



destinationnorthernontario.ca

2025-26

Annual Report

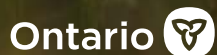
Ontario 

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- › **Destination Northern Ontario** / destinationnorthernontario.ca
- › **Tourism Excellence North** / tourismexcellencenorth.ca
- › **Domestic Marketing** / northernontario.travel
- › **International Travel Trade** / northernontarioitt.com



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Message from the President

The 2025-26 fiscal year was one of continued progress for tourism in Northern Ontario.

Building on the resilience of our industry, Destination Northern Ontario remained focused on strengthening the region's tourism offering, increasing its visibility in key markets, supporting tourism businesses and communities, and creating opportunities for long-term growth.

Through our marketing efforts, digital platforms and strategic partnerships, we continued to connect visitors with Northern Ontario experiences and support tourism businesses in turning inspiration into travel. NorthernOntario.travel and the Northern Ontario Trip Planner continued to generate strong engagement, while our international marketing efforts created new opportunities for Northern Ontario in key markets.

Product development also remained a priority. Work advanced across culinary, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQI+, cycling and cruise tourism, alongside investments in wayfinding, destination planning and community projects. These initiatives help strengthen the visitor experience while creating new opportunities for communities and businesses across the region.

Research and strategic planning continued to inform our work, including the completion and sharing of Destination Northern Ontario's Destination Master Plan. The plan provides a clear framework to help guide our priorities, investments and partnerships in the years ahead, ensuring our efforts remain focused on opportunities that can strengthen Northern Ontario's tourism economy. We also advanced sustainability and accessibility priorities, while Tourism Excellence North provided tourism operators and communities with training, mentorship and professional development opportunities.

None of this work happens in isolation. Our progress is made possible through the dedication of our staff and the collaboration of tourism operators, communities, Francophone and Indigenous partners, regional organizations and government partners. These relationships remain fundamental to building a stronger, more connected and resilient tourism economy across Northern Ontario.

I am proud of the progress made throughout 2025-26 and grateful to everyone who continues to contribute to Northern Ontario's tourism story. Together, we are helping build a strong and sustainable future for tourism across the region.



Yours in Tourism,
Marty Kalagian
President,

DESTINATION
NORTHERN
ONTARIO

Board of Directors | 2025-2026

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. The representatives are from the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming, the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, Destination Ontario, FedNor, Ontario Parks and Parks Canada.

NAME	POSITION	SECTOR
Marty Kalagian	President	Private Sector
Gerry Webber	Vice President	Public Service Sector
Betty McGie	Treasurer	Private Sector
Heather Gropp	Secretary	Municipal Government
Lori Branch	Director	Private Sector
Tammy Frick	Director	Not for Profit
Guy LaMarche	Director	Public Service – Retired
Shannon McMullan	Director	Private Sector
George Stivrins	Director	Private Sector
Ian Wood	Director	Municipal Government

Government Advisors | 2025-2026

NAME	POSITION	SECTOR
Laurie Brownlee	Advisor	Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming
Laurie Ypya	Advisor	Ministry of Northern Development
Todd Eastman	Advisor	Destination Ontario (MTCS)
Heather McKeown	Advisor	FedNor
Chad O'Halloran	Advisor	Parks Canada
Vacant	Advisor	Ontario Parks

Our Team

Destination Northern Ontario Staff | 2025-2026

Staff compliment is dependent upon MTCG and MLTSD funding.

NAME	POSITION
GOVERNANCE & ADMINISTRATION	
David MacLachlan	Executive Director
Bobbi-Lynn Pallot	Corporate Services Officer
Kathy Carlson	Finance Officer
MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS	
Sara Currier	Manager, Marketing and Communications
Tiina Keranen	Visual Communications Designer
PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT	
Megan Boyd	Manager, Product Development
INVESTMENT ATTRACTION & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	
Gord Knowles	Senior Coordinator, Investment Attraction & Economic Development
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & INDUSTRY TRAINING	
Karen Peacock	Senior Coordinator, Workforce Development & Industry Training
Gillian McCullough	Industry Training Coordinator
Naza Obasi	Information and Learning Technology Coordinator
PROFESSIONAL SERVICES	
Ian McMillan	International Marketing Specialist
Marla Tremblay	Francophone Tourism Specialist
Mike Wozny	Special Projects Coordinator

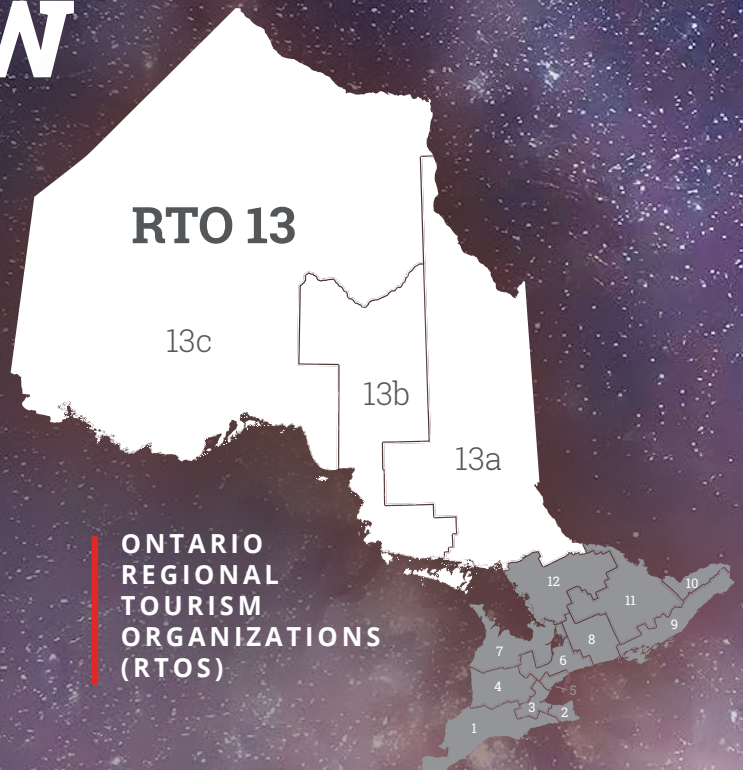


DESTINATION
**NORTHERN
ONTARIO**

A COMMITMENT TO ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE,
PROFESSIONALISM AND QUALITY PROGRAM DELIVERY

Overview

Geographically, Destination Northern Ontario (RTO13) is the largest tourism region in Ontario. The region spans from the French River in the south including Manitoulin Island, the Ottawa River in the east, west to the Manitoba border and north to the saltwater coast. The region is divided into three sub-regions: Northeastern Ontario (13A), Algoma-Sault Ste. Marie (13B) and Northwestern Ontario (13C). Destination Northern Ontario's role in the tourism industry is to strategically guide and champion growth in Northern Ontario through strong communication, collaboration, and partnerships with industry.



