



Strategic Plan 2013-2016



Acknowledgments

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Mission & Vision

Vision: To be the voice of tourism in the Georgian Bay-Parry Sound area.

Mission: To provide outstanding tourism marketing and management services in partnership with tourism operators, community groups and industry partners in the Georgian Bay-Parry Sound area.

About Us

Georgian Bay Country is a local tourism organization, promoting the Georgian Bay-Parry Sound area as a preferred year round destination and the unique experiences available to visitors. GBC is an incorporated not-for-profit tourism association, governed by a volunteer board of directors and sustained by its members and partners.

Membership is open to any tourism operator, associated business or organization at annual rates that return benefits such as: marketing, advertising, media promotion, direct booking services, and industry information and training opportunities.

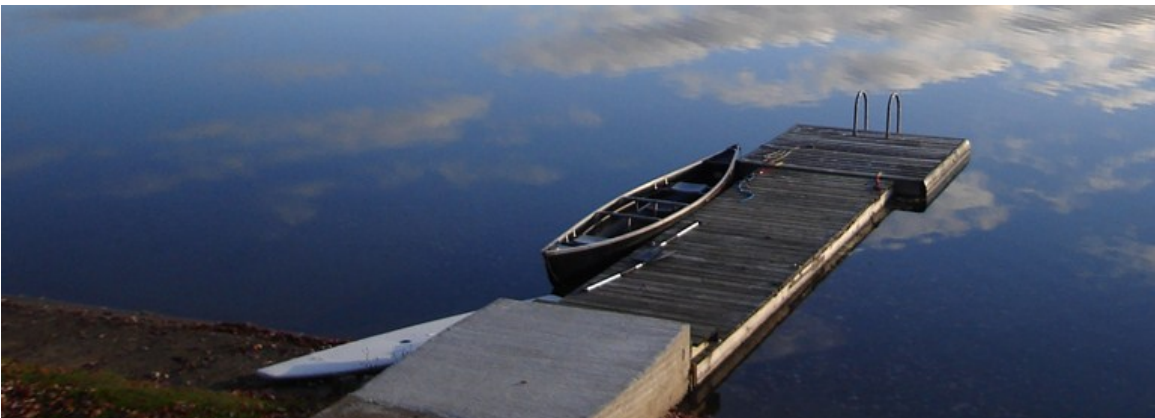
Georgian Bay Country operates a Visitor Centre in a high-traffic location on Highway #400, offering premium advertising opportunities. It promotes the value of tourism and stimulates the economy of the region as a whole.



Essential Services

In moving forward, Georgian Bay Country will succeed if it can confirm, promote, and account for the following valued services:

