



Huron-Kinloss Tourism Action Plan

January 2022



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The Role of the Tourism Action Plan

The role of the 2022 Huron-Kinloss Tourism Action Plan is to provide direction to guide the future development of the tourism sector in Huron-Kinloss. It is to be used as a resource by staff when building the tourism program. The plan is made up of six main recommendations, each with a subset of actions. The Action Plan is designed to be updated each year.

The plan was developed using the following process:



SWOT of Current Tourism Tactics

The SWOT for Huron-Kinloss considers its existing tourism assets examines the factors that contribute to both current and future visitor experiences and visitation successes and challenges. The following list of internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats was created during the initial meeting with Huron-Kinloss staff and the on the ground site visit.

Ice Cream Trail

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Moves people around to different pockets of Huron-Kinloss• Keeps people in Huron-Kinloss• People love the free t-shirts• Something to do for visiting friends and family• Created a group of diehards who participate every year; it has become a family tradition• 10 years running• Niche markets such as motorcycle groups participate• Brand awareness; people know Sammy Sprinkles• Initially the program was netting \$15-20K per year• Scavenger hunts are popular• Social accounts have been established for this program<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facebook: 673 followers• Instagram: 313 followers• An activity locals can complete throughout the summer• Takes participants past beaches, golf courses, splash pads and a pool; and also includes a mini scavenger hunt for participants to do	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Struggles with increasing participation• Typically, 180-350 participants per year for a \$10k budget• Locals are not participating in the program• Can't get ice cream retailers to buy into the program, no interest• Only 5 retailers in 2021• Challenges associated with the current app being used

Opportunities

- Detailed data available regarding participants
- Data available to adjust marketing plan and target market
- Possibility to sell ice cream from lighthouse

Threats

- Retailers closing
- The return on investment is low for the amount of staff time it takes to set up, administration and tracking
- Businesses are getting tired and no longer want to be involved in the trail; they are not providing information to the wrap-up surveys anymore
- The schoolboard no longer allows for marketing directly to schools. As a result, the Ice Cream Trail map cannot be distributed in schools.

Lighthouse

Strengths

- A well-known National Historic Site
- Good relationship and signed agreement with Parks Canada
- Underwent a large renovation to the tower
- Attracts people off the highway
- Huron-Kinloss has been given permission by Parks Canada to make changes inside the buildings to make the experience better.
- Interesting history, was the first of six to be built
- Web camera at the top of the tower for people to view sunset and weather
- Famous sunsets viewable from the location
- One of Huron-Kinloss' only experiences along the shoreline
- Beach located in close proximity to lighthouse
- Sunset tours available by appointment

Weaknesses

- State of museum is tired and dated
- Limited attractions, experiences and amenities close to the site
- Trouble getting visitor stats. Rely on visitor guest book
- Parking is limited
- Limited hours of operation (closes at 5pm)
- The displays in the museum are static. There is no interactive element to the experience
- Lighthouse theme and learning opportunities are not strictly evident in the museum. There are items on display that do not match this theme.
- No food or refreshments close by
- Can't sit on grass for picnics due to contamination
- Costs municipality \$16-\$20k per year to operate

Opportunities

- Update to museum is planned
- Funding opportunities are available
- RTO7 performed a geofence report for the lighthouse, providing Huron-Kinloss target market data
- Ice cream available on site

Threats

- Operation relies on Parks Canada's agreement to operate
- Limited use opportunities because of zoning, i.e., refreshment vehicle

Back Forty Map

Strengths

- High demand for the maps, always run out
- Threads together farm gates and the Mennonite community
- On trend with local food
- Successful program operated with a \$3k budget (minimal admin work)
- Mennonites want to be on the map, which creates consistency
- Currently 36 operators are part of the map

Weaknesses

- Hard to see and measure return on investment
- Limited opportunities to have an experience
- No user-friendly digital map
- Not very visible on the website
- Last map reprint is 2019
- There are new food producers who aren't on the map

Opportunities

- Restaurants are using local ingredients – i.e. Fig
- Some operators have food experiences
- There are three seasons of fruit and vegetable production

Threats

- People do not want to be part of the initiative
- Too many visitors interfere with daily farm operations
- Farmers don't want to venture into agri-tourism
- A large percentage of businesses do not want 'tourism' – particularly Mennonite community
- Small scale produce, majority of items go to auction

Discovery Guide

Strengths

- Residents appreciate the community guide being mailed directly to them
- Discovery guide goes to all tourism information centres
- High distribution at lighthouse kiosk