ONTARIO
REGIONAL
TOURISM
ORGANIZATIONS
(RTOS)

STATISTICS FOR NORTHERN ONTARIO

8.2

**MILLION
VISITORS**

\$2.8

**BILLION IN
TOURISM
RECEIPTS**

+\$500

**MILLION GENERATED
IN TAX REVENUES**

BETWEEN JANUARY
& DECEMBER 2024

Organizational Excellence

**100% of
planned
initiatives
completed
on-time.**

Destination Northern Ontario has exercised administrative diligence on both planning and adhering to reporting deadlines with 100% of planned initiatives being completed on time. Guided by a strategic implementation plan, a dedicated staff person is responsible for each of the four priority pillars with support staff as needed. Partnership projects also align with mandated pillars, and each staff person works on partnerships related to their portfolio.



Destination Northern Ontario continues to align with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming in both its programs and coordination of staff.

Developed as a tool to help the Destination Northern Ontario Board of Directors track the organization's performance each year, this annual report is aligned with the Ministry's Regional Tourism Organizations Guide which recognizes the following five pillar areas:



5 CORE PILLARS

- 01 Product Development
- 02 Investment Attraction
- 03 Workforce Development & Industry Training
- 04 Marketing & Communications
- 05 Partnerships

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**



Business Development Goals

› **Generate** industry research and monitor industry performance to continually improve products and experiences and evaluate the success of Destination Northern Ontario programs to ensure a "visitor first" approach.

› **Implement** a strategic approach to bring high-quality products and experiences to market through strong partnerships and workforce training.



Governance

› **The Board of Directors** met ten times this past fiscal. To keep attendance at acceptable levels, meetings via Zoom enabled the Board to travel less, while still sharing resources and weighing in on decisions from their respective locations. Board attendance in 2025-26 was 79%. The Board monitors organizational performance through oversight of the various strategies in the business and marketing plans through the review of detailed performance reports.



STATISTICS FOR NORTHERN ONTARIO



90%

of Northern
Ontario's tourism
economic benefits
**STAY IN THE
REGION**



+20%

INCREASE in
**INTERNATIONAL
VISITATION**
year over year



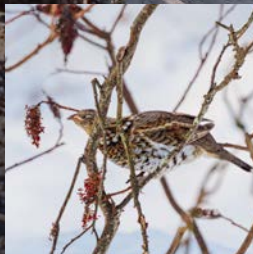
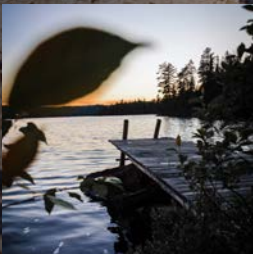
36%

INCREASE in
**OCCUPANCY &
DAILY ROOM
RATES** since 2019



+92%

of the region's
ACCOMMODATORS
are stand-alone
**OWNER/OPERATOR
SMALL BUSINESSES**





"Destination Northern Ontario is one of our key partners. Through our marketing partnership, we promote our northern campgrounds and help campers discover what else there is to see and do in the region. We are grateful for their financial support and their ongoing role in encouraging campers to visit Northern Ontario campgrounds"

— Alexandra Anderson,
Executive Director, Camping in Ontario

Marketing

2025-26 MARKETING OVERVIEW

The 2025-26 fiscal year continued to build momentum across Destination Northern Ontario's marketing pillar, **with a strong focus on research-informed, consumer-first marketing, pan-northern collaboration, digital engagement, content development and strategic partnerships.** All planned marketing initiatives were completed on time and on budget, with investments focused on increasing awareness, supporting conversion and strengthening the capacity of tourism businesses and organizations across Northern Ontario.

\$1.63 M
GENERATED THROUGH
SIMPLE RES PLATFORM

The SimpleRes platform managed by Algoma Country continued to support tourism operators in driving direct sales, generating **\$1.63 million** in revenue during 2025-26, a **6% increase** year-over-year. The platform had **28 participating operators**, including **23 active operators**, demonstrating continued adoption of the e-commerce tool by tourism businesses across the region.



Northernontario.travel remained a cornerstone of Destination Northern Ontario's digital marketing efforts, generating **2.4 million visits** and **556,098 referrals** to partner websites during the fiscal year. The platform also saw significant growth in AI-driven content discovery, recording more than **2.1 million AI scrapes** between November 2025 and March 2026. A total of **180 new stories** were published, supported by nine content contracts with regional partners across Northern Ontario. This partner-focused content development helped showcase tourism businesses, destinations and experiences across the region while directing consumers to participating partners for further information and trip planning.

2.4 M VISITS TO THE
NORTHERN PORTAL

2.1 M AI SCRAPES
RECORDED

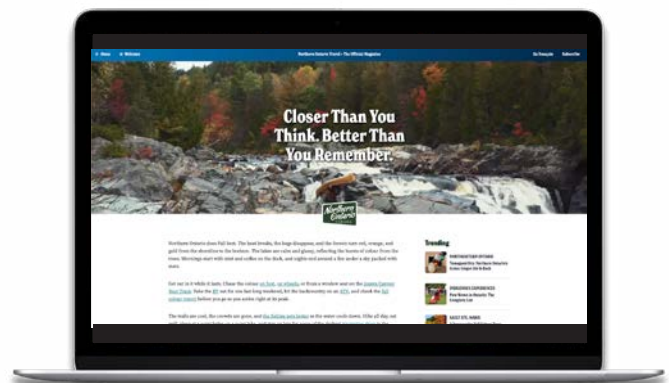
180 NEW STORIES
PUBLISHED

The Northern Ontario Trip Planner continued to support the visitor journey from inspiration to trip planning and conversion. During 2025-26, Trip Planner content generated **283,260 page views**, **23,000 outbound clicks** to partner websites and approximately **3,400 consumer itinerary downloads**. **Twenty-five** new itineraries were developed, and **460** existing itineraries were updated, ensuring the tool remained current and relevant to travelers.