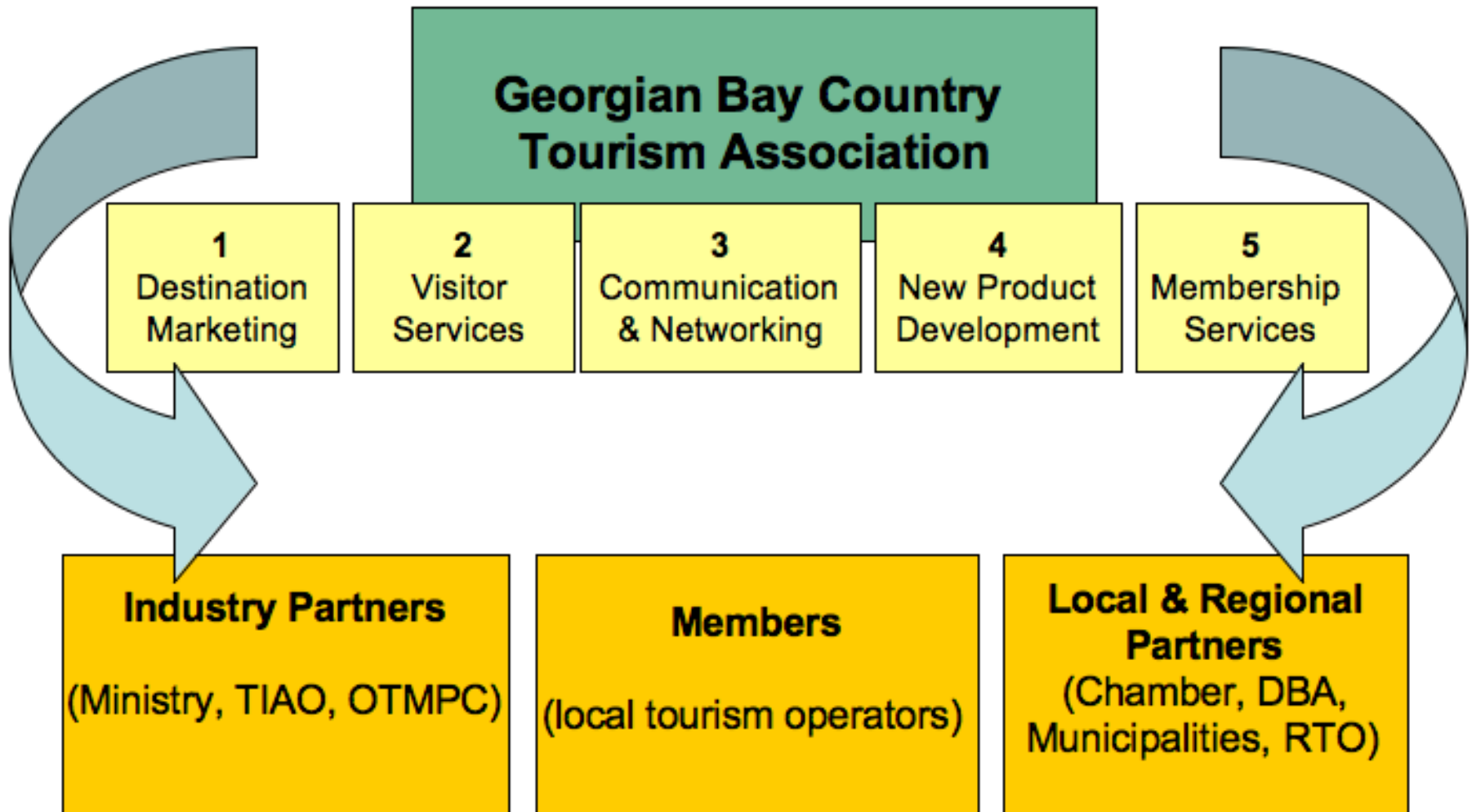
- ⇒ **Keeper of the brand.** No one else is going to keep the Georgian Bay-Parry Sound brand; it should be protected, and developed as the basis for tourism marketing.
- ⇒ Visitor services and the capacity to service inquiries. **Direct customer contact** that visitors are not going to get anywhere else.
- ⇒ External marketing through **digital services** (website, social media, apps) that no other organization provides.
- ⇒ **Building bridges** in the whole Georgian Bay-Parry Sound area to support a healthy tourism industry; networking with government and the private sector to create effective partnerships.
- ⇒ Being the **voice of tourism** for local tourism providers.



Overall Tourism Objectives

- Increase number of visitors
- Increase length-of-stay
- Increase visitor spending
- Increase repeat visitations
- Enhance the economic impact of tourism for the area.

Major Areas of Activity & Partnerships



Strategic Goals 2013-2016

In order to fulfill the mission of the organization and ensure delivery of the essential services noted, the following strategic goals were established for the next 3 years. They were generated through consultations and research, a SWOT analysis and surveys with Board Members, review of market research, interviews with 10 different stakeholders, and a Ministry of Tourism framework for strategic planning. Further detail on the process is outlined in Appendix 2.

- 1. Develop & Implement a Marketing Plan**
- 2. Provide Outstanding Visitor Information & Services**
- 3. Maintain Excellent Communications & Networking**
- 4. Support New Tourism Product Development**
- 5. Expand & Enhance Membership**
- 6. Maintain Good Organizational Governance**



GOAL 1. Develop & Implement Strategic Marketing Programs

Objectives	Timeline	Existing/Proposed Actions
1.1 Create a Marketing Committee	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a Marketing Committee that plays an advisory role to the Board, with at-large members with expertise • Oversee the Marketing Plan and guide implementation • Ensure existing market research is used fully • Identify research needs for future (see 2.5 below) • Review and update the plan annually
1.2 Develop the Marketing Plan	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop RFP & contract a third-party to prepare the plan • Survey members (past/potential members) about their marketing needs and the services they want from GBC • Include a social media plan • Include a strategy for measuring impact/success of the Marketing Plan; (see 4.1 for measuring economic impact of tourism for the region).
1.3 Distribute the Marketing Plan	2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the Marketing Plan with members • Make it available online • Make it available to area Townships • Use the Marketing Plan to develop specific programs with tourism partners.
1.4 Build marketing capacity	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build capacity by supporting staff training & networking • Identify opportunities for professional development • Continue to use interns for marketing support • Assess marketing performance (ROI) annually
1.5 Assess new market potential	2014-2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess new market potential and niche markets • Include Seasonal Residents/Cottagers and their guests • Ensure that new products meet their needs (i.e., day trips and half-day experience/packages) and that marketing is targeted (eg., cottager association newsletters)

