EXPLORERS' EDGE

DIVA DIALOGUES
2SLGBTQI+ Destination Insights

November 24, 2026 · Findings and dialogue

OUR REGION

Algonquin Park

Almaguin Highlands

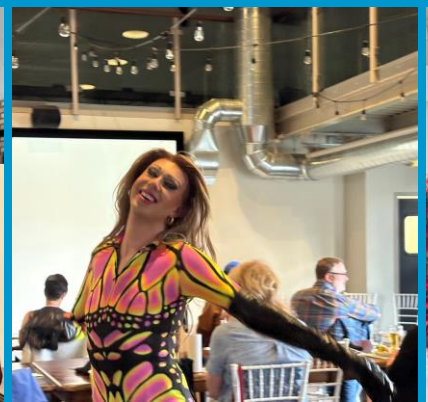
Loring-Restoule

Muskoka

Parry Sound

South Algonquin









Land Acknowledgement



We acknowledge that the region we call ‘the Great Canadian wilderness just north of Toronto’ is founded on the traditional lands and waterways of the Anishinabek, Algonquin, Mohawk and Métis peoples, and is part of the Robinson Huron (1850) and Williams (1923) Treaties territory, and the unceded territory of the Algonquins of Ontario.

We further acknowledge that as Canadians, we are all treaty people. Explorers’ Edge staff are committed to the ongoing truth and reconciliation process, including economic reconciliation through tourism development, and we will work diligently to listen, to learn, to take action, and to be respectful towards all First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

How will 2SLGBTQI+ travellers know they’re welcome in our region?

DIVA DIALOGUES · OPENING QUESTION

TONIGHT

Three lenses on one question

What travellers want, where our region stands, and what we've already shown can be done.

01

Traveller research

CRG survey of 2SLGBTQI+ travellers · May 2026

02

Destination audit

CQCC review of the region's 2SLGBTQI+ market readiness

03

Our accreditation

Rainbow Registered assessment · May 14, 2026

04

Dialogue

What we do next, together

What travellers told us

01 · CRG 2SLGBTQI+ PARTNER REPORT FOR EXPLORERS' EDGE · MAY 2026



What we know now. What we need to do differently

36%	**1. Pride is part of the visitor economy, not separate from it.** 36% identify Pride events as a reason to consider an Ontario trip. How are we recognizing that contribution in tourism planni ng?
87%	**2. Welcoming communities are a shared responsibility.** 87% value community attitudes. How do we move inclusion beyond Pride volunteers and into municipal and business priorities?
44%	**3. Rural Ontario has an opportunity beyond traditional Pride events.** 44% are interested in nature and outdoor experiences. How can existing tourism strengths connect with authentic 2SLGBTQI+ experiences?
81%	**4. Good intentions need to become measurable actions.** 81% value staff training and inclusive policies. What could regional partners help deliver consistently across communities?
Next	**5. The research should influence where resources go next.** How can these findings inform regional investment, partnerships and the next fiscal year’s priorities?

Who we heard from

CRG surveyed 2SLGBTQI+ leisure travellers across Canada, the U.S. and overseas this spring.

399

2SLGBTQI+ travellers in our results

Likely Ontario visitors aware of Muskoka, Parry Sound and Algonquin Park

211 · 118 · 70

Canada · U.S. · Overseas

U.S. drive and fly markets; overseas covers the UK, Germany and Mexico

25–64

Adults who travel for leisure

Travelled in the past two years, or planning a trip in the next two

Spring 2026

Online survey, March 27 – April 18

Median interview length of 15.8 minutes

AT A GLANCE

Five things travellers told us

From 2SLGBTQI+ travellers who know our region and are likely to visit Ontario.