283,260 PAGE VIEWS

23,000 OUTBOUND
CLICKS

3400 ITINERARY
DOWNLOADS



> northernontario.travel



Content and asset development remained a significant area of investment, with a continued focus on building a strong library of visual assets for marketing use. In total, **1,084** video assets and **4,780** photo assets were generated through in-house production and partnerships, exceeding annual targets of **1,058 video** assets and **4,498** photo assets.

3644 SURVEY RESPONSES

Research continued to inform marketing decisions throughout the year. **Two major consumer surveys were completed:** the *Northern Ontario Border States Travel Intention Survey* and the *Northern Ontario High Value Customers Survey*, generating **3,644 responses**. The research provides additional insight into consumer behaviour and target audiences and will help inform future marketing and strategic planning.



5 PAN-NORTHERN CAMPAIGNS

11 REGIONAL CAMPAIGNS

Marketing partnerships remained central to Destination Northern Ontario's approach, with **five pan-northern campaigns** and **11 regional campaigns** completed during 2025-26. Pan-northern initiatives included participation at the Canadian Motorcycle & Expo Experience, RVC 2025, Camping in Ontario, Attractions Ontario's Passport program and a multi-partner U.S. campaign led by Destination Ontario. All eligible and market-appropriate campaigns were aligned with Destination Ontario opportunities, leveraging the provincial brand and pan-provincial and northern-specific marketing initiatives.



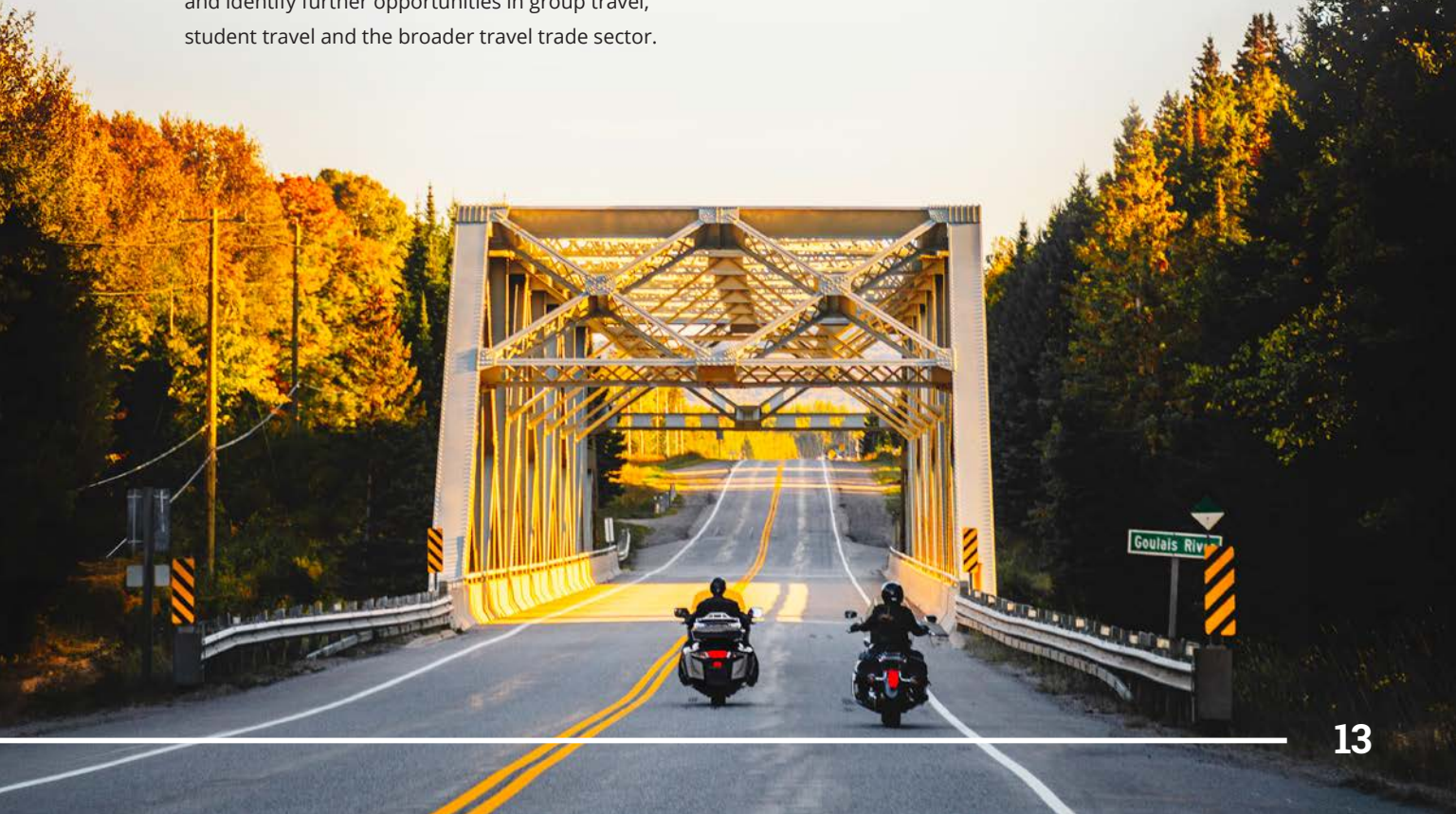
Regional marketing investments continued to support priority tourism products and target markets across Northern Ontario. Campaigns were delivered in partnership with regional tourism organizations and focused on **nature and adventure, angling, auto/RV touring, culture and culinary experiences**. These initiatives included digital and print campaigns, consumer shows, targeted media placements, geofencing and other tactics designed to increase awareness and visitation to priority experiences throughout the region.

