism products can further enhance their travel experiences.²³

¹⁹ Canadian Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (CGLCC) & Tourism HR Canada. *Canadian LGBT+ Travel Market: Market Study and Travel Guide*. Toronto: CGLCC, 2018.

²⁰ Government of Canada (Destination Canada & Canadian Heritage). *Federal Briefing Notes on LGBT+ Tourism Market Opportunities*. Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2019–2021.

²¹ Open Doors Organization. *2020 Market Study on U.S. Adults with Disabilities: Travel and Tourism*. Chicago: Open Doors Organization, 2020; MMGY Global. *Portrait of Travelers with Disabilities: Mobility & Accessibility*. 2025.

²² Movement Advancement Project & Human Rights Campaign. *LGBTQ+ People with Disabilities*. 2019; Statistics Canada. *A demographic, employment and income profile of LGBTQ2+ Canadians, 2015–2018*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2021.

²³ Destination Canada. *Canada's Travel & Tourism: An Economic Engine for the Country, 2025*; Destination Northern Ontario & partners. *Northern Ontario Tourism positioning and brand materials*.

Building on earlier product-development priorities and new national research, the accessibility market now stands out as a high-value, evidence-based opportunity for Northern Ontario.

- Travellers living with disabilities represent a substantial opportunity for tourism, with recent studies estimating tens of billions of dollars in annual accessible-travel spending in North America alone, making them a high-value market for regions that remove barriers.
<https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/canadian-tourism-sector/en/canada-365-welcoming-world-every-day-federal-tourism-growth-strategy>
- This market is structurally underserved, as a large majority of travellers living with disabilities still report significant barriers across transportation, accommodations, attractions, and information, creating a clear gap that Northern Ontario can help fill through targeted product development.
<https://www.mmgyglobal.com/news/portrait-of-travelers-with-disabilities>
- Travellers living with disabilities are rarely solo visitors and often travel with companions, meaning each accessible visitor typically translates into multiple customers and higher total party spend per trip.
<https://www.travelpulse.com/news/impacting-travel/americans-with-disabilities-spend-50-billion-in-travel-each-year>
- Evidence shows that travellers living with disabilities are highly loyal to destinations and operators that are genuinely accessible and welcoming, returning to barrier-free places and recommending them to peers, which aligns well with Northern Ontario's focus on long-term visitor relationships.
<https://wheelchairtravel.org/insights-from-the-groundbreaking-portrait-of-travelers-with-disabilities-study>
- Investments in accessible tourism infrastructure and experiences (such as barrier-free trails, clear wayfinding, adaptive equipment, and accessible washrooms) improve the experience not only for visitors living with a disability, but also for seniors, families with strollers, and visitors with temporary mobility limitations, amplifying the return on product-development spending.
<https://www.destinationontario.com/en-ca/travel-resources/accessible-travel>
- Ontario's accessibility legislation and provincial tourism strategies already prioritize removing physical and service barriers, providing a supportive policy environment for Northern Ontario to lead in accessible product development across outdoor, cultural, and community-based experiences.
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility-ontarians-disabilities-act-annual-report-2024>



SWOTT Analysis

Northern Ontario’s accessible tourism potential is shaped by strong natural assets, community commitment to inclusivity, and evolving market dynamics. The following analysis summarizes the key internal and external factors influencing the region’s ability to grow this sector.

Strengths

- > Strong industry leadership committed to diversity, inclusion, and accessible service delivery.
- > Accessibility to Lake Superior and extensive hiking and camping opportunities.
- > Substantial outdoor recreation product: world-class boating, fishing, motorsports, snowmobiling, hunting, and cycling.
- > Commitment to continuous diversity, cultural sensitivity, and 2SLGBTQ+ inclusivity training.
- > Unique Northern culture and heritage experiences, including Group of Seven trail and cultural routes.
- > Distinctive culinary, shopping, and arts-based experiences that reflect regional character.
- > Air connections to major centres and increasing accessibility within park infrastructure.
- > Funding and grants available for tourism development.
- > Provincial and community support for inclusive tourism initiatives.
- > Positive brand sentiment—Northern Ontario is viewed as a safe and inclusive, welcoming destination.
- > Wide-open landscapes and low-density destinations appeal to travellers seeking space and solitude.
- > People with disabilities show strong visitor loyalty, offering repeat visitation potential.

Weaknesses

- > Perceived and actual shortage of accessible accommodations, attractions, and transportation options.
- > Limited operator and staff training on accessibility best practices and diverse ability awareness.
- > Uneven distribution of accessible offerings—particularly in rural and remote areas.
- > Ongoing reductions in flight schedules to Northern airports post-pandemic.
- > Large geography leads to significant travel times and infrastructure challenges between communities.
- > Difficulty of maintaining barrier-free conditions through timely snow clearing, ice control, and emergency planning.
- > Marketing accessible experiences before products are market-ready can harm credibility.

Opportunities

Engagement and Alliances

- › Build community networks to advance accessible collaboration.
- › Fully integrated AODA training into the Tourism Excellence North (TEN) program.
- › Foster regional and cross-border partnerships with accessibility organizations.
- › Work with entrepreneurs, small businesses, and business centres to embed accessibility in business planning.
- › Advocate for funding incentives that enable operators to upgrade facilities for accessibility compliance.

Training

- › Launch and promote AODA accreditation and accessibility training modules.
- › Deliver TEN self-assessment tools and sensitivity training resources.
- › Develop staff onboarding packages and operator training guides.
- › Incorporate accessibility education into all tourism learning streams.