01 Welcome is judged first on legal and social climate

02 Nature leads, with 2SLGBTQI+ culture close behind

03 Summer peaks, but winter and spring are open

04 Hotels lead; cottages and cabins draw steady interest

05 Accreditation is a strong driver of consideration

THE HEADLINE

90%

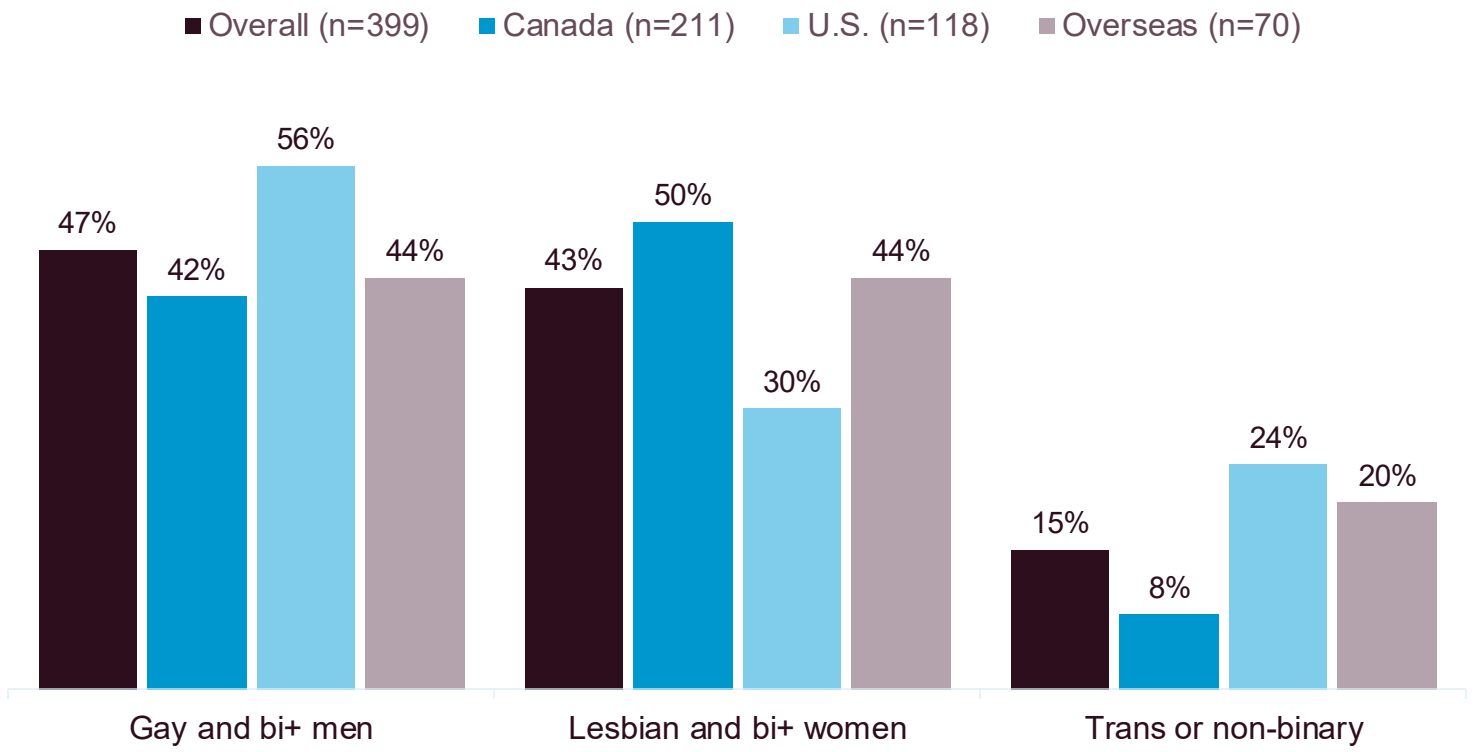
say legal protections matter when choosing a destination. Visible Pride symbols rank last of the eight signals tested (67%).

Welcome has to be real, and easy to verify.

Next: the numbers behind each finding.

The traveller mix differs by market

Identity of travellers aware of Muskoka, Parry Sound and Algonquin Park, by market.



Source: CRG, 2SLGBTQI+ Research Partner Report for Explorers' Edge (May 2026). Travellers likely to visit Ontario and aware of Muskoka, Parry Sound and Algonquin Park (n=399).