6 MEDIA FAM TOURS

Media relations continued to provide valuable, earned exposure for Northern Ontario. **Six media familiarization tours** were delivered during the year, featuring partners and experiences through Single Tracks, Ashley Rae, SoFly, Local Love, Motorcycle.com and The Fit RV. In addition, two travel trade familiarization opportunities were undertaken, including a Heart of Canada touring route FAM from Winnipeg to Thunder Bay in partnership with RVC. These initiatives helped increase destination awareness and identify further opportunities in group travel, student travel and the broader travel trade sector.



Overall, 2025-26 was a year of continued growth and strengthening across the marketing pillar. Investments expanded Northern Ontario's digital reach, increased the volume of available content and research, supported regional and pan-northern marketing efforts, and strengthened collaboration with tourism partners across the region.





23 NEWSLETTERS
DISTRIBUTED

4800 INDUSTRY
CONTACTS

37 ITEMS ADDED TO
EVENTS CALENDAR

500+ SOCIAL
MEDIA POSTS

18,000+ SOCIAL MEDIA
FOLLOWERS

Corporate Communications

In 2025-26, Destination Northern Ontario continued to strengthen industry communications, expand engagement, and increase the visibility of tourism across the region. Communications efforts focused on consistent messaging, digital engagement, industry outreach, inclusivity, and stronger connections with tourism partners and stakeholders.

Industry communications remained a key priority, with **23 newsletter campaigns** distributed to approximately **4,800 contacts**. The industry events calendar continued to support knowledge sharing and engagement, with **37 events** added throughout the year.

Digital engagement continued to grow across DNO's communications channels. More than **500 social media posts** and stories were published, exceeding the **annual target of 500**. DNO maintained more than **18,000 social media followers**, representing a **12.7% year-over-year increase**. Website traffic also increased significantly, with DNO's corporate website experiencing a **126% increase in traffic**.

Communications continued to prioritize consistent and accessible organizational messaging. The **Media Relations Kit** was updated and published on DNO's website, while communications planning remained aligned with the organization's digital strategy and Destination Master Plan. Organizational and Ministry branding, styles, and logos were also applied consistently across communications.

DNO continued to advance its commitment to **inclusive engagement**, building on the Francophone and Indigenous engagement strategy developed in the previous fiscal year. Communications continued to be provided in French, Oji-Cree, and English, while relationships with **Indigenous, Francophone, and 2SLGBTQI+** communities were strengthened through partnerships and initiatives. This included advancing the MOU with Indigenous Tourism Ontario, expanding French-language outreach and resources, and deepening collaboration with the Canada's LGBT+ Chamber of Commerce (CGLCC). Two Indigenous Tourism Ontario and Francophone sessions were also delivered as part of the Northern Ontario Tourism Summit in Thunder Bay.

Industry engagement and recognition remained an important component of DNO's communications efforts. **Board and staff participated in 30 industry events** throughout the year, with two award nominations received through the Ontario Tourism Summit. These activities helped maintain DNO's visibility within the tourism sector and strengthen relationships with industry partners.

Board and industry engagement surveys were also completed in Q4, providing feedback to support ongoing organizational improvement. Looking ahead, work was initiated toward developing an AI strategy in 2026-27, with AI opportunities to be incorporated into communications strategies and processes as appropriate.



"Developing the Northern Ontario Tourism Summit with Destination Northern Ontario continues to be a rewarding experience for Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario. We believe this event has become an important one-of-a-kind event that supports Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario's objectives and the tourism industry by bringing together all people, businesses, and organizations in the sector. We appreciate the continued funding Destination Northern Ontario has provided to Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario for this project".

**— Laurie Marcil, Executive Director,
Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario**





International travel to Ontario continued to recover following the significant disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This recovery was reflected in strong year-over-year growth across DNO's priority markets. Visitation from the **U.K. increased 12%**, reaching 97% of 2019 levels, while **Germany increased 6%**, reaching 82% of 2019 levels. **Japan increased 20%**, reaching 63% of 2019 levels, and **South Korea increased 18%**, reaching 59% of 2019 levels. **China** experienced the **strongest year-over-year growth at 25%**, although visitation remained at 40% of 2019 levels, highlighting both the significant recovery underway and the continued opportunity for future growth.

Business Development

For the 2025-26 fiscal year, Destination Northern Ontario (DNO) continued to focus on increasing tourism visitation and spending from key international markets, with priority placed on the **United Kingdom** and **Germany**, while also working to re-establish relationships and market opportunities in **Japan** and **South Korea** and capitalize on renewed opportunities in **China** following Canada's return to Approved Destination Status. DNO strengthened its strategic partnerships with Destination Ontario and Destination Canada, aligning with their international marketing and sales activities to showcase Northern Ontario's tourism products and experiences and build relationships with influential international tour operators.

Priority Markets



U.K.



GERMANY



JAPAN



SOUTH KOREA



CHINA



2025-26 PROGRAM RESULTS

U.K.	+12% increase over 2024	Reached 97% of 2019 level
Germany	+6% increase over 2024	Reached 82% of 2019 level
Japan	+20% increase over 2024	Reached 63% of 2019 level
South Korea	+18 increase over 2024	Reached 59% of 2019 level
China	+ 25% increase over 2024	Reached 40% of 2019 level

Northern Ontario's world-class landscapes, clean air and water, Indigenous tourism offerings, soft outdoor experiences, and themed touring routes continued to position the region as a compelling destination for international travellers and tour operators. These attributes closely align with Destination Canada research showing that travellers from priority markets such as the U.K. and Germany are seeking destinations offering **unspoiled outdoors, soft adventure, safety, and uncrowded experiences**. DNO supported this opportunity through participation in Destination Canada and Destination Ontario sales missions, marketplaces, and itinerary development initiatives, while continuing to work with private-sector partners to develop products and experiences that respond to international consumer demand.