Weaknesses

- Limited digital availability
- Expires as soon as it is printed
- Tourists are not picking up for tourism information purposes
- Costs \$19k to produce community guide with \$13k in ad sales
 - Ad sales may be down due to the pandemic

Opportunities

- Campgrounds are the primary location to access visitors to the area

Threats

- Visitors don't recognize the discovery guide as a tourism piece
- Not many distribution centres along the lakeshore

Digital Marketing

Strengths

- Ice Cream Trail has an Instagram and Facebook account
- Experiences available to market
- Geofence information available for target markets
- <https://visithuronkinloss.ca/>

Weaknesses

- All tourism experiences except the Ice Cream Trail are posted on the Township of Huron-Kinloss Facebook page
- No written content (experiences/stories) to promote
- Tourism website is not mobile friendly
- Lack of interactive maps

Opportunities

- Target audience uses Facebook and YouTube

Threats

- Losing possible visitors

Understanding the Huron-Kinloss Tourism Market

Using the Huron-Kinloss Geofence Project Report the following ideal target market profile was developed that will guide all tourism marketing and product development decisions.



Margaret & Keith

Age: 57	Household Income: \$114,000
Marital Status: Married/common law	Residing Communities: London, Kitchener/Waterloo, Guelph
Children: 2 (no longer live at home)	Own home/Rent: Own their own home
Occupation: Sales & service	Type of Vehicle: Pickup Truck

Digital Medial Follows/Pays Attention to: Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn

In their free time:

These individuals like being outdoors. You will find them camping, hiking, fishing, hunting and enjoying their powersports (ATV/boats/snowmobiles). They like attending craft and home shows and both indoor and outdoor events, concerts and festivals. They also enjoy playing sports such as baseball and hockey.

Media Consumption:

Listens to Top Country, watches contest shows, curling and sports

Way of life:

The target market has a strong attraction to nature. They look to recharge their spiritual batteries and enjoy the simpler, healthier, and more authentic way of life. They have deep roots in their communities and like to support small businesses. They also have values that are more traditional and conservative.

A Shift Taking Place

With the pandemic and the corresponding change in travel trends, there is a shift taking place in Huron Kinloss's tourism market. In 2020 and 2021, Huron-Kinloss saw an increase in younger families visiting the area. Some of their highlights include:

- One of the largest travel segments
- 35-54 years old, with children over the age of 10
- Jobs in retail, public administration, education and utilities
- Dual income household
- Sports are central to this segment's lifestyle. Garages filled with sports equipment – skiing, golfing, and hockey, as well as trailers and boats
- Health and fitness is important



Rural Tourism Trends

Rural tourism can be defined as: “Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially; as well as enabling the interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience”¹.

Rural tourism is gaining in popularity in recent years for the following reasons:

- People want and need open space
- Road trips and touring routes (see appendix 1) are in demand as people can control their own pace
- ‘Gravel travel’ is trendy, especially for cycling
- Rural downtowns are hip again
- People want to become connected to their food story
- There is a movement to support small, local producers and crafters
- Shoulder and harvest seasons are becoming popular as people seek out less busy times
- Rural real estate values are attractive and driving relocation interest from visitors

Investing in rural tourism development and marketing, can have a significant return on investment for Huron-Kinloss by:

- Continuing to build Huron-Kinloss community pride
- Educating visitors on Huron-Kinloss values
- Connecting the rural and shoreline communities together
- Circulating spending more evenly throughout the township
- Uncovering the hidden gems
- Giving locals and visitors a nudge to do something
- Acting as a core trip motivator driving visitation
- Increasing length of stay and spending

¹ An overview of the new trends in rural tourism. 2016

Recommendations

1. Leverage Secrets of the Back Forty as the core tourism marketing and experience program of Huron-Kinloss.

The Secrets of the Back Forty was developed as part of the Huron-Kinloss Business Recruitment Strategy and was designed to tell the unique food story and to motivate people to explore the interior and agricultural assets of Huron-Kinloss. This was activated by compiling the assets onto a simple listings-based map, profiling farm gates, Mennonite farms, producers and manufacturers of a wide array of rural products. There is a tremendous opportunity to expand this program by beginning to animate the rural experience even more, ultimately providing visitors with memorable opportunities. The name is catchy and creative, and can easily become the campaign theme to promote Huron-Kinloss as a destination.