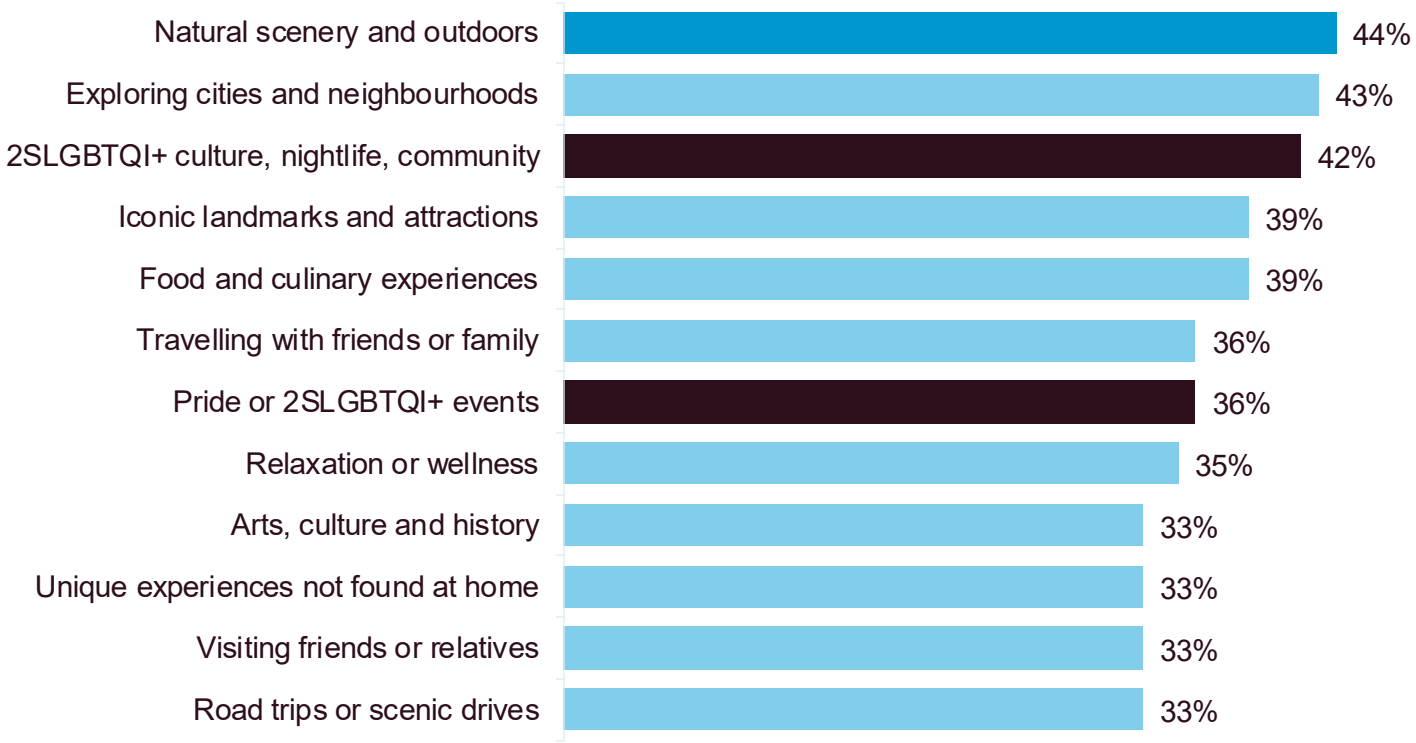
WHAT STANDS OUT

Gay and bi+ men are 56% of U.S. respondents. Lesbian and bi+ women lead in Canada (50%). Trans and non-binary travellers are 24% of the U.S. sample but 8% in Canada.

One message won't fit every market.

Nature draws them, community keeps pace

Main reasons for an overnight leisure trip in Ontario: top 12 of 21. Identity-related reasons in plum.



Source: CRG, 2SLGBTQI+ Research Partner Report for Explorers' Edge (May 2026). Travellers likely to visit Ontario and aware of Muskoka, Parry Sound and Algonquin Park (n=399).

