

Analysis of Ontario's RTOs

Comparison of 2022 Performance
Business Plan Analysis
Advertising Analysis



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A. Comparison of 2022 Performance

The 2022 data, the most recent available, shows meaningful differences in performance across Ontario's 10 Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs). Some regions brought in large numbers of visitors and strong spending. Others attracted high volumes but saw relatively low economic returns per visitor.

Visits & Spend, Types of Visits

There's an inverse relationship between traffic and yield. In several cases, regions with fewer visitors (e.g. us and RTO13) had significantly higher spend per visitor, while regions with larger numbers of visits (e.g. RTO3, RTO4) saw lower individual returns. **This suggests that we are attracting a different type of tourist.** RTO3 had the lowest per-night spend, indicating short visits with limited impact on local economies.

Region	Total Visits (millions, 2022)	Visitor Spending (billions, 2022)	Avg Spending per Visitor	Avg Nights per Visitor	Avg Spending per Night	% VFR	% Pleasure	% Business	% Other
RTO 1	10.7	\$1.6	\$145	1.4	\$108	49%	30%	5%	17%
RTO 2	8.3	\$2.1	\$254	1.0	\$253	27%	60%	5%	7%
RTO 3	7.8	\$0.7	\$91	1.3	\$68	58%	25%	5%	12%
RTO 4	9.4	\$1.1	\$119	1.1	\$106	56%	23%	5%	16%
RTO 5	16.3	\$4.2	\$254	0.7	\$351	50%	28%	10%	12%
RTO 6	9.1	\$1.0	\$114	1.4	\$81	49%	35%	4%	13%
RTO 7	11.5	\$2.2	\$190	1.3	\$145	38%	48%	3%	11%
RTO 8	6.2	\$1.1	\$176	2.1	\$86	36%	49%	4%	10%
RTO 9	6.5	\$1.2	\$185	1.4	\$131	39%	38%	5%	18%
RTO 10	7.0	\$1.6	\$226	1.1	\$200	40%	30%	7%	24%
RTO 11	4.7	\$0.9	\$182	2.0	\$94	37%	54%	2%	7%
RTO 12	4.4	\$1.3	\$301	2.1	\$142	29%	63%	4%	5%
RTO 13	4.7	\$1.4	\$294	2.3	\$130	38%	39%	7%	16%
All Ontario	106.6	\$20.4	\$191	1.3	\$143	43%	40%	5%	13%

[Spreadsheet](#)

RTO 7 (Bruce, Grey, Simcoe): Led the province on most key metrics, which is surprising to the point of straining credulity. It recorded the highest number of visits (11.5 million) and the greatest overall visitor spending (\$2.19 billion). It was average on all other metrics like average spending per night/visitor and number of nights.

RTO 12 and RTO 13 (Muskoka, Northern Ontario): While we had lower visitation, we had the highest spending per visitor - about \$300. This is explained by the fact we have longer stays - our average nights per visitor was more than 50% higher than the provincial average. Note that our visitor profile looks a lot like Niagara. Only 29% of visits were VFR, compared to the provincial average of 43%.

RTO 13 was close behind at \$294. That's more than double what some other regions saw. Total spending in each exceeded \$1.3 billion. This indicates a visitor profile that tends to stay longer and spend more, even if total foot traffic is modest.

RTO 1 (Southwest Ontario): Brought in 10.7 million visits and over \$1.5 billion in spending. Its per-visitor spending was moderate at \$145, but the high traffic volume contributed to a strong total return.

RTO 3 (Hamilton, Halton, Brant): Although RTO3 saw a respectable 7.8 million visits, it had the lowest average spend per visitor (\$91) and per night (\$68). This suggests a large number of low-spend or day-trip visits, and limited overnight tourism. It was the lowest overall in terms of total visitor revenue.

RTO 4 and RTO 6 (Waterloo Region, York/Durham/Headwaters): Both regions attracted around 9 million visitors and surpassed the \$1 billion mark in spending. However, their average spend per visitor - \$114 to \$119 - was well below that of comparable regions. This may point to a high volume of short stays or limited discretionary spending.

Inverse relationship between volume and yield: In several cases, regions with fewer visitors (e.g. RTO12 and RTO13) had significantly higher spend per visitor, while regions with larger numbers of visits (e.g. RTO3, RTO4) saw lower individual returns. This suggests that many rural or remote regions are attracting a different type of tourist

The importance of overnight visits: Regions with higher average nightly spend tend to perform better overall. The lowest performing region, RTO3, also had the lowest per-night spend, indicating short visits with limited impact on local economies.

Seasonality

Tourism remains highly seasonal with Q3 (July–September) the peak quarter for all regions, accounting for roughly one-third or more of annual visits in most cases. Of all the RTOs, we have the highest concentration on Q3 with 51.1% of visits. We also have comparatively low traffic in the fall season.

