

SEA-TO-SKY CORRIDOR

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

HIGHLIGHTS



DESTINATION
BRITISH COLUMBIA

THANK YOU

The Sea-to-Sky Corridor Destination Development Strategy is the outcome of a nine-month, iterative process of gathering, synthesizing, and validating information with tourism partners about the status and future direction of tourism in the Sea-to-Sky Corridor planning area.

We thank the Indigenous communities and entrepreneurs on whose traditional territories we travelled and gathered for our community meetings including the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Tseil-Waututh, Lílwat, and St'át'imc Indigenous Communities.

Thank you to our tourism partners who participated in the process by attending community meetings, participating in surveys and interviews, engaging in follow-up conversations, and forwarding relevant documents and insights. Special thanks to the members of the Working Group as well as the facilitator of the destination development process.

WHAT'S INSIDE

1. INTRODUCTION
2. REALIZING THE POTENTIAL
3. AT A GLANCE
4. GEARING UP

1 INTRODUCTION

WHY A STRATEGY?

The Sea-to-Sky Corridor Destination Development Strategy was developed to enhance the competitiveness of the Sea-to-Sky Corridor planning area over the next 10 years and beyond. The strategy was developed as part of Destination BC's Destination Development Program to support and guide the long-term growth of tourism in British Columbia. This document presents some of the key highlights of the Sea-to-Sky Corridor strategy.

WHO IS IT FOR?

The Sea-to-Sky Corridor Destination Development Strategy is a guide for tourism partners as they work collaboratively to grow the visitor economy. The strategy will be reviewed and updated to reflect changing tourism objectives, priorities, and market conditions. Results will be tracked and learning outcomes will inform future implementation activities thereby optimizing their effectiveness in increasing economic, social, and cultural benefits for the entire Sea-to-Sky Corridor planning area.

WHERE IS IT FOR?

The Sea-to-Sky Corridor planning area encompasses all of the North Shore of Metro Vancouver Regional District and the Squamish-Lillooet Regional District (SLRD). This estimated 260-kilometre long area includes North Vancouver, along Highway 1 and Burrard Inlet

through West Vancouver to Horseshoe Bay, and then north along Highway 99 where the route meanders along the scenic Howe Sound coastline to Squamish. The route continues inland through the Coastal Mountain Range to Whistler, Pemberton, and Lillooet. The Sea-to-Sky Corridor includes all communities and rural areas in between North Vancouver and Lillooet, including Bowen Island and the Bridge River Valley, both located north of Pemberton.

WHERE DOES IT FIT?

The Sea-to-Sky Corridor is one of 20 planning areas across BC for which destination development strategies are being created. Each planning area represents a logical destination for visitors in and around the province. As planning areas span across multiple jurisdictions, the importance of adopting an integrated approach with a shared vision and coordinated investment is critical.

The Sea-to-Sky Corridor Destination Development Strategy is one of six planning area strategies being prepared for the Vancouver, Coast & Mountains tourism region. The other five are: Metro Vancouver, Sunshine Coast, Fraser Valley, Gold Rush Trail, and Highway 3 Corridor. In time, informed by the outcomes of all relevant planning area destination development strategies, six regional strategies will be developed. These will, in turn, inform the creation of a provincial strategy thereby ensuring a truly integrated and cohesive combination of bottom-up and top-down destination planning.

A KEY IMPERATIVE

The recommendations contained within the Sea-to-Sky Corridor Destination Development Strategy form the foundation for additional focused and aligned discussions regarding implementation. It will be important to ensure that the strategy becomes embedded in local, regional, provincial, and federal decision making processes. It is only by working collaboratively in an integrated way, with a shared agenda that the full potential of the Sea-to-Sky Corridor planning area will be realized.

AT A GLANCE

In the information that follows, the distinctiveness of the destination is summarized and its vision for tourism introduced. While acknowledging the challenges the sector faces, its potential for growth is set out through key opportunities and experience development potential.