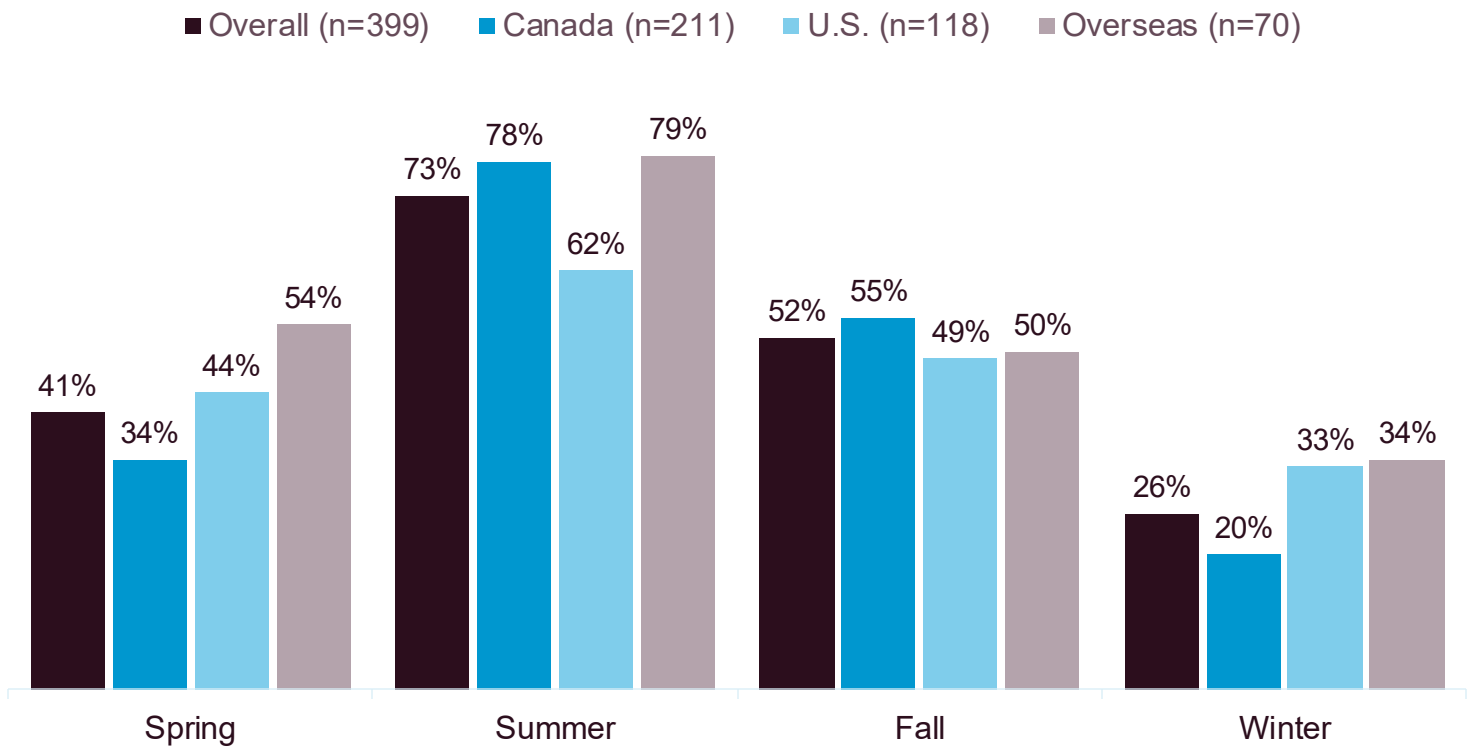
WHAT STANDS OUT

Natural scenery leads at 44%, but exploring 2SLGBTQI+ culture, nightlife and community spaces is nearly tied (42%). Pride and 2SLGBTQI+ events draw 36%.

Our outdoor strengths land best alongside community connection.

Summer leads, but other seasons are open

Months considered for an Ontario leisure trip, grouped by season and market.



Source: CRG, 2SLGBTQI+ Research Partner Report for Explorers' Edge (May 2026). Travellers likely to visit Ontario and aware of Muskoka, Parry Sound and Algonquin Park (n=399).

WHAT STANDS OUT

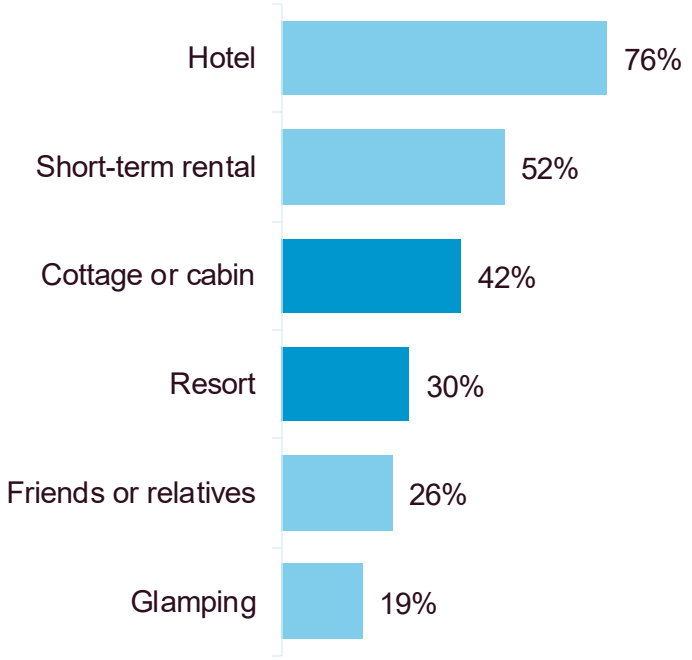
Summer is the peak everywhere (73% overall). Overseas travellers show the strongest spring interest (54%), and about one in three U.S. and overseas travellers would consider winter.