Quarter	Q1 (Jan-Mar)	Q2 (Apr-Jun)	Q3 (Jul-Sep)	Q4 (Oct-Dec)
RTO 1	16%	22%	35%	27%
RTO 3	18%	25%	31%	26%
RTO 4	14%	25%	30%	32%
RTO 6	18%	24%	32%	26%
RTO 7	19%	26%	37%	17%
RTO 8	14%	34%	38%	15%
RTO 9	12%	30%	37%	21%
RTO 11	12%	21%	44%	24%
RTO 12	11%	24%	51%	15%
RTO 13	16%	27%	41%	16%
Non-Urban RTOs Total	16%	25%	36%	23%

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Types of Accommodations

The accommodation choices of visitors vary by region, reflecting the nature of each destination. In most RTOs, a large share of overnight visitors stay in private homes or cottages (often visiting friends/relatives or staying at second homes). For instance, over 73% of RTO 3's overnight visits are in private homes/cottages, no doubt related to the high concentration of VFR traffic.

Roofed commercial lodgings (hotels, motels, B&Bs, etc.) comprise about 20–30% of stays in most regions, with the highest usage in RTO 13 (nearly 38% of overnight visits). Not surprisingly, camping/RV sites are significant in some regions known for outdoors - it accounts for 16% of our overnights.

Type	Roofed Commercial	Camping/RV Facilities	Private Homes/Cottages	Other Accommodations
RTO 1	27%	10%	57%	7%
RTO 3	17%	4%	76%	3%
RTO 4	24%	12%	57%	7%
RTO 6	27%	7%	60%	7%
RTO 7	27%	9%	38%	26%
RTO 8	22%	8%	38%	33%
RTO 9	31%	13%	44%	12%
RTO 11	21%	11%	32%	36%
RTO 12	20%	16%	31%	33%
RTO 13	37%	15%	35%	13%
Non-Urban RTOs Total	26%	11%	45%	19%

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Activities

Visitors engage in a variety of activities during their trips, with participation rates differing by region depending on the attractions available. One of the most common activities across many regions (though not us) is visiting friends or relatives (VFR).

The importance of outdoor and nature-oriented activities stands out in certain regions. We have a high share of visitors taking part in “Any Outdoor/Sports Activity” (34%) and Nature Park visits (9%). In contrast, regions like RTO 4 or RTO 9 have lower participation in outdoor activities and higher in shopping.

Activity	Visit Friends or Relatives	Shopping	Restaurant or bar	Sightseeing	National/Provincial Nature Parks	Any Outdoor/Sports Activity	Visit a beach
RTO 1	39%	16%	16%	7%	3%	14%	6%
RTO 3	49%	12%	16%	8%	4%	10%	1%
RTO 4	43%	19%	16%	8%	3%	8%	4%
RTO 6	45%	12%	17%	8%	3%	14%	2%
RTO 7	29%	11%	12%	9%	5%	24%	10%
RTO 8	35%	10%	15%	7%	4%	25%	4%
RTO 9	34%	15%	16%	12%	5%	14%	3%
RTO 11	33%	9%	10%	8%	5%	29%	6%
RTO 12	25%	5%	9%	9%	9%	34%	9%
RTO 13	30%	13%	14%	7%	5%	25%	6%
Non-Urban RTOs Total	36%	13%	14%	8%	4%	19%	5%

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Age of Visitor

Overall, the age profile of visitors generally reflects the age of the Ontario population. That said, our visitors are among the oldest of all the RTOs with 52% over the age 55.

Age Group	18–24 years	25–34 years	35–44 years	45–54 years	55–64 years	65+ years
RTO 1	8%	19%	17%	16%	17%	23%
RTO 3	9%	19%	16%	17%	23%	17%
RTO 4	8%	20%	16%	13%	18%	24%
RTO 6	9%	20%	17%	16%	18%	20%
RTO 7	10%	21%	17%	13%	17%	22%
RTO 8	8%	16%	14%	16%	21%	26%
RTO 9	8%	17%	15%	13%	21%	26%
RTO 11	6%	16%	12%	16%	22%	29%
RTO 12	6%	15%	18%	11%	22%	30%
RTO 13	7%	15%	16%	13%	20%	28%
Non-Urban RTOs Total	8%	18%	16%	15%	19%	24%
Ontario Age Distribution	9%	18%	17%	16%	18%	22%

[Spreadsheet](#)

Number of Nights Stayed

Travel duration varies significantly by region. Regions closer to population centers or comprising urban day-trip destinations have a high proportion of same-day visits (0 nights), whereas more rural or far-reaching regions see longer stays. This is a standout metric for us - we have the lowest proportion of 0 nights stays of all the RTOs and the highest proportion of 2+ nights stays.