DNO also continued to strengthen Northern Ontario's position within the **Group Tour market**, building relationships with tour operators and buyers through participation in key industry marketplaces, sales missions and familiarization opportunities. Participation in events such as **SYTA, OMCA, NTA** and **ABA**, along with joint marketing agreements with tour operators including **Jonview Canada** and **CRD**, provided opportunities to showcase Northern Ontario's products, experiences and touring routes to buyers developing group itineraries. These efforts also supported opportunities in the Meetings & Events market by increasing awareness of Northern Ontario's unique venues, destinations and experiences among travel trade and industry partners. Through collaboration with Destination Ontario, Destination Canada and regional tourism partners, DNO continued to build relationships and create opportunities to position Northern Ontario for group travel, meetings and events.

Through the **Tourism Excellence North (TEN)** program, DNO also **supported tourism operators in strengthening their international readiness**. Workshops and best-practice missions provided operators with opportunities to diversify their products, improve their offerings, and address the requirements necessary to work effectively with international markets and buyers. Together, these initiatives supported the development of new products and experiences aligned with the expectations of international travellers and strengthened Northern Ontario's overall capacity to attract and serve visitors from key overseas markets.





Product Development

2025-26 PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW

The 2025-26 year marked a period of transition and renewed focus for Destination Northern Ontario (DNO). Building on the momentum of previous initiatives, DNO continued to advance product development opportunities, strengthen key partnerships, and enhance the visitor experience to ensure Northern Ontario remains a premier tourism destination. During the year, the existing product teams were consolidated into one Product Development Advisory Committee, creating a more streamlined and collaborative approach to industry consultation. This change proved to be valuable, with feedback from participants indicating a more efficient and engaging process.



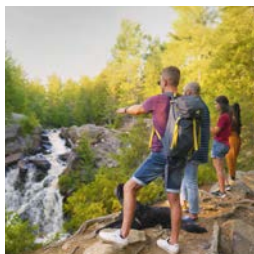
The fiscal year marked an important year of implementation as the Destination Master Plan began to more directly guide DNO's priorities and activities. DNO continued to focus on its core strategic priorities to support tourism growth and strengthen the region's long-term competitiveness, with an emphasis on developing integrated, year-round experiences, fostering regional collaboration and industry evolution, and advancing opportunities for strategic infrastructure and connectivity.

DNO also continued to champion Northern Ontario's authentic identity, while recognizing the importance of **environmental stewardship** in the development and growth of the tourism sector. These priorities provide a clear framework for DNO's ongoing work and will continue to guide efforts to create more inclusive, **accessible, sustainable, and competitive tourism opportunities** across Northern Ontario.

Multi-year product development initiatives continued to advance in 2025-26, with DNO supporting a range of projects that deepen storytelling, inclusivity, and Indigenous tourism experiences across Northern Ontario. Highlights included the **new Indigenous Tourism Corridor Project**, which created curated Indigenous travel routes and packages along key visitor corridors. DNO continued to advance **2SLGBTQI+ tourism development** through partnership with Canada's 2SLGBTQI+ Chamber of Commerce (CQCC) and five participating communities. Building on the success of previous market-readiness training, this work further strengthened inclusive practices, accreditation pathways, and welcoming experiences for 2SLGBTQI+ visitors across Northern Ontario. The extension of the project ensured continued momentum and supported the ongoing development of a safe, inclusive, and welcoming destination.



Culinary tourism continued to be a **cornerstone of regional growth** in Northern Ontario. DNO further strengthened its relationship with the **Culinary Tourism Alliance** through ongoing FedNor supported initiatives. Year two delivered strong results, including **seven new Feast On restaurants** in Thunder Bay, including a sold-out Feast On event, **four custom content trips** across the region, and **three Do Something Delicious activations**. Collectively, these initiatives reinforced Northern Ontario's reputation for authentic, place-based food experiences and helped expand the region's culinary tourism profile.



7 NEW FEAST ON RESTAURANTS
4 CUSTOM CONTENT TRIPS
3 DO SOMETHING DELICIOUS ACTIVATIONS



📍 Silver Islet General Store | 📷 Total Studios / Damien Gilbert

Northern Ontario's **cycling tourism sector continued to build momentum** through continued investment in route development, wayfinding, and active transportation experiences. DNO continued to work with regional partners to strengthen cycling infrastructure, enhance route readiness, and expand the visitor experience through trail development and wayfinding improvements. The Lake Superior route remained an important active tourism asset, connecting communities from Sault Ste. Marie to Thunder Bay and supporting multi-day cycling experiences that showcase the region's natural landscapes and small communities. Continued collaboration on cycling initiatives helped position Northern Ontario as a growing destination for active and sustainable travel.

Cruise tourism continued to gain momentum as Northern Ontario **strengthened its cruise readiness and visitor experiences** along the Lake Superior North Shore. Through ongoing collaboration with regional partners, cruise ship readiness planning, shore excursion development, and infrastructure improvements continued to support additional vessel visits and enhanced visitor experiences. The 2025 cruise season included multiple itineraries in Thunder Bay and along the north shore, reflecting growing interest in the region as a Great Lakes cruise destination. Continued investment in **port branding, local tourism assets, and community readiness** helped expand opportunities for cruise visitation and economic development across the North.

Research and strategic planning remained a priority in 2025-26, with DNO continuing to advance data-informed decision-making through the completion and industry sharing of the Destination Master Plan and Skift research. The first meeting with the Destination Master Plan Committee was also held to begin advancing implementation requests, with additional work expected in the coming fiscal year. Concurrently, the wayfinding project in Mattawa was completed, improving visitor navigation and community connectivity.





Destination Northern Ontario continued to build on its **GreenStep Sustainable Tourism certification** through the launch of its sustainability and accessibility strategies, further strengthening its commitment to responsible tourism development. Work started advancing these priorities, with industry consultation helping to identify new ideas and recommendations to inform future initiatives.