A real off-peak opportunity in international markets.

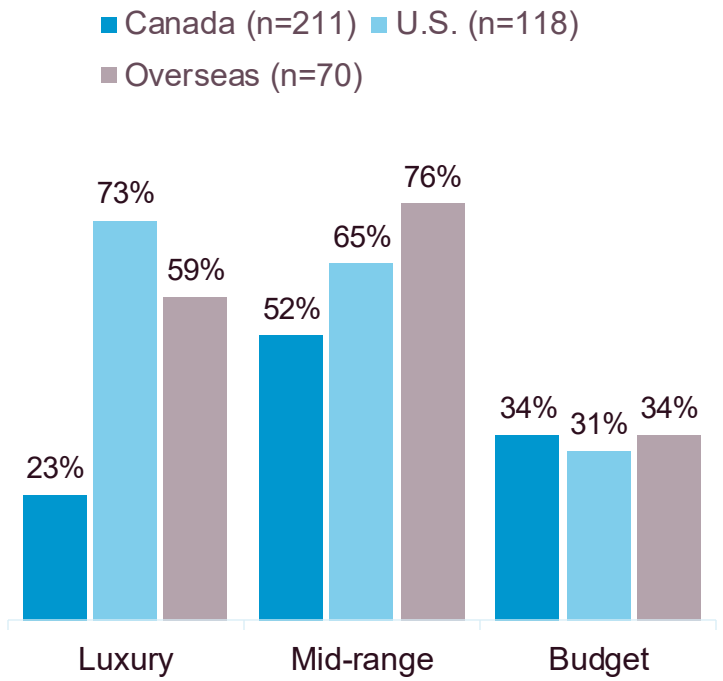
Hotels lead; cottages and cabins hold steady

Accommodation type (overall) and preferred tier, by market.

ACCOMMODATION TYPE · OVERALL



PREFERRED TIER · BY MARKET



Source: CRG, 2SLGBTQI+ Research Partner Report for Explorers' Edge (May 2026). Travellers likely to visit Ontario and aware of Muskoka, Parry Sound and Algonquin Park (n=399).