Nights Stayed	0 nights (Same-day)	1 night	2 nights	3 nights	4 nights	5 nights	6 – 9 nights	10+ nights
RTO 1	72%	10%	10%	4%	1%	0%	2%	1%
RTO 3	80%	10%	5%	1%	2%	0%	1%	0%
RTO 4	78%	10%	6%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%
RTO 6	78%	10%	6%	2%	1%	1%	0%	1%
RTO 7	65%	11%	12%	6%	2%	1%	2%	1%
RTO 8	61%	9%	12%	9%	3%	1%	3%	2%
RTO 9	65%	13%	11%	5%	2%	0%	2%	1%
RTO 11	50%	12%	14%	10%	5%	2%	5%	1%
RTO 12	30%	14%	21%	17%	7%	5%	5%	1%
RTO 13	47%	11%	17%	8%	6%	2%	6%	3%
Non-Urban RTOs Total	66%	11%	10%	5%	3%	1%	2%	1%

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B. Business Plan Analysis

Each of the 13 RTOs has outlined strategic priorities and operational programs to drive tourism recovery and growth in their regions. If there is one common theme here, it's a focus on **inclusivity, sustainability, and community alignment**. Several also focus on coordination with other marketing organizations, namely DO and municipal tourism offices.

RTO	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	Website - Tourism	Website - Industry	Strategic / Operational Plan (Multi-Year)
RTO1 – Ontario's Southwest	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	ontariosouthwest.com	swotc.ca	2020–2023 Strategic Recovery Plan Target audiences
RTO2 – Niagara Canada	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	niagarafallstourism.com	N/D	Strategic Plan
RTO3 – Hamilton Halton Brant	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	theheartofontario.com	N/D	2023–2026 Strategic Plan
RTO4 – Huron, Perth, Waterloo & Wellington	N/D	N/D	N/D	N/D	rto4.ca	2024-25-Business-Plan
RTO5 – Toronto (Destination Toronto)	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	seetorontonow.com	destinationtoronto.com	Visitor Economy Strategic Directions
RTO6 – York, Durham & Headwaters	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	yorkdurhamheadwaters.ca	https://centralcounties.ca	2025-26 Business Plan
RTO7 – BruceGreySimcoe	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	brucegreysimcoe.com	rto7data.ca	5-Year Strategy 2024–2029
RTO8 – Kawartha's Northumberland	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	kawarthasnorthumberland.ca	N/D	2023/24 Business & Operational Plan (most recent available)
RTO9 – South Eastern Ontario	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	southeasternontario.ca	rto9.ca	2025–2028 Strategic Plan
RTO10 – Ottawa (Ottawa Tourism)	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	ottawatourism.ca	N/D	2023–2032 Destination Stewardship Plan
RTO11 – Ontario's Highlands	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	comewander.ca	ohto.ca	Responsible Tourism Mandate ("Wander Sustainably") - No plan found
RTO12 – Explorers' Edge	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	explorersedge.ca	rto12.ca	2025-26 BOP
RTO13 – Northern Ontario	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	northernontario.travel	destinationnorthernontario.ca	2023–2028 Strategic Plan

[Spreadsheet](#)

Business and Operational Plan Summary

Here is a summary of the latest plans available from each.

RTO 1 Ontario's Southwest: Focused on post-pandemic recovery and sector growth. Its plan emphasizes product development and marketing to rebuild visitation, evidence-based decision-making using research, stakeholder collaboration & communication, and workforce development for tourism operators. These priorities are aimed at re-establishing a “vibrant and prosperous” regional tourism economy while instilling a “business-minded, inclusive approach”.

RTO 2 Tourism Partnership of Niagara: Based on a vision “for the Niagara Region to be the #1 tourism destination in Canada that people want to visit again and again”. The current strategic agenda centers on destination marketing and branding – presenting Niagara as a world-class, four-season destination – and fostering partnerships to align the region’s tourism narrative. TPN’s plan highlights increasing market awareness of Niagara’s offerings and enhancing collaboration among local stakeholders to attract both leisure and business travelers. (TPN is presently developing a new 3-year strategic plan for 2025–2028 to guide these efforts which will no doubt focus on the new Toronto Power Station Hotel.)

RTO3 Hamilton, Halton & Brant: Launched a new 3-Year Strategic Plan (2024–2026) to recalibrate tourism development in the “Heart of Ontario.” The plan, developed with broad stakeholder input, sets out 23 strategic actions organized under four focus areas:

- *Relationship Development & Communications:* building a strong network of engaged partners and communities.
- *Leadership & Representation:* serving as a trusted voice for regional needs and advocating on behalf of the sub-regions.
- *Ecosystem Development & Value Co-creation:* collaborating across the region to maximize tourism’s value and create compelling experiences.
- *Resource Management:* ensuring the RTO’s organizational resilience and capacity to support stakeholders.