Marketing and Messaging

- › Position Northern Ontario as a progressive, welcoming, and accessible region.
- › Share community success stories showcasing accessible products and improvements.
- › Create a marketing campaign promoting inclusive destinations and operators.
- › Ensure regional tourism websites and apps meet accessibility standards.
- › Celebrate diversity through media partnerships and storytelling on *northernontario.travel*.

Product Development

- › Design multi-day accessible experiences, including inclusive accommodations and trained guides.
- › Provide operators with resources to develop accessible tourism products and services.
- › Strengthen collaborations with AODA, the Rick Hansen Foundation, AccessNow and similar organizations.
- › Prioritize accessibility in infrastructure projects and service design.
- › Include Accessible Tourism as a standing topic at the Northern Ontario Tourism Summit.

Threats

- > Inaccessible or partially accessible websites and booking systems.
- > Shortage of accessible hotel rooms, transport vehicles, and public spaces.
- > Limited year-round accessibility support, particularly in winter conditions.
- > Misconception that accessibility retrofits are prohibitively expensive.
- > Lack of consistent training and sector-wide commitment to accessibility advancements.
- > Outdoor experiences often lack adaptive equipment and support systems.
- > Inaccessible sidewalks and streets in certain communities hinder mobility.

Trends

- > Growth in road trips and interprovincial travel as travellers seek open spaces and self-contained trips.
- > Strong domestic tourism market—80% of Ontario travellers visit within the province.
- > Heightened interest in outdoor activities such as cycling, boating, kayaking, and skiing.
- > Remote and hybrid work create demand for longer stays in smaller communities.
- > Increased emphasis on diversity and inclusion as economic and community development priorities.
- > Continued shift toward domestic and local tourism driven by pandemic-era travel behaviours.
- > Urban outmigration fuels population growth and tourism demand in smaller Northern communities.
- > Travellers demonstrate more open-mindedness toward new experiences and inclusive destinations.

Implementation Plan

Destination Northern Ontario and its partners will advance accessible tourism in a staged, coordinated way, focusing on clear regional priorities, shared leadership, and visible improvements on the ground. This plan identifies key actions, phases, and roles that will guide implementation over the next three years.

- **Over the next three years**, DNO and the Accessible Working Group will set **three regional priorities** for tourism (e.g. accommodation, nature and outdoor, cultural experiences, wayfinding, training).
- **Support accessible projects** in each regional priority area.
- **Embed accessible considerations** into existing product development, training, work environment, and marketing activities.
- **Look at tools and partnerships** such as AccessNow, the Rick Hansen Foundation, and other organizations to support audits, mapping, and promotion of accessible experiences across Northern Ontario.

Terms of Reference

ACCESSIBLE PRODUCT
DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
WORKING GROUP

Destination Northern Ontario's Mission Statement

Destination Northern Ontario – *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 within the industry.*

Purpose of the Accessible Working Group

The purpose of the Accessible Working Group is to provide advice to DNO through a process of discussion and analysis from the available research and the recommendations for accessible tourism outlined in the Destination Northern Ontario Tourism Product Development Strategy. DNO will capitalize on members' knowledge of the accessible community as a tourism product in Northern Ontario and utilize the feedback and advice to action this product niche

THE TEAM WILL FOCUS ON HOW TO:



Engage the local accessible and broader community



Increase accessible targeted tourism product development



Expand accessible target marketing and partnerships



Implement a region wide accessible tourism development strategy



Develop network activities that engage allies of the accessibility community

Role of the Accessible Working Group

The working group will collaborate and share their collective knowledge on how best to approach the enhancement and expansion of accessible tourism by exploring every possible means to attract more members of the diversely able community, making them stay longer and spend more money in Northern Ontario.

Encourage activities that support accessible tourism that is complementary and coordinates well with other product niches in an accessible, sustainable, and resilient way.

Input will flow from the working group to the DNO staff in the form of information, feedback, and recommendations which will be used to map the implementation of initiatives.

Additionally, the Accessible Working Group will be instrumental in advising the DNO staff on

the best avenues for focused community engagement and communication of critical information.

The Working Group will assist to identify and forecast any training needs within workforce development and industry training.

Final decision-making authority rests with the DNO Board of Directors.

Skills and Attributes of the Accessible Working Group

In the interest of putting together the best possible team of individuals, identification, selection and appointment of team members will center on the following attributes:

- Extensive experience in the tourism industry and/or in the area of accessibility.
- An above average understanding of the tourism landscape of the region.
- A very good understanding of unique natural, cultural and heritage attractions that will make excellent experiential offerings to the region.
- Good knowledge of federal, provincial, and municipal policies and regulations that impact accessibility and tourism in general.
- Track record of being involved in innovative and accessible tourism product development.

Duties of the Accessible Working Group

- Meet as required, but no less than four times per year. The Destination Northern Ontario Manager of Product Development will act as chair of this group. As the work develops, the DNO representative may change to reflect work within its five pillar areas.
- Members of the Accessible Working Group will contribute to the meeting agendas.
- The Accessible Working Group may be required to meet face to face. Meetings will be held by videoconference.
- Destination Northern Ontario staff will organize and coordinate meetings; team members are expected to provide prompt and timely response to aid this process.

APPOINTMENT

Members of the team shall be accepted for a two-year term.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The Accessible Working Group will be considered a focus group and report to the Executive Director of Destination Northern Ontario.

MEETINGS

Meetings will be on an “as-needed” basis or as determined by the team and/or the Workforce Development and Industry Training Manager.

MEMBERSHIP

Members will be solicited by invitation from the working group co-chairs.

Let's Work Together!



Interested in Joining the Working Group?

Contact **Megan Boyd**, Manager, Product Development & Investment Attraction, Destination Northern Ontario:

m.boyd@destinationnorthernontario.ca



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