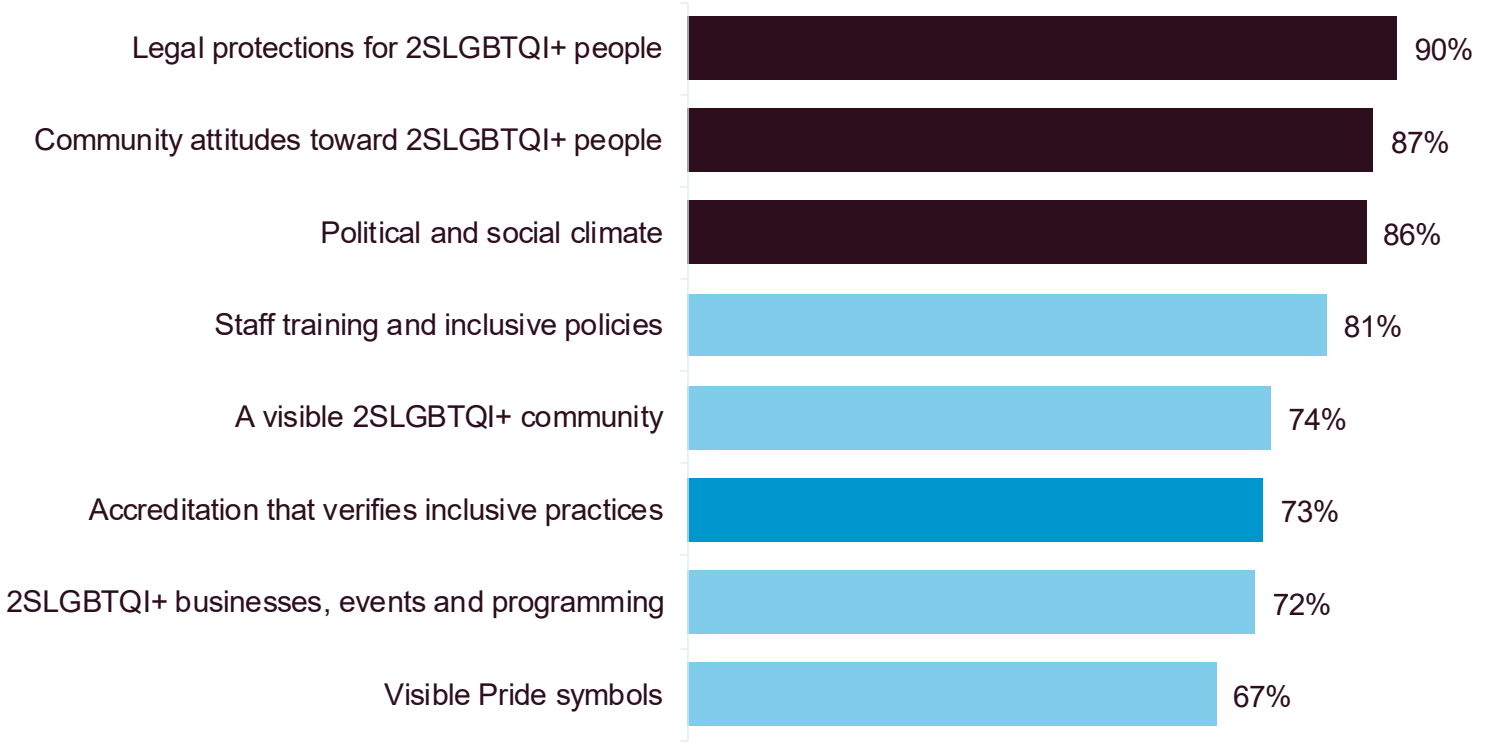
WHAT STANDS OUT

Hotels lead in every market. Cottages and cabins draw 39–47% across markets. U.S. travellers lean luxury (73%); overseas travellers lean mid-range (76%).

Rural stays are a viable product, and resorts appeal internationally (49%).

Structural signals matter most

Importance when choosing a leisure destination. Structural signals in plum; accreditation in blue.



Source: CRG, 2SLGBTQI+ Research Partner Report for Explorers' Edge (May 2026). Travellers likely to visit Ontario and aware of Muskoka, Parry Sound and Algonquin Park (n=399).

THE SURPRISE

Accreditation ranks sixth (73%), yet travellers who value it are considerably more likely to be considering Ontario. It is one of the strongest drivers of consideration.

Programs like Rainbow Registered turn welcome into proof.

Proof matters more than symbols

LEGAL PROTECTIONS

90%

rate legal protections for 2SLGBTQI+ people as important

STAFF TRAINING

81%

value staff training and inclusive policies

ACCREDITATION

73%

value programs that verify inclusive practices

PRIDE SYMBOLS

67%

value visible Pride symbols, last of eight signals

What operators control directly, such as training, policies and accreditation, still matters to roughly three in four travellers or more.

Source: CRG, 2SLGBTQI+ Research Partner Report for Explorers' Edge (May 2026). Travellers likely to visit Ontario and aware of Muskoka, Parry Sound and Algonquin Park (n=399).

FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS

Small communities. Meaningful impact

The research reinforces something important: creating welcoming communities is a shared responsibility.

01 **Your work has value beyond Pride events.**

The connections, visibility and sense of belonging you create also contribute to the strength and appeal of rural communities.

02 **You shouldn’t have to do it alone.**

Municipalities, tourism organizations and local businesses all have a role to play — and resources to contribute.

03 **The research gives us a reason to act.**

We now have evidence that inclusion, community attitudes and welcoming experiences matter to travellers. How can we use that evidence to influence regional priorities and support?

How can we better support the work you’re already doing, rather than asking you to do more?



What the destination audit found

02 · CQCC 2SLGBTQI+ DESTINATION AUDIT · FUNDED BY FEDNOR



Strong foundations to build on

CQCC found real momentum, especially in the region's larger centres.

Momentum is real.

Visibility and allyship are growing in Huntsville, Bracebridge, Gravenhurst and Parry Sound.

01 **Diva Dialogues sparking community conversation**

02 **All staff completed Rainbow Registered training**

03 **Pride events, drag nights and the Muskoka Queer Film Festival**

04 **Relationships with local leaders and grassroots groups**

05 **DEI commitments built into operational planning**

FROM THE WORKING GROUP

"If someone feels safe and welcome, they will come."

Michelle Emson, Theatre Muskoka and Muskoka Queer Film Festival

Source: CQCC, 2SLGBTQI+ Destination Audit for Explorers' Edge, funded by FedNor, DNO and participating RTOs.