This strategy is meant to “elevate the regional tourism economy” post-pandemic through a coordinated, inclusive approach

RTO 4 Huron, Perth, Waterloo & Wellington: Takes a “holistic and sustainable approach to tourism development”, whatever that means. **To be honest, it’s almost impossible to discern what this looks like on the ground from the available materials.**

The organization claims to champion successful and sustainable tourism economies where the visitors that a destination attracts are just as important as the communities who serve as hosts. In practice, this means RTO 4 prioritizes initiatives that yield positive impacts for both visitors and local residents, with a strong sense of destination stewardship and responsibility. Recent efforts have focused on sustainable tourism best practices – underscored by RTO4 becoming the first Ontario region to earn GreenStep’s Sustainable Tourism Destination certification and on projects that integrate tourism with community well-being for long-term success.

RTO 5 Toronto: As an urban destination, Destination Toronto concentrates on sustaining Toronto’s status as a top-tier travel destination and major event host. Current plans focus on marketing and sales programs to attract visitors and high-profile events (e.g. conventions, sports, cultural festivals), thereby driving the city’s visitor economy. Working in partnership with the City of Toronto and the hotel industry, Destination Toronto’s mandate is to promote the diversity of Toronto’s people, places, and culture to inspire travel year-round.

Key ongoing objectives include supporting local businesses through tourism, leveraging the new Municipal Accommodation Tax for funding, and aligning with the City’s broader Visitor Economy Strategic Directions (2023–2028) which aim to make Toronto one of the world’s most vibrant and inclusive destinations.

RTO 6 York, Durham & Headwaters: Central Counties Tourism (RTO6) emphasizes data-driven management and industry development to strengthen its suburban/rural destinations. In its recent business planning, RTO6 outlined goals such as providing aggregated visitor data and analysis to stakeholders, expanding industry training and learning platforms, coaching tourism operators on accessing funding, and implementing partnership programs that leverage regional strengths.

This is one of the only RTOs to make collaboration across municipalities as a primary operating principle. For example, working with Durham Region’s tourism office and others to avoid duplication and play a support role where municipal DMOs lead. RTO6’s draft 2024-25 plan also explored expanding its role in destination development for communities lacking capacity. Overall, Central Counties’ operational focus is on being a reliable partner for research, industry communication, and product development support in the York/Durham/Headwaters area.

RTO 7 Bruce Grey Simcoe: Adopted a 5-Year Destination Development Strategy (2024–2029) that takes a “balanced approach” centered on sustainable tourism growth. This strategy, titled *“Evolution – A Balanced Approach to Tourism Destination Development”*, focuses on several pillars:

- Progressive Leadership & Sustainable Development: RTO7 as a leader coordinating tourism recovery in a sustainable manner.
- Collaborative Partnerships (Municipal Accommodation Tax Engagement): Deepening collaboration with municipalities and organizations (e.g. leveraging the new hotel tax) to jointly invest in tourism development
- Workforce and Labour Force Development: Addressing workforce needs and skills to support the tourism sector’s growth.
- Product and Experience Development: Planned development of new and enhanced tourism experiences, with an emphasis on resource-based activities (parks, trails, etc.) and culture/heritage, as identified in Northern Ontario’s priority streams (for RTO7, this means focusing on BruceGreySimcoe’s strengths)
- Responsible Marketing & Promotion: Promoting the region through aligned branding (with Destination Ontario) and encouraging year-round visitation in a responsible way.
- Research & Analytics: Dedicating effort to research and learning to inform decisions.

This 5-year plan is accompanied by annual business plans. Recent operational initiatives include a new, more strategic funding application process to ensure projects align with RTO7’s business plan and regional priorities. RTO7 has also launched a Tourism Technology “Tech Compass” program, reflecting the strategic goal of operator digital enablement.

RTO8 Kawarthas Northumberland: Plan positions the Kawarthas Northumberland region as a premier destination for “soft outdoor and rural adventure” connected by its rich waterway heritage. Their vision statement aims that “by 2026, Kawarthas Northumberland communities will be recognized as one of the leading travel destinations in Ontario for experiencing soft outdoor and rural adventure connecting Canadian waterway heritage”. To achieve growth, the RTO’s mission emphasizes product development around paddling, trails, cycling, and other outdoor experiences, and targeted marketing to “Connected Explorers” and other key visitor segments identified through research. Overall, RTO8’s strategy is about balancing tourism growth with community capacity, ensuring tourism development aligns with local values and the region’s natural/cultural assets.

RTO 9 South Eastern Ontario: Newly released 2025–2028 Strategic Plan sets a “fresh” vision for the region. The vision is for tourism to be *“a sustainable driver of social, economic, and environmental prosperity for diverse partners”* in South Eastern Ontario. This implies a focus on sustainable tourism development that benefits communities and businesses across the region. Nothing unique about this.