GOAL 2. Provide Outstanding Visitor Information & Services

Objectives	Timeline	Existing/Proposed Actions
2.1 Create a Business Plan for the Visitor Centre	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a Visitor Centre Committee to prepare a draft Business Plan for the Board • Look at past success of the business model • Assess new opportunities for sustained revenues, including advertising, merchandise, and bookings
2.2 Create a Framework of all Visitor Services	Annual Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the full suite of visitor services provided, and promote this to members and Townships. • Evaluate the value and impact of each service and based on member surveys (5.5 below) prioritize them to ensure efficient use of resources.
2.3 Operate the Visitor Centre	Year-Round	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create the centre as “the information hub” for tourism in the area • Maintain call centre, promote the personal referrals • Seek new advertisers • Provide staff training/customer service • Highlight the Visitor Centre as one of the stops on the “front line fam. tour” (see 5.4 below)
2.4 Pilot a Booking Service	2013 Expand 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and pilot a telephone and walk-in booking service at the Visitor Centre for participating operators (using the Tourism Information Centres of Ontario as a resource) • Train staff to be pro-active “Can I book that for you?” • Measure the success to expand in Year 2.
2.5 Conduct market research	As needed to inform Marketing Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake local market research with partner organizations in order to meet information needs. • Use the Visitor Centre for gathering data • Specifically, do face-to-face and social media surveys for visitors in the building

GOAL 2. Provide Outstanding Visitor Information & Services (continued)

Objectives	Timeline	Existing/Proposed Actions
2.6 Produce a Visitors Guide	Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the Guide promotes the destination and “the offer” (Box 1, above) with clear links between the <u>Experiences</u> & the <u>Providers</u>. • Ensure that the Guide continues to offer good value for advertisers and sponsors. • Title should say: “Georgian Bay-Parry Sound area” • Create a social media link to the Guide. • Consider an online, searchable & interactive version of the Guide (see 2.7 below).
2.7 Replace Web Site	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update the website (as per Marketing Plan) • Promote both “destination” & “experiences” • Ensure user-friendly pages for members and administration • Include an on-line booking service

GOAL 3. Maintain Excellent Communications & Networking

Objectives	Timeline	Existing/Proposed Actions
3.1 Revitalize the GBC brand.	2013-2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who are we, what we do, our value to members Communicate GBC's essential services Emphasize the unique local role of GBC (distinct from RTOs)
3.2 Develop a select number of public, educational events that showcase the economic and cultural benefits of tourism.	Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer these events in partnership, where possible Design the events as cost-recovery Prioritize events based on member survey results.
3.3 Continue to ensure that industry representatives, members, associated businesses, and townships are informed and that there is an opportunity to showcase the work of Georgian Bay Country, promote the brand and the value.	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain a current database of contacts Invite members-at-large to sit on committees Recruit champions to be spokespeople for GBC Equip them with the GBC mission/vision/goals Engage municipalities in tourism marketing plans Cross-market the "Front Line Fam Tours" (below)
3.4 Continue to participate in priority meetings to maintain strong networks.	As Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> e.g., Explorers' Edge, Georgian Bay Destination Development Partnership, Municipal deputations, Club Class of GBC membership Deputations to Municipal Councils
3.5 Evaluate major festivals or events as partnership opportunities.	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By networking with municipalities and community partners, assess which (if any) major events will fulfill the goals of this Strategic Plan.

GOAL 4. Support New Tourism Product Development

Objectives	Timelines	Existing/Proposed Actions
4.1 Asset & Opportunity Study	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the key purpose & key questions of study: • To demonstrate the economic development value of tourism to the regional economy • Identify an inventory of current assets • Highlight new opportunities for product development • In partnership, begin the study in Sept. 2013
4.2 Lead the development of “Experience Georgian Bay Country” program with partners and operators	2013-2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the “Experience GBC” Committee, hold workshops with operators and others in the industry • Encourage multi-day & half-day experiences • Encourage single & multi-operator packages • Include new products in the Visitor Guide • Include a booking service with these products • Provide a framework for operators to evaluate their success and improve.
4.3 Create a strategy for New Product Development	2014-2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on first year experience, create a strategic framework for new products, including thematic package development, balance of year-round experiences and concept-to-market stewardship. • Encourage operators to fill the needs for culinary, arts, and culture through case studies from other regions and models for development. • Measure the success of package marketing.