Strategic partnerships continued to play a central role in advancing DNO's product development priorities. Highlights included **expanded support for the Culinary Tourism Alliance** across the region, the **Cochrane Polar Bear Habitat** wayfinding project and the **Nipigon Tourism Plan**. DNO also supported **Red Rock Indian Band** signage and the **Voyagers Trail Association** wayfinding project, strengthening visitor navigation, community connectivity, and trail-based experiences across Northern Ontario. Together, these strategic collaborations underscore DNO's commitment to storytelling, market positioning, and long-term product readiness.

Destination Northern Ontario (DNO) has been a lifeline for Indigenous Tourism Ontario and our development of the Northern Ontario Indigenous Tourism Corridor. The funding has helped us populate our Native Experience's Ontario (NEO) website with a much more robust list of Indigenous Tourism businesses and experiences across Canada, and it has also helped us with event coordination and cultural programming for events in Northern Ontario. DNO funding has also allowed us to build capacity in the communities through workforce and product development efforts. We are very appreciative of the funding support we received from DNO, and Megan has always been supportive, responsive and proactive."

**— Scott Mercs,
Indigenous Business Advisor,
Indigenous Tourism Ontario**



Workforce Development & Industry Training

2025-26 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & INDUSTRY TRAINING OVERVIEW

Throughout the 2025-26 fiscal year, Tourism Excellence North (TEN) continued to deliver a range of training, professional development, mentorship and capacity-building opportunities designed to strengthen tourism operators and communities across Northern Ontario.



Fast Track to Success

TEN's **Fast Track to Success program** also continued to provide personalized coaching and support to tourism operators. Nine of the 15 planned coaching sessions were completed during the fiscal year. The reduction in sessions was the result of a shift in budgetary priorities in Q4 and a corresponding adjustment to the number of programs delivered. Nine operator visits were completed, although more than nine operators were identified or recommended for the program. Operators identified during 2025-26 will receive priority consideration for participation in 2026-27.

Professional Development

Professional development opportunities continued throughout the year through targeted workshops. The **International Travel Trade Operator Workshop** was held in Sioux Narrows, in partnership with Sioux Narrows-Nestor Falls and the City of Kenora. Facilitated by TEN Training Specialist Eva Gutsche, the workshop welcomed **eight participants**, with **100%** of respondents indicating that they believed the workshop would contribute to business improvements, increased visitation and increased sales. An **Experiential Travel Trade Workshop** was subsequently held in North Bay, with **ten participants**. Again, **100%** of respondents indicated that the workshop could support business improvements and contribute to increased visitation and sales.

Best Practices Missions

TEN successfully delivered its **Best Practices Mission Building a Quality Tourism Destination: Strategic Renovations to Enhance Your Accommodation** with **ten participants**. A second Best Practices Mission, *Culinary and Agritourism Best Practices Mission: How to Develop Culinary and Agritourism Experiences*, was delivered in partnership with the Culinary Tourism Alliance. The program was oversubscribed and welcomed **13 participants**, demonstrating continued demand for hands-on learning and best-practice opportunities within the tourism industry. and industry training initiatives are overseen by the Senior Coordinator for Workforce Development and Industry Training with support from the Industry Training Coordinator and the Information Technology Support Coordinator.

2 BEST PRACTICES MISSION

23 TOTAL PARTICIPANTS



Community Tourism Assessment Index

TEN also continued to support communities in assessing and strengthening their tourism potential through the **Community Tourism Assessment Index**. A session held in Temagami brought together **20 participants**. TEN staff subsequently attended the Huron North Community Economic Alliance's Tides, Trails and Traditions Summit, where they presented the assessment tool and initiated the process of completing an assessment for the North Shore region.

Online Learning

TEN's ongoing **online learning opportunities** continued to provide accessible professional development for tourism businesses. The long-standing **ADAPT: A Webinar Series for Tourism** remained a valuable source of free information on current events, industry best practices and industry updates. **Six webinars** were delivered during 2025-26, generating **365 registrations**. The **Tourism Business Essentials** online courses were also utilized by operators throughout the year, with **67 learners** participating across the **11 available courses**. In partnership with TEN and the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO), the **OPTIS/NOPTIS micro-credential program** at Lakehead University continued to provide specialized learning opportunities, with **25 learners** participating in the Fall 2025 cohort.

TEN also continued to strengthen its **digital learning infrastructure**. The Industry Training Coordinator and Information Technology Support Coordinator worked collaboratively to ensure the organization's website, learning management system and customer relationship management system operated effectively and were optimized where possible. Through the TEN Learning Management System, **39 online courses** were fully completed during the year. The TEN website recorded approximately **3,600 visits** and **15,300 total page views**. Version 2 of Whereabouts, TEN's learning management system tracking tool, was successfully developed and launched, providing more robust and detailed reporting on online training statistics, the events calendar and website activity.

Mentorship Program

The **TEN Mentorship Program** provided additional one-on-one support to tourism operators, completing nine of the 15 mentorship sessions planned for the year. As with Fast Track to Success, the number of mentorships delivered was adjusted in Q4 due to a shift in budgetary priorities. Mentees identified during the 2025-26 fiscal year will receive priority placement in 2026-27.

ADAPT WEBINAR SERIES:

6 WEBINARS
365 REGISTRATIONS

TOURISM BUSINESS ESSENTIALS:

11 COURSES
67 LEARNERS ENROLLED

OPTIS / NOPTIS PROGRAM:

25 LEARNERS ENROLLED

LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM:

39 ONLINE COURSES
3,600 WEBSITE VISITS
15,300 PAGE VIEWS



"Working with Destination Northern Ontario's "Fast Track to Success" program has helped us not only get a bird's eye view of our operations, but their coaches have also helped us look at the finer details of our marketing program and offered us many great suggestions and goals to help our business succeed! Having just completed a video highlighting our history (as recommended by this program) we feel we are really starting to fill the gaps noted in the final reports from the DNO team. Thank you, Tourism Excellence North and Destination Northern Ontario!"