The RTO says the strategic plan was developed through a consultative process and outlines priority areas such as product development, investment attraction, workforce development, marketing, and partnerships (in line with provincial destination management pillars).

Key commitments include supporting year-round destination development (for example, culinary and wine tourism, heritage experiences, Indigenous tourism), fostering partnerships among destinations (e.g. Kingston, Bay of Quinte, Rideau Canal corridor), and marketing initiatives to increase visits and visitor spending in a sustainable way. The plan also emphasizes inclusivity and resilience (natch) ensuring that as tourism grows post-pandemic, it does so in a way that preserves local culture and the environment.

RTO 10 Ottawa (Ottawa Tourism): Spearheaded a comprehensive Destination Stewardship Plan as its guiding strategy. Coming out of the pandemic, this 10-year collective roadmap (developed in 2022) envisions making Ottawa *“one of Canada’s most visited, vibrant and valued urban destinations”*. The plan embraces tourism as a shared community value, integrating tourism development with the city’s social, cultural, and environmental goals. Eight strategic focus areas were identified through extensive consultations. These include enhancing Ottawa’s year-round destination appeal, improving product and experience development (e.g. animation of attractions, festivals, and neighborhoods), sustainable practices (“greener, more equitable” tourism) and deepening community engagement in tourism.

The stewardship approach means Ottawa Tourism aims to *“shepherd Ottawa into a greener, more equitable society and economy”* while growing visitation. Operationally, this has translated into initiatives like the Ottawa Destination Development Fund (to support local tourism projects), community-oriented marketing (e.g. encouraging residents to explore Ottawa, not just external tourists), and measurement of tourism’s impacts on quality of life.

RTO 11 Ontario's Highlands: Claims to be dedicated to “strengthening communities in the region through responsible tourism.” Strategy centers on a “Wander Sustainably” approach, which is grounded in three core values: Inclusivity, Sustainability, and Community Alignment. Rather than a traditional standalone strategic plan, these principles are embedded in all of the RTOs programs and initiatives.

The organization’s aim is to build a collaborative tourism community and ultimately “*create the very best, most successful and vibrant tourism region in Ontario through sustainable best practices in marketing, product and destination development, investment attraction and skills development.*” This strategic direction translates into supporting tourism operators with training and grants (e.g. the Tourism Recovery & Innovation Program), promoting lesser-known rural experiences via the “Come Wander” brand (storytelling that encourages visitors to explore responsibly), and partnerships that ensure tourism benefits are spread locally.

RTO 13 Destination Northern Ontario: Outlined a 2023–2028 “Post-Pandemic Strategic Focus” to guide the region’s tourism recovery and growth. The plan’s vision sees Northern Ontario as a “*unique, distinctive, and sought-after*” destination with high-quality products and experiences that benefit the entire region. Key strategic goals include:

- Growing Northern Ontario’s Tourism Share: DNO aims to increase Northern Ontario’s share of provincial tourism receipts to 10% (up from current 7%). To do so, the strategy calls for enhancing marketing and access
- Product Development - Defend & Grow Strengths: A “Priority Streams” approach is used, focusing on resource-based experiences (angling, hunting, parks, trails), nature & adventure tourism, culture/heritage (e.g. Indigenous tourism, Francophone culture, Group of Seven heritage), touring (RV, snowmobile, boating, etc.), and gateway communities/events. The plan emphasizes defending and maintaining existing signature products where Northern Ontario excels, while also inspiring and growing new products and experiences to provide opportunities for growth. There’s also a focus on fostering excellence so that Northern Ontario’s offerings are “best in class” (referred to as “*Rise & Shine*” in quality)
- Collaborative Marketing & Distribution: Continue developing coordinated marketing initiatives that position Northern Ontario as a destination of choice. This includes leveraged, pan-northern marketing campaigns showcasing the region’s top “best-bet” experiences (e.g. fishing and hunting adventures, touring routes, nature getaways) to new and existing markets. DNO is investing in content development (through the NorthernOntario.travel platform), building a compelling photo/video library, and supporting partners with digital marketing tools. There is an emphasis on modernizing e-commerce and online booking capabilities for Northern operators as well
- Industry Communication & Workforce: Strengthening industry communications and partnerships is another strategic pillar. DNO sees its role as a leader and champion for the Northern tourism industry. The plan includes initiatives in workforce development and training (acknowledging labor shortages), and a recently developed three-year Communications Strategy (2022–25) to increase engagement within the tourism sector and awareness of DNO’s efforts
- Partnerships and Alignment: DNO says it works closely with sub-regional partners (like city DMOs and tourism associations in parts of Northern Ontario) and aligns its efforts with Destination Ontario’s marketing to maximize reach. It also champions Northern operators’ needs to government and pursues inter-regional projects (e.g. Indigenous tourism development in partnership with Indigenous Tourism Ontario)

C. Advertising Analysis

The following is a look at the marketing and advertising for each of the RTOs. It looks at four dimensions:

- Slogan/Tagline, if available, as it most likely reflects the RTO's brand promise
- Social media following
- Latest campaigns

This research was conducted online using secondary research. It pulls from the RTOs' websites, social channels, operating plans, trade pubs, etc. As such I cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information.