GOAL 5. Expand & Enhance Membership

Objectives	Timeline	Existing/Proposed Actions
5.1 Communicate with members	Monthly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly electronic newsletters with key events and digital links to increase engagement • Solicit volunteers for committees, as needed • Survey members & operators to assess their marketing needs and rank important services. • Invite members to “bring a friend” to workshops • Profile a member’s business or tourist experience.
5.2 Update the Benefits to Members	Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review existing membership benefits structure • Add and publicize new benefits • Recruit champions to promote the booking service program to other members (see 2.4 above) • Support the “Tourism of the Year Award” • Communicate this to Chamber members
5.3 Evaluate and Update the Advertising Opportunities	Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review past and current advertising opportunities • Assess the profit margin for past 5 years • Identify new venues (e.g., Cottager magazines) • Explore online bulk advertising, sales/promotions
5.4 Develop and lead a “Front Line Fam Tour”	Spring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve members in the design of a Familiarization Tour for tourism employees (“fam tour”) • Provide a wide selection of information and experiences for a high quality educational day • Invite operators to participate both as stops on the tour and for registering their employees.
5.5 Invite members to participate in market research & GBC evaluations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey members about their interest and willingness to participate in a booking service. • Develop an annual online survey to enhance research data & inform marketing activities

Goal 6. Maintain Good Organizational Governance

Objectives	Timeline	Existing/Proposed Actions
6.1 Ensure best practices for organizational management and reporting	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider Board governance training or coaching • Review Board structure and representation • Recruit new Board & Committee members • Produce an Annual Report for members, funders & the public • Hold an Annual General Meeting • Ensure transparency and accountability with records of Board Minutes & Financial Statements.
6.2 Human Resource support	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint a Board “supervisor” for management or an HR Committee to provide coaching and an annual performance review based on pre-set targets, as per this Strategic Plan. • Provide opportunities for professional development, particularly in marketing and social media. • Continue to pursue internship positions or other staffing or job-sharing opportunities.
6.3 Communications & Engagement	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renew and recruit people to board and committees and create ambassadors for GBC • Ensure through good internal communications board members • Provide timely updates and information to Board • Ensure that board members are invited and engaged in activities.

Recommendation on How to Operationalize the Strategic Goals

Goal	Priority	Resources (Partners, Grants)	Success Measure
1. Marketing Plan	Develop the Plan	Ontario Trillium Fund Muskoka Community Network Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership C.	Plan complete by January 2014 Marketing Committee active
2. Visitor Services	Business Plan New Partners Improved Website	Diversify Revenues Municipal Support TICO OTMPC	Business Plan ready to present Booking service for 2013 Funding commitments for 2013
3. Communications	GBC Brand Recognition Select Events	Marketing Intern Partner organizations	Membership survey in 2013 Cost-recovery of all events
4. New Products	Asset Study Workshops & Training Promotion for 2013	Labour Market Group Ontario Tourism Development Fund RTO Partnership Fund Visitor Guide & Bookings Community Partners	Asset Study complete by 2014 # of New Products/Packages # of Packages booked
5. Membership	Communication New members Fam Tour	Marketing Intern Membership fee structure Advertising & booking fees	Quarterly newsletters/surveys 50% new members per year Full participation by members
6. Governance	Board Training & Recruits Financials, Minutes Annual report & meeting	Volunteers Board & Staff Review Bylaws	Board engagement, new recruits Treasurer & staff reports AGM & elections

Appendix 1: List of GBC Activities in 2011-2012

Tourism Marketing

Website

Social Media

Television – Cogeco

Radio – Moose FM

Visitor Centre Operations – staff training, supervision, travel information materials, merchandise, etc.

Visitor Guide – 40,000 copies distributed to travel centres across Ontario

Advertising with Lake Land Boating and the Great Lakes Cruising Club

Promotion: Fall Colour Report, Contests, OTMPC website/publications

FAM trips, photo/video shoots

Coordination & Hosting

- Tourism Industry & Awareness Events
- Business on the Bay – annual networking boat cruise
- “The Future of Tourism in GBC” workshop
- Breakfast information sessions – Northern Ontario Growth Plan, Mayors/Reeves, EDOs/CAOs
- Dissemination of tourism information to the GBC Board from RTO12, TIAO, etc.
- Georgian Bay Coastal Route Sign Launch



List of GBC Activities in 2011-2012 *continued*

Public Events

- Golf Tournament
- Shirt of the Week at the Visitor Centre
- Awareness of Canada's Ultimate Fishing Spot – with the World Fishing Network
- Lighthouse Summit

Partner in Hosting

- Baypalooza – Home & Cottage Show
- Biosphere Career Day
- Georgian Bay Biosphere Charter Launch
- Doors Open Ontario
- Timbits Elementary School Curling Championship
- Interprovincial Air Tour
- The Great Race