Welcome isn’t yet visible everywhere

The audit’s main challenge: consistency across communities, channels and partners.

Closing the gap.

Between communities, between destinations, and between intent and action.

01 **Rural communities show fewer visible signals of inclusion**

02 **Our 2SLGBTQI+ content is hard to find online**

03 **Partner tourism websites rarely mention the community or Pride**

04 **More Two-Spirit, trans, BIPOC and younger voices needed**

05 **Some harassment and resistance still reported in smaller places**

FROM THE WORKING GROUP

“We’re all in it together, but we’re still separate.”

Autumn Smith, TimberBeast Productions

Source: CQCC, 2SLGBTQI+ Destination Audit for Explorers’ Edge, funded by FedNor, DNO and participating RTOs.

Six elements, and what to do first

CQCC's framework for a 2SLGBTQI+ tourism strategy, with the audit's 'need to do' actions.

#1
Engage the community

A working group of 10–12, with rural, Two-Spirit, trans and BIPOC voices

#2
Set values and a plan

Build a one-year action plan and a 3–5 year strategy with the working group

#3
Build partnerships

Share the findings with partners; add regional content to Destination Ontario

#4
Invest and support

Train new staff, audit forms and policies, support local Prides

#5
Offer unique experiences

Showcase three authentic experiences in the strategy's first year

#6
Market inclusively

Make 2SLGBTQI+ content searchable and invite queer media on FAM trips

Source: CQCC, 2SLGBTQI+ Destination Audit for Explorers' Edge, funded by FedNor, DNO and participating RTOs.

A roadmap, not another to-do list

Many of you helped shape this audit. Your experiences, insights and honesty are reflected throughout the report.

01

We recognize the realities.

Much of the region's Pride programming and community leadership happens because volunteers give their time, energy and resources.

02

The recommendations are extensive.

They represent a longer-term direction for the region, not an expectation that everything needs to happen at once.

03

The responsibility is shared.

Explorers' Edge, municipalities, tourism businesses and community partners all have roles to play. This work cannot rest on Pride organizations alone.

Tonight, we're sharing what we heard and what it could mean for our regional planning.

What the audit asks of partners

Partner destinations and operators are the hosts on the ground.

01 Take inclusion training, such as CQCC workshops

02 Mention the community, and your Pride, on your website

03 Connect with local Pride and 2SLGBTQI+ events

04 Choose ethical and diverse vendors and suppliers

A SAMPLE GOAL

5% of Explorers' Edge providers complete diversity and inclusion training in the first year.

The audit also suggests rising inclusion requirements for events we fund.

Source: CQCC, 2SLGBTQI+ Destination Audit for Explorers' Edge, funded by FedNor, DNO and participating RTOs.

A market that rewards a welcoming reputation

The national picture behind our regional findings, from Canada's 2SLGBTQI+ Chamber of Commerce.

$12B a year

Canada's 2SLGBTQI+ travel market, up 43% since 2014

$1,855 per trip

average spend by Canadian 2SLGBTQI+ travellers, versus $265 for the general travelling public

76%

would choose a destination or business known for a 2SLGBTQI+-friendly reputation

55%

of gay travellers visited a rural area at least once in 2019

Reputation travels by word of mouth.

Friends and family are the top sources of travel information, and safety is the first thing travellers weigh.

Source: Canada's 2SLGBTQI+ Chamber of Commerce (CGLCC, now CQCC), 2SLGBTQI+ Travel Market-Ready Seminar (2024). Figures draw on earlier studies cited in the seminar.

Market with the community, not at it

Four principles from the seminar, and an example that fits a region like ours.

01 Engage before you market
Ask local 2SLGBTQI+ people what they want, and how they want to be spoken to.

02 It's not your story to tell
Put community voices up front. Your business plays a supporting role.

03 Earn validation; don't claim it
Accreditation, reviews and community partners carry more weight than self-promotion.

04 Integrate; don't separate
Fold 2SLGBTQI+ people and stories into everyday marketing, all year.

A SMALL-COMMUNITY EXAMPLE

Whistler, B.C.

A small but active community, a local Pride champion, inclusion training for resort staff, and year-round promotion with 2SLGBTQI+ partners and media.

Size isn't the barrier. Consistency and commitment are what count.

Source: CGLCC (now CQCC), 2SLGBTQI+ Travel Market-Ready Seminar (2024).