RTO1 – Ontario’s Southwest

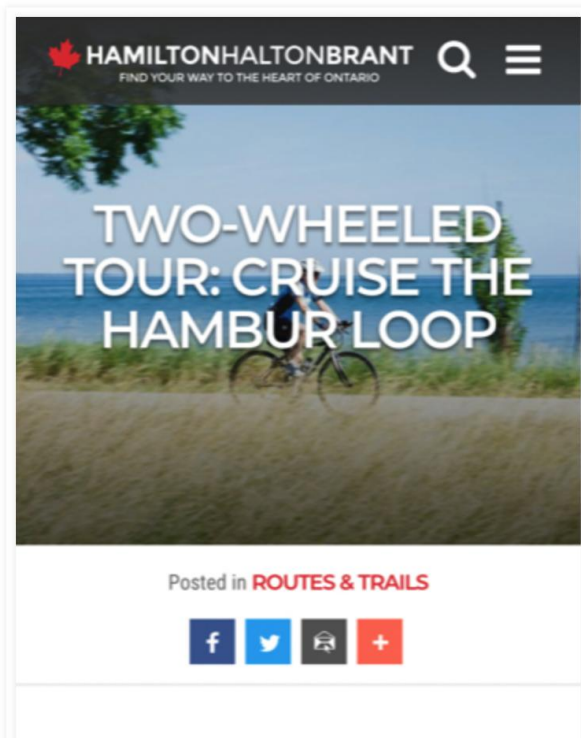
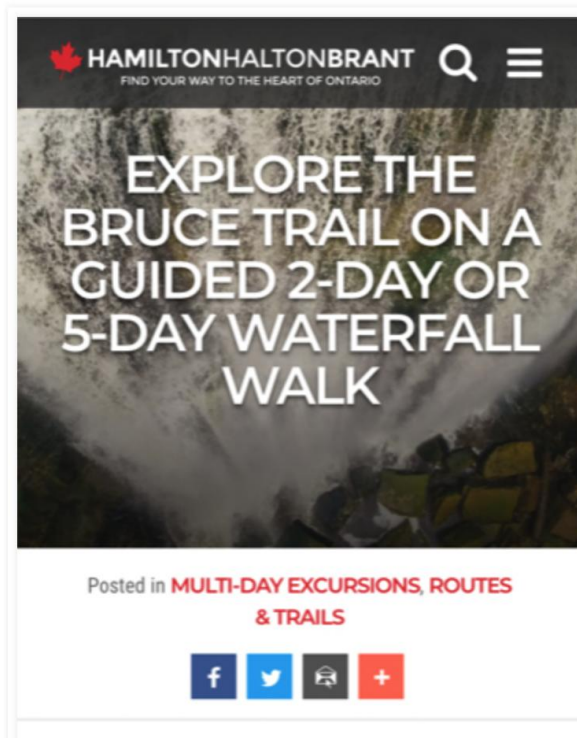
- **Slogan/Tagline:** “*Shaped by Nature.*” This tagline underpins their branding, emphasizing how the region’s identity and experiences are formed by its lakes, trails, and natural beauty
- **Social Media Followers:** Facebook, 66,000 followers ; Instagram, 19,500 followers; YouTube, 394 subscribers (inactive)
- **Content Marketing / Advertising:** Ontario’s Southwest has focused on nature-driven marketing. The “**Shaped by Nature**” theme is evident in their content, such as blog series on outdoor wellness and paddling. Content marketing seems to be a key activity. Focuses on outdoor adventure and eco-tourism, aligning with the region’s natural charms. [In 2023 they ran sponsored content in the Globe & Mail.](#)

RTO2 – Tourism Partnership of Niagara

- **Slogan/Tagline:** “*This is our Niagara... Discover Yours.*” Niagara Canada invites visitors to find their own Niagara experience, underlining that the region offers more than the falls. This messaging encourages personal discovery – from rolling vineyards to historic towns.
- **Social Media Followers:** Facebook, 113,000 likes; Instagram, 51,000 followers; YouTube, 3,200 subscribers. These channels feature the usual images of Niagara’s wineries, attractions, and events, often tagged with **#MyNiagara** to encourage user-generated content. Youtube channel has the most followers of any RTO, but no new content has been posted since last year
- **Content Marketing / Advertising:** Heavy focus on content both on their blog and on their Youtube channel. Last year they posted [a series called “My Niagara Experience” featuring Toronto-based influencers](#). Niagara Falls Tourism separately runs its own advertising [such as this](#).