ACTIONS
Invest in the development of new rural tourism experiences. This can include immersive on the farm learning, make your own, behind the scenes tours, lectures or courses, long table rural dinners, and animation at the various locations.
Reposition “Family-Grown Huron-Kinloss” to “Back Forty Grown Huron-Kinloss” to more closely align with the Back Forty positioning.
Continue to produce the Secrets of the Back Forty Map, adding other layers like the gravel cycling route, Top 10 Must Experience list etc.
Develop a curated Back Forty Farm Basket program that both residents and cottagers can enjoy.
Develop a Back Forty gravel cycling route.
Create an annual Back Forty Top 10 Must Do experience list designed for visitors, especially campers. It can be showcased on the map and website.
Implement an identification program for all participating operators so it is easier for visitors to find them.
Work with all participants to create/identify an Instagrammable moment at each location and leverage the #backforty hashtag to curate content.
Develop itineraries based on different interests: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gather & Graze – Gather items to build your perfect charcuterie board• Backyard BBQ – A guide to find all your food items necessary for the ultimate BBQ

ACTIONS

- Beach Picnic Bounty – Fill your basket with items to enjoy on a shoreline picnic
- Fruits and Vegetable Foray – The ultimate guide to what is in season

Create the Secrets of the Back Forty microsite that houses all content such as: listings, maps, top 10, itineraries, routes, experiences, attractions, stories, video, and “what’s in season”.

Rebrand the Ice Cream Trail social accounts to Secrets of the Back Forty as the official tourism channels.

Develop a blog within the microsite to host all of the Back Forty stories, ultimately linking to producers, routes, itineraries, etc.

Create an annual social media content calendar in order to guide the creation and scheduling of social media content and blogs.

Use influencers to help tell the stories by inviting them to Huron-Kinloss to experience the various developed itineraries.



2. Sunset the Ice Cream Trail.

The Ice Cream Trail had a successful 10-year run but has seen participation decrease and remain low and relatively flat for the past several seasons. It served its purpose to drive visitation and awareness to the hidden gems throughout the municipality; however, it now is time to reallocate these resources to the Secrets of the Back Forty campaign.



ACTIONS

Cease operation of the Ice Cream Trail.

Rebrand the social accounts to become Secrets of the Back Forty.

Update and gain permission from Ice Cream Trail participant database to receive quarterly Back Forty information.

Move Ice Cream Trail participants to the Secrets of the Back Forty Map.

3. Animate the Point Clark Lighthouse to create a must visit Ontario experience.

The Point Clark Lighthouse attracts approximately 3500-5000 paid visits per year (pre-COVID). It is a well-known National Historic Site as John Brown's first Imperial Tower on the Great Lakes. The lighthouse is a significant draw to the shoreline, creating a community hub when combined with the beach, the marina, boat launch, and playground. During peak times however, this destination suffers from over-crowding resulting in limited parking. The municipality can continue to leverage its popularity and create even more memorable moments during non-peak times by further animating the space.

ACTIONS

Develop an on-lighthouse projection show to be viewed just after sunset telling the story of the Point Clark Lighthouse and the marine heritage along the Bruce Coast. Make the show a weekly/bi-weekly community event that features an ice cream truck onsite.

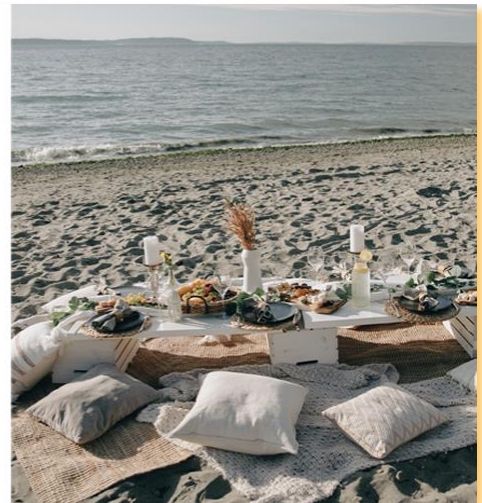
Source or develop an online booking system for lighthouse tours.

Offer (when the pandemic allows) premium sunset tours allowing guests to watch the sunset from atop of the tower.

Continue to work with the exhibit designer to better tell the marine heritage story in the Keepers Quarters.

In line with the Back Forty positioning, create a signature long table dining event in the parking lot, featuring local chefs and Huron-Kinloss food producers.

Work with a third party to offer curated luxury VIP Lighthouse Picnics that feature local Huron-Kinloss food.