Networking & Partnership Development

- Active Transportation Committee
- Canadore College
- Explorers' Edge (RTO12) sub-committees
- Georgian Bay Destination Development Partnership
- Municipal Deputations and Tourism presentations
- Parry Sound area Chamber of Commerce
- Regional Economic Development Advisory Committee – Smart Communities
- Roundtables (Labour Market Group, MPP Norm Miller)
- Small Business Week
- Tourism Industry Association of Ontario
- Tourism Week at the Ontario Travel Centre in Barrie

Appendix 2: Strategic Plan Process & Research

October 11, 2012—Strategic Planning Framework, Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Sport

SWOT analysis by the Board of Directors

October 22, 2012— Survey to Board members to confirm SWOT analysis

October 30, 2012—Strategic Planning session (9am-3pm) with Board of Directors

November 6, 2012— “Experience Georgian Bay Country” Committee Meeting

November 21, 2012— GBC Board Meeting, presentation of Draft 1 of the Strategic Plan to confirm Goals

December 11, 2012—GBC Board Meeting, presentation of Draft 2 of the Strategic Plan to confirm terms and actions

December 18, 2012—Meeting with GBC staff to confirm actions, implementation strategies & resources

December 18, 2012—Circulation of Draft for Comment to stakeholders and Board members

December 21, 2012—Target for Final Draft

January 31, 2013—Target for Approved Strategic Plan by GBC Board

Case Study Research, Contact & Workshops

RTO 13 & Canadian Tourism Commission “The Explorer Quotient” workshop Nov. 30, 2012

RTO 7 Sustainable Tourism Tool Kit

RTO 1 Southwest Ontario Tourism Corporation

RTO 11 Experiential Tourism Workshop Series

RTO 12 Research Documents

RTO 12 & Canadore College: Tourism Package Development Workshop Series Nov. 23; Dec. 13, 2012

Sudbury Tourism

Explore the Bruce

Appendix 3: List of Stakeholder Interviews (October-December 2012)

Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Sport
Tourism Association Industry of Ontario
Tourism Operator & RTO 12 Board
Tourism Operator & RTO 12 Board
Tourism Operator & GBC Board
Tourism Operator & Past GBC Board
RTO 12 – Explorers’ Edge
Labour Market Group
Georgian Bay Country
Muskoka Tourism
Town of Parry Sound
Township of Seguin
Parry Sound Area Community Business & Development Corporation

Appendix 4: Critical Issues

Georgian Bay Country has a complex history as a tourism association, and is currently in transition to an incorporated non-profit structure governed by a volunteer Board of Directors.

With the introduction of Regional Tourism Organizations by the Province of Ontario, a certain amount of confusion was created among partners with regard to the differentiation between regional and local objectives, services, and funding models. Clarity is still needed around the fact that the provincial investment in RTOs does not directly benefit local tourism organizations, such as Georgian Bay Country. However, these organizations are in a position to partner on common goals to meet both regional and local tourism development and marketing objectives. RTO12 is available to help with strategies, planning and marketing.

The GBC is widely-recognized and has a strong brand. The organization has benefited from members, staff, and volunteers that build capacity through networking and partnership creation. However, certain measures would enhance the value:

- a marketing plan is needed to direct marketing strategies and build strong partnerships
- services provided by GBC must be informed by members' needs and valued by members as a good investment
- the economic impact of tourism for local economic development should be measured and reported.

Business planning is key for the Strategic Plan to work, both for the organization as a whole, and specific operations, such as the Visitor Centre.

GBC should ensure good governance, including transparency in terms of plans, budgets, and an Annual Meeting. A review of Board and Committee structures is recommended to ensure good representation and diversity of experience.

Partnerships are critical to success. This plan will help to move the organization forward and show strategic goals to potential partners.

Potential Markets

Many tourism studies for this area exclude seasonal residents (or summer/cottage property owners) from their analysis of tourism rates and spending. However, the number of people visiting friends or relatives is a significant potential market and should be further evaluated.

Residents and cottagers themselves are often seeking experiences in the region and could be seen as another potential market for tourism. Within new product development, there may be a suite of experiences that could be created and marketed specifically for seasonal residents and their guests. This area should be developed cautiously and only with sound research background.

Glossary of Terms

DMO – Destination Marketing Organization (note that GBC is not technically a DMO but a local tourism association)

GBC – Georgian Bay Country

MTC – Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Sport

OTMPC – Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation

ROI – Return on Investment

RTO – Regional Tourism Organization (13 in Ontario)

SWOT – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats Analysis

TIAC – Tourism Industry Association of Canada

TIAO – Tourism Industry Association of Ontario

TICO – Tourism Information Centres of Ontario