RTO3 – Hamilton Halton Brant (The Heart of Ontario)

- **Slogan/Tagline:** “Find Your Way to the Heart of Ontario.” This tagline remains the consumer-facing brand message positioning Hamilton Halton Brant as Ontario’s vibrant heartland of culture and outdoors. Earlier this year RTO 3 “refreshed” [its industry brand](#) with the focus on the “3”. (Why they would want to invest in that as a brand defies comprehension.)
- **Social Media Followers:** Facebook, 52,000 likes; Instagram, 11,000 followers; YouTube channel, 80 subscribers, inactive
- **Content Marketing / Advertising:** Focus on content. One recent series featured the **Grand River** experiences – from autumn hikes on the Bruce Trail to Indigenous cultural tours – reinforcing the idea of finding *your* path in this region. They promote artisanal breweries with their [True Brew Path](#) with craft beer routes across Hamilton, Halton, and Brant providing maps and brewery spotlights.



RTO4 – Huron, Perth, Waterloo & Wellington (Regional Tourism Organization 4)

Rather than a single consumer campaign, RTO4 operates as a collaborative hub supporting local tourism offices (like Stratford, **Explore Waterloo Region**, etc.) in marketing their areas.

RTO6 – York Durham Headwaters

- **Slogan/Tagline:** *“Ontario’s Trip Destination.”* This phrase is used across Central Counties’ branding, inviting Torontonians to take a short drive north and explore. It encapsulates the region’s appeal: diverse attractions all within a convenient drive – *“Just a short drive from Toronto, York Durham Headwaters is your ultimate road trip destination”*
- **Social Media Followers:** Facebook, 30,800 likes; Instagram, 16,000 followers; Youtube 94 followers, inactive.. These channels actively share itineraries (often using the hashtag **#VisitYDH**).
- **Content Marketing / Advertising:** Recent social media efforts heavily feature **road trip itineraries** – such as fall colours tours and family-friendly weekend getaways. YDH has run thematic promotions like **“Splash into Summer”** (promoting water parks and lakes) and **“Harvest Adventures”** (farmers’ markets and fall farms). There have been collaborations with local influencers (e.g. foodie tours in Headwaters). TDH is one of the most aggressive creators of blog content with 36 pieces posted this year alone.

I could not find evidence of recent ad campaigns though I did find [co-op print ads to be run this year in the Globe & Mail](#). (Wha?)

RTO7 – BruceGreySimcoe

- **Slogan/Tagline:** *“BruceGreySimcoe... always in season!”* This slogan is used in their Instagram profile and other materials, telling visitors that no matter the time of year, there’s something exciting to do in the region. RTO 7 is the one RTO with relative balance across the seasons, no doubt thanks to Blue Mountain
- **Social Media Followers:** Facebook, 37,000 likes; Instagram 23,000 followers; Youtube, 393 subscribers. They actively use hashtags like **#BruceGreySimcoe** and encourage visitors to share their vacation photos (user photos are often re-shared as testimonials).
- **Content Marketing / Advertising:** No evidence of traditional advertising, but plenty of focus on content. BruceGreySimcoe’s content strategy includes seasonal guides. For example, their **Summer Campaign** hub listed top beaches, trails, and family attractions with an interactive map, while the **Winter Campaign** pushed a “Snow Days in BGS” video series on social media, profiling activities like snowshoeing in Simcoe forests and ice fishing on Lake Simcoe. They even have a guide for LGBTQ+. They seem to be doubling down on visual content - in fact, [they are recruiting models for photo and video](#)

[shoots across the region](#). They seem to now focus on Youtube with 9 videos published this year.

RTO 8 – Kawarthas Northumberland

- **Slogan/Tagline:** “*Perfect Weekends.*” (The region often markets itself as providing “perfect weekends” – in fact, their Instagram handle is @perfectwknds[instagram.com](#)). While not a formal tagline, **phrases like “So close to Toronto & Ottawa”** and “*Perfect Weekends in the Kawarthas Northumberland*” appear in their content, emphasizing ease of access and short-break potential. The region’s branding leans into being a “**Land of 350 Lakes**” connected by the Trent-Severn canal, inviting boating and fishing enthusiasts.
- **Social Media Followers:** Facebook, 19,000 likes; Instagram, 4,700 followers; Youtube, 372 subscribers. The Butter Tart Tour itself has its own social presence (Instagram @buttertarttour 2.5k followers)
- **Content Marketing / Advertising:** [The Butter Tart Tour is the standout content piece](#) – the website offers maps, an official “tour passport,” and bakery spotlights, and RTO8 promotes it through fun videos of taste-test road trips. It has become Ontario’s largest butter tart trail with over 50 stops. Kawarthas Northumberland’s marketing focuses on culinary and outdoor touring experiences. The flagship ongoing campaign is the “**Butter Tart Tour**,” which has its own [instagram.com](#).