— Rob Dokuchie, Director of Marketing, Lake of the Woods Brewing Company



TEN's Podcast Series

TEN's *Let's Talk Northern Ontario Tourism* **podcast** also continued to extend the organization's reach and provide accessible industry content. As of March 2026, podcast episodes had generated **631 total downloads** from **407 unique listeners** across all platforms, with **43 followers** on Apple Podcasts and Spotify. Approximately **69%** of listeners were **located in Canada**, while the remaining **31%** were **located across 24 other countries**. TEN also continued to receive positive anecdotal feedback regarding the podcast and its value as an industry resource.

> **Listen Now!**



631

**TOTAL
DOWNLOADS**

43

FOLLOWERS

407

**UNIQUE
LISTENERS**

69%

**OF LISTENERS
WERE LOCATED
IN CANADA**

31%

**OF LISTENERS WERE
LOCATED ACROSS
OTHER COUNTRIES**

Tourism SkillsNet North

Following the unsuccessful application for the **Tourism SkillsNet North** program through FedNor, DNO worked collaboratively with TIAO to address the resulting skills-development gap through the provincial Forward Ready Tourism - A Collaborative Solution for Tourism program. DNO participated in monthly Forward Ready Tourism meetings and worked with TIAO to develop banners, postcards and posters supporting the Skills That Travel and Tourism Rocks initiatives.



NOVEMBER TUES 25 WED 26 THURS 27
📍 THUNDER BAY • ONTARIO



Northern Ontario Tourism Summit

The **Northern Ontario Tourism Summit** celebrated its 11th year, bringing together **240 tourism leaders, partners, and stakeholders** from across the region at the Valhalla Hotel and Conference Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario. The Summit featured more than **20 training sessions** and workshops, providing opportunities for meaningful conversations, practical insights, knowledge sharing, and valuable connections.

240

**TOURISM LEADERS,
PARTNERS AND
STAKEHOLDERS**

20

TRAINING SESSIONS

Together, these initiatives provided tourism operators, communities and industry stakeholders with a combination of practical training, personalized support, online learning and professional development opportunities. Continued participation across workshops, webinars, online courses and mentorship programs reflects ongoing demand for accessible tools and resources that support tourism businesses and communities across Northern Ontario.

"We would highly recommend any of the courses offered and are thankful to all of the consultants we have engaged with and all of the opportunities that have been pursued due to the Destination Northern Ontario and Tourism Excellence North Program. Do not hesitate to reach out and complete their training modules. Each one will put you one step closer to success."

**— Misty Brousseau, General Manager,
Serpent River First Nation Limited
Partnership**



tourisme
d'excellence
nord

> tourismexcellencenorth.ca



"I have had the pleasure of working with the DNO team on a couple of occasions over the last couple years and appreciate their commitment to diversifying and enhancing the Tourism Economy of Northern Ontario!"

— Ryan Reynard, Executive Director,
Lake of the Woods Business Incentive Corporation

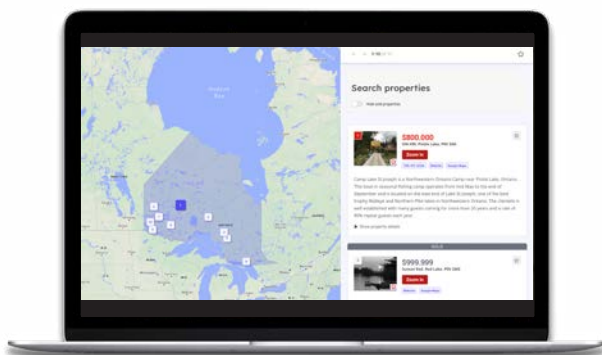
Investment Attraction

2025-26 INVESTMENT ATTRACTION OVERVIEW

Throughout the year, Destination Northern Ontario's Investment Attraction priorities focused on building regional capacity, strengthening business supports and developing practical tools to drive sustainable tourism growth. Led by the Senior Coordinator of Investment Attraction and Economic Development, this work brought together teams across the organization to respond to evolving visitor expectations while positioning Northern Ontario to capitalize on emerging opportunities within tourism and the broader economy.



The Investment Attraction sub-portal, (invest.destinationnorthernontario.ca) developed with support from FedNor, continues to evolve with tools for prospective and existing entrepreneurs. Current research is identifying service and market gaps, highlighting investment opportunities and building a database of investment-ready properties. This work also supports business succession and workforce development by helping connect opportunities with new and underemployed Canadians.



Visit the portal



Destination Northern Ontario continued to track tourism and tourism-adjacent trends, including the expansion of the **Municipal Accommodation Tax** across Northern communities, to better understand opportunities for growth and diversification. Partnerships with **data analysis firms** strengthened insight into the accommodations sector by integrating pan-Northern small-scale accommodation data with existing urban KPIs, provincial datasets and local intelligence. Together, these sources are creating a more complete picture of sector performance, occupancy trends and areas of untapped potential.

Research remains a cornerstone of the Investment Attraction pillar, giving communities, businesses and partners stronger information to guide investment and development decisions.





Destination: Northern Ontario Podcast Series

The second season of the **award-winning Destination: Northern Ontario podcast** expanded the reach of the region's business purchase and succession opportunities to audiences beyond Northern Ontario. A third season is in the works.



SEASON II

[> Listen Now!](#)



Tourism Supports

Practical supports continued to help tourism operators prepare for succession and growth, including virtual resources and webinars delivered through Tourism Excellence North. Destination Northern Ontario also continued its successful pilot with **Northern Ontario Community Futures** organizations, encouraging tourism businesses to incorporate where appropriate; on the docket is programming to help access financing opportunities, realize potential cost efficiencies and strengthen long-term succession and sale readiness.