4. Continue to invest in the Ripley and Lucknow downtown experience.

Considerable investment has already been made in the downtowns through the alignment with the Spruce the Bruce program and other grant programs. Branding, façade improvement, signage and wayfinding, and animation are all aligning to create visitor friendly spaces and environments that encourage commerce. Rural downtowns are also becoming hip again. Visitors want to support local, engage with merchants and learn the story behind the products being offered. Both Ripley and Lucknow are 'supply' towns, especially for those seasonal residents on their way to the shoreline.

ACTIONS

Create an annual downtown animation fund that the business community/BIA/chamber can access to enhance the visitor experience. Animation examples include:

ACTIONS

- Music on the street with local musicians (combine with Music in the Fields event)
- Curious Cottager – scavenger hunt (targeting cottagers)
- Curious Camper – scavenger hunt (targeting campers)
- Continued mural/art experience (butterflies)
- Add augmented reality to the historical walking tour

Continue to invest in façade improvement projects through the Community Improvement Plan.

Continue to promote working remote – rent an office for a day leveraging the HUB.

Offer pop up shops for local artisans/makers to showcase their items for a few months.



5. Continue to invest in and develop signature festivals and events.

Events can be the backbone for rural communities, bringing both locals and visitors together to experience the true essence of community. They generate spending and provide fundraising opportunities. The target audience for Huron-Kinloss is attracted to festivals and events.

ACTIONS

Continue to provide in-kind support to Music in the Fields.

Develop a signature long table dining event involving the Point Clark Lighthouse.

Develop a weekly/bi-weekly projection show at the Point Clark Lighthouse.

Develop a signature gravel cycling event – Back Forty Gravel Road Ramble.

6. Continue to produce the Huron-Kinloss Discovery Guide.

The Discovery Guide has a proven track record and is appreciated by local residents. It is a tool to educate and inform residents about the products and services offered by the municipality and its businesses. It generates revenue and has minimal budgetary impact.

ACTIONS

Brand the guide to become the Huron-Kinloss - Secrets of the Back Forty Community Guide

Insert the Secrets of the Back Forty map into the guide when distributing.

Align the content to be reflective of telling the Secrets of the Back Forty story.

Provide a digital format of the guide on the Secrets of the Back Forty microsite and cross promote the microsite within the guide as a place to get current information and enriched Back Forty content.

Summary

Huron Kinloss continues to leverage its unique positioning as both a rural and Lake Huron shoreline destination. The two main communities of Ripley and Lucknow serve as supply towns for locals and visitors, while there is an explosive growth of makers and growers along the rural roads. Rural is hip right now, as urbanites question their city existence and are attracted to a more relaxed lifestyle that thrives on open space. Visitors are curious and are attracted to learning more about their food story and go out of their way to support local. This action plan will help shape the tourism landscape in Huron Kinloss to take advantage of these new opportunities.

Appendix 1 - Rural Touring Routes

Touring routes are an important tool in the development of rural tourism. They give visitors a sense of purpose and accomplishment by providing ready-made trip plans that are easy to execute thus taking the guess work out of trip planning. Huron Kinloss has had success with rural touring routes in the past, and this plan will leverage that success. Below are the Top 10 Key Ingredients of a Rural Touring Route.

1.1. Must be more than just dots on a map

1.2. Give people something to do at each location

1.3. Gamify it

1.4. Incentivize it

1.5. Provide education or hands on learning opportunities

1.6. Create ways to interact with the locals

1.7. Create opportunities to spend money

1.8. Make it long enough to encourage overnight stays

1.9. Create ways for visitors to share and tell their stories

1.10. Give visitors a reason to come back

Appendix 2 – Resources/Inspiration

EXPERIENCES	RESOURCES/INSPIRATION
Lighthouse Picnics	Ferryland Lighthouse Picnics Sundaze Sauble Beach Picnics Sincerely, K&J Luxury Picnics
Lighthouse Projection Companies	Parliament Building Shows - TKNL Production Company Western University Projection – Exar Studios Srushti IMX
Gravel Cycling	BT (Butter Tart) 700 Gravel Cycling Event Ontario Gravel Routes – RideGravel.ca Reggie Ramble Harvest Ride
Long Table Dinners	Hudson Bay Company Heritage Dinner Edible Vancouver Araxi Long Table Dinner
Downtown Animation	Stratford Downtown Animation Project Elora Downtown Animation Project
Historical Walking Tour Augmented Reality	St. Thomas – Exar Studios Streetsville, Mississauga Augmented Reality Historical Walking Tour – ImagineAR