Interesting to note that RTO 8 was all in on Youtube, having published almost 300 videos! The pace seems to have slowed down, with just a handful published this year.

RTO9 – South Eastern Ontario

- **Slogan/Tagline:** “*Extraordinary Everywhere You Go!*” This tagline is used on their Instagram and marketing materials, conveying that throughout South Eastern Ontario - whether Prince Edward County’s wine country, the Rideau Canal, or Gananoque’s islands - travelers will find extraordinary experiences. It ties the diverse sub-regions together under a promise of something special at every turn.

RTO 9 also invested in refreshing its industry logo. And like RTO 3, the focus was the RTO number.

- **Social Media Followers:** Facebook, 42,000 followers; Instagram, 22,000 followers; Youtube 692 followers, inactive. The region also maintains a presence on Twitter and Pinterest. They claim the hashtag **#SouthEasternOntario** has been used over 22,000 times by visitors.
- **Content Marketing / Advertising:** As with most RTOs, content marketing is the primary advertising channel. [An advertising plan for 2023-24 is available on their website](#). It is

centred on sponsored content. Almost ⅓ of their advertising \$300K budget goes to agency fees alone.

RTO 11 – Ontario’s Highlands

- **Slogan/Tagline:** “*Come Wander.*” This un compelling tagline is the heart of the brand – they say it’s both a call-to-action and a state of mind. It’s even their website URL. It suggests unstructured exploration of the Highlands’ “unique landscapes and charming communities”. All marketing materials reinforce this phrase, and have done so for at least 6 years.
- **Social Media Followers:** Facebook, 34,000 followers; Instagram, 10,000+ followers; Youtube, 496 subscribers, inactive. Ride the Highlands has its own social media, including a Youtube channel with almost 900 subscribers.
- **Content Marketing / Advertising:** *Come Wander* is a content-driven campaign that encourages travelers to explore slowly and serendipitously. It features storytelling from the perspective of “The Wanderer,” with blog posts and videos that feel like journal entries discovering hidden waterfalls, artisans, or backroad diners. OHTO says it’s “a digital-first, content marketing approach”.
- The OHTO website presents the following results for 2023-24 Locally Inspired campaign:
 - Number of Itinerary views: 796,409
 - Itinerary Downloads: 2,716
 - Referrals to Operators/outbound clicks: 34,782
 - Total impressions: 2,734,303

For their Destination Ontario fall spotlight campaign:

- 12,573,286 total Impressions
- 111,109 landings to our website comewander.ca
- 547,994 Users on [ComeWander.ca](https://comewander.ca) + 22,729 total direct referrals to the five operators featured

Recent extensions of this campaign include “**Wander Sustainably,**” adding tips for eco-friendly travel in the Highlands RidetheHighlands.ca is a standalone website with its own social media presence that, inexplicably, makes no mention of “Come Wander”. In fact, most site visitors would not make the connection to RTO 11. For more, [click here](#).

RTO 13 – Northern Ontario

- **Slogan/Tagline:** Sub-regions have their own taglines (e.g., Northeastern Ontario Tourism uses “*Unexpectedly Epic*” and Northwest Ontario’s Sunset Country uses “*Outdoor Adventure Awaits*”), but as a whole, “Discover Northern Ontario” is the unifying line.
- **Social Media Followers:** Northern Ontario’s FB pages are run by sub-regions (e.g., “Northeastern Ontario” has 8,000 followers and “Northwest Ontario”/Sunset Country over 20,000) though it is an umbrella FB page with 4K followers. Instagram – @destinationnorthernontario is a newer account with a modest following (a few thousand)
- **Campaign Content:** Destination Northern Ontario has promoted the region through both northeastern and northwestern sub-campaigns. In the northeast, the standout initiative is “[The Seven](#)”, which highlights seven iconic experiences—such as canoeing in Temagami, riding the Polar Bear Express, and hiking in Killarney. The campaign includes a video series and a dedicated microsite, serving as a kind of bucket list for the area. [Apparently the campaign is an attempt to attract younger visitors by borrowing interest from Toronto’s nickname, The 6ix.](#)

In the northwest, campaigns like “**Heart of Superior**” and “**Sunset Country Adventures**” promote destinations such as Thunder Bay and Lake Superior.

[DNO also promotes motorcycle touring.](#)

Separately, the “**Tourism Rocks**” campaign focuses on workforce development and sector pride, using storytelling from local tourism workers to attract talent and strengthen industry identity on sustainability of the industry itself.