What our accreditation confirmed

03 · RAINBOW REGISTERED ASSESSMENT · MAY 14, 2026



Explorers’ Edge met all four criteria

POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Met

Non-discrimination, anti-harassment, pronouns and gender-neutral washrooms

TRAINING

Met

All staff completed Foundation Modules 1 and 2; staff and board training policy

INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

Met

Inclusivity clause in every partner MOU; research partnerships; Diva Dialogues

CULTURE OF INCLUSIVITY

Met

Pride in the Wilderness blog, inclusive events calendar and social channels

Overall assessment: Met. The assessor said Explorers’ Edge has “set a high standard for other RTOs.”

Source: Rainbow Registered Assessment Form, Explorers’ Edge/RTO12. Assessor: Paula Dodick, May 14, 2026.

Leading by example

The assessment highlighted practices partners can borrow.

Inclusion built in, not added on.

Commitments that reach staff, the board and every funded partner.

01 **Every partner MOU includes a 2SLGBTQI+ inclusivity clause**

02 **Staff and board complete 2SLGBTQI+ training before their roles**

03 **Pronouns in introductions, email signatures and name badges**

04 **Gender-neutral washroom access is a requirement**

05 **Quiet support for regional Pride organizations**

ASSESSOR'S RECOMMENDATION

"Explorers' Edge is highly recommended to be Rainbow Registered."

Paula Dodick, Rainbow Registered assessor

Source: Rainbow Registered Assessment Form, Explorers' Edge/RTO12. Assessor: Paula Dodick, May 14, 2026.

BRINGING IT TOGETHER

Three sources, one message

Welcome has to be real, visible and found across the whole region.

Travellers

Want proof, not just symbols

90% weigh legal protections; accreditation drives consideration

The audit

Strong foundations, uneven visibility

Hubs are moving; rural areas and online content lag behind

Accreditation

We’ve shown it can be done

Explorers’ Edge met all four Rainbow Registered criteria

Next

Make welcome visible everywhere

With partners, operators and the 2SLGBTQI+ community

FOR DISCUSSION

What this could mean for our region

Ideas drawn from all three reports, for us to test together tonight.

Making welcome visible.

Turning what we've learned into steps operators and communities can take.

01 **Form a 2SLGBTQI+ community working group**

02 **Grow the number of Rainbow Registered businesses**

03 **Make our 2SLGBTQI+ content visible and searchable**

04 **Pair outdoor experiences with community and events**

05 **Market spring and winter to U.S. and overseas travellers**

QUESTION FOR TONIGHT

Which of these could your business or community act on in the next year?

Think about one step, one partner and one barrier.

OPEN DIALOGUE

Turning signals into welcome



LET'S TALK

Questions for tonight

Share what you're seeing in your business and community.

01 What surprised you most in these findings?

02 How would a 2SLGBTQI+ traveller know they're welcome with you?

03 What would help you take the next step?

04 Would you join a 2SLGBTQI+ community working group?

AS YOU DISCUSS

There are no wrong answers. Lived experience and frontline observations are exactly what we need.

Your input will shape Explorers' Edge's next steps on inclusion.

What is one step you could take this year to make welcome visible?

CLOSING PROMPT



Recognizing Kieren Day and the Bala Bay Inn

Nominated by Explorers' Edge for provincial tourism recognition through TIAO.

01

Creating spaces for belonging

Through the Bala Bay Divas performances and inclusive programming, Kieren has helped make rural Muskoka a place for 2SLGBTQI+ celebration and cultural expression.

02

Showing what inclusive tourism looks like

The Bala Bay Inn demonstrates how a local tourism business can create visibility, strengthen community connections and welcome visitors.

03

Bringing regional stories to a provincial audience

One of eight regional nominations submitted by Explorers' Edge for the 2026 Ontario Tourism Awards of Excellence.



1 of 8

Explorers' Edge nominations for the 2026 Ontario Tourism Awards of Excellence (TIAO)

SAVE THE DATE · FRIDAY, JANUARY 15, 2027

Breaking the Ice: Winter Tourism Summit

Community is the destination. Possibility is the journey.

01 Where

JW Marriott The Rosseau Muskoka Resort & Spa. Summit room rate: $259 a night for Thursday, January 14, plus taxes and fees.

02 Inclusion on the agenda

The Rainbow Connection: a 1:00 PM breakout on inclusive tourism with the Canadian Queer Chamber of Commerce (CQCC).

03 Register on Eventbrite

Early bird $100 until December 3, 2026. Regular $125 from December 4 to January 12.

explorersedge.ca/breaking-the-ice