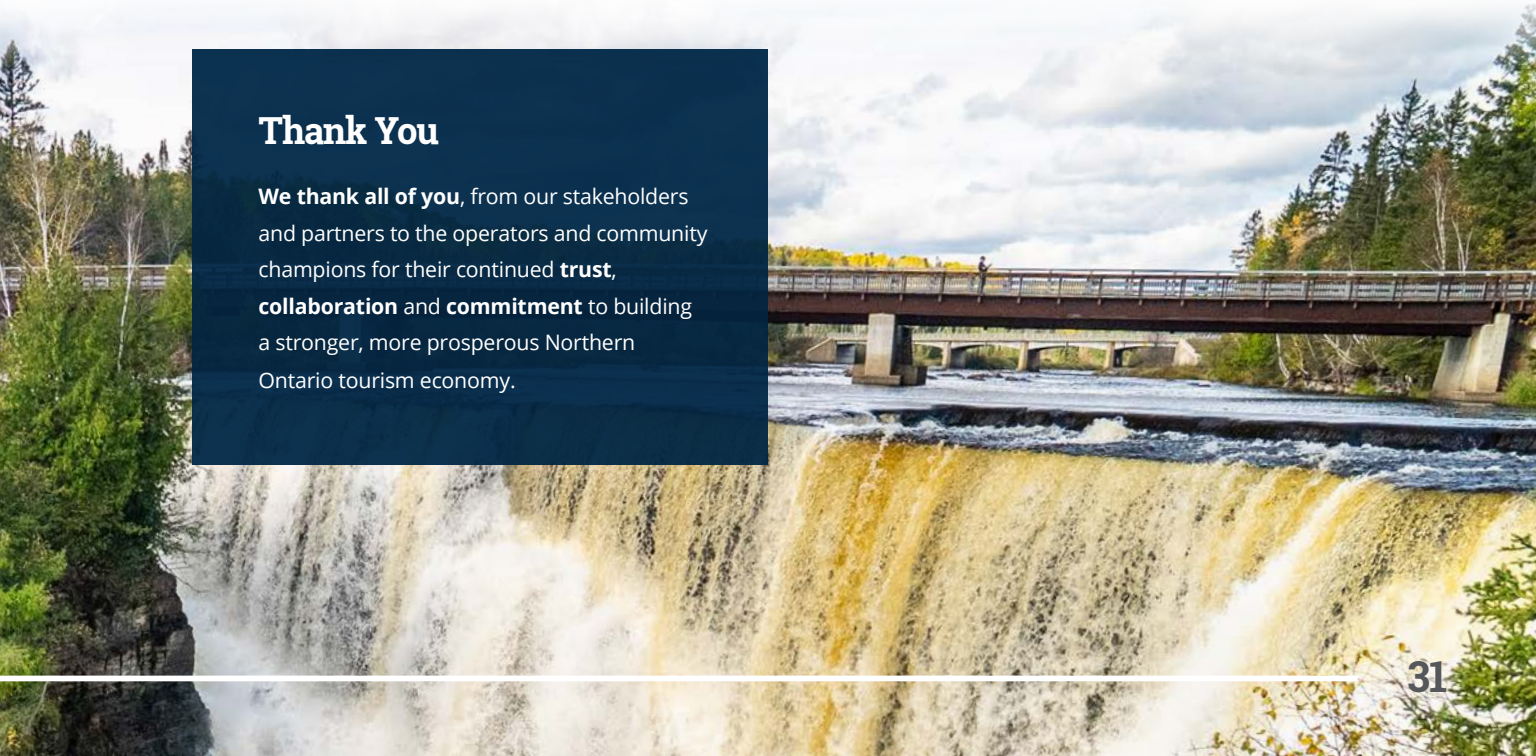
Collaboration

Collaboration remains central to this work. Destination Northern Ontario continues to connect the **public** and **private** sectors and contribute to economic development initiatives across the North. The organization also remains engaged with the **Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, Tourism Industry Association of Canada, Economic Developers Council of Ontario, Economic**

Developers Association of Canada, Community Futures Ontario, regional municipal associations, Indigenous organizations and **provincial** and **federal ministries**. These relationships ensure Northern Ontario tourism is represented in broader economic development, investment and policy discussions.

Thank You

We thank all of you, from our stakeholders and partners to the operators and community champions for their continued **trust, collaboration** and **commitment** to building a stronger, more prosperous Northern Ontario tourism economy.



Partnership

Fulfilling its partnership mandate, Destination Northern Ontario reached out across the North to identify potential initiatives that aligned with its business plan and pillar strategies.

Destination Northern Ontario implemented **28 partnered initiatives** working with **95 partners** and leveraging the province's investment three times over, resulting in **\$1.9 million** of partnered activity, **every \$ leveraged to \$3.26**.



28
PARTNERED
INITIATIVES



95
INDUSTRY
PARTNERS



\$1.9
MILLION
LEVERAGED

Interested in working together?

At Destination Northern Ontario, we actively develop and manage partnership initiatives across key pillars: Product Development, Investment Attraction, Workforce Development & Industry Training, and Marketing.

Contact communications@destinationnorthernontario.ca to discuss further.



"Destination Northern Ontario (DNO) has never taken their mandate lightly. Managing the needs of tourism operators across the largest Tourism Region in Ontario, and helping visitors to navigate long distances between communities, takes considerable effort. That said, DNO continues to push the envelope, and I've been honoured to work with them on a number of projects to help drive new interest and tourism investment. They have been excellent partners, collaborating on investment attraction plans, along with visitation and program assessments to maximize funding and align with visitor trends. DNO is a model Regional Tourism Organization, and I truly enjoy working with the team."

— Rebecca Godfrey, Senior Vice President, CBRE



Financial Report

Financial Report 2025-26

Area of focus	Actual		Budget		%
Governance & Administration	\$	466,542.00	\$	425,235.00	-10%
Product Development	\$	320,520.00	\$	350,000.00	8%
Investment Attraction	\$	245,243.00	\$	300,000.00	18%
Workforce Development & Industry Training	\$	406,330.00	\$	450,000.00	10%
Marketing & Communications	\$	1,886,600.00	\$	1,800,000.00	-5%
Partnership	\$	605,000.00	\$	605,000.00	0%
Total MTCG Contribution	\$	3,930,235.00	\$	3,930,235.00	0%
Leveraged Contributions*	\$	1,945,678.51			
Total \$		5,875,913.51			



Connect with us!

WEBSITES

Destination Northern Ontario / destinationnorthernontario.ca

Tourism Excellence North / tourismexcellencenorth.ca

Domestic Marketing / northernontario.travel

International Travel Trade / northernontarioitt.com

SOCIAL

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THANK YOU



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