A consideration of each development priority and associated actions then follows. While further detail on each of these elements is available in the full strategy, they are brought together "At A Glance" to demonstrate the scope of the integrated nature of the approach that is being taken.

2 REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

A DISTINCTIVE DESTINATION

Stretching from the North Shore of Vancouver along the east side of Howe Sound, before turning northwards to Squamish, Whistler and Pemberton and beyond to Lillooet, the Sea-to-Sky Corridor has it all. It's a place where downtown streets give way to leafy green spaces; where a coastal landscape of deep fjords and sea cliffs rise above turquoise waters and are fed by waterfalls, lakes, and rivers.

Hiking trails reach deep into alpine forests, glaciers beckon, and snow-capped peaks stand guard. The ecosystems in the area provide habitat for a variety of fish and wildlife, including species of national and provincial significance.

The Sea-to-Sky Highway (Highway 99, which gives the planning area its name) twists and turns through a destination which is home to many communities, including a rich diversity of First Nations. With its beautiful scenery, the Sea-to-Sky Corridor planning area provides the backdrop for a variety of regionally significant and world-class recreational activities in an outdoor setting. Primarily due to its proximity to the Lower Mainland, the Resort Municipality of Whistler's high global profile as a visitor destination, and the destination's growing variety of visitor experiences, tourism makes an important contribution to the regional economy.

Traditional major attractions for the area include:

Grouse Mountain, Deep Cove/Baden Powell Trail, Capilano Suspension Bridge, Bowen Island, Whistler Blackcomb, hiking and mountain biking trails, and the Sea-to-Sky Gondola. Multiple BC Parks, hot springs, and an abundance of additional festivals, events, and experiences also exist in the area. All of these have potential to further increase visitor interest in travelling along the Sea-to-Sky Corridor.

While strong tourism growth is felt within communities located in the southern parts of the Sea-to-Sky Corridor, it is generally acknowledged that northern communities could benefit from additional economic development.

A SHARED VISION

The vision for tourism development in the next 10 years and beyond reflects the distinctiveness of the destination and the ambition of its communities:



“VIBRANT, DIVERSE, AND AUTHENTIC, THE SEA-TO-SKY CORRIDOR PAIRS A

YEAR-ROUND SUSTAINABLE AND PROSPEROUS TOURISM MANAGEMENT MODEL WITH BEING THE MOST SOUGHT-AFTER DESTINATION FOR WORLD CLASS NATURE-BASED OUTDOOR RECREATION AND THRIVING CULTURAL EXPERIENCES.”

2

REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

The planning area faces a number of challenges, including the lack of transportation options and congestion; year-round staff constraints; a decline in shoulder and off-season visitation; aging infrastructure, and a lack of visitor amenities, and visitor-ready experiences.

However, key opportunities include:

- The growth at Vancouver International Airport
- Connected visitors and technology use
- Arts, culture, and heritage tourism, including festivals and events
- Growing demand for experiences: culinary, road cycling, health, wellness, and retreats
- Indigenous cultural tourism development
- Lower Canadian dollar to attract the US market

EXPERIENCE POTENTIAL

The current and future experiences that will motivate travel and differentiate the destination with a compelling, sustainable visitor experience include:

- Outdoor Adventure and Recreation — an abundance of outdoor adventure and recreation activities for all seasons, including ski resorts, snowshoeing, outdoor hockey, and cross-country skiing, hiking trails, bike parks, mountain biking, rafting, camping, road cycling, fishing, kayaking, and horseback riding.
- Festivals and Events — including large scale outdoor recreation and sporting events with significant gravitational pull to drive the tourism economy. This is in addition to year-round arts, festivals, and events that activate the communities, add colour to the destination, and attract visitors from around the world.
- Indigenous Cultural Tourism — a small, but rapidly growing segment that tends to attract an international visitor who spends more per trip than other visitors. Significant opportunity exists to enhance the cultural product and experience offerings and participate more fully in this growing segment. There is interest to support Indigenous experiences as part of a destination stay.
- Culture — opportunities exist to diversify the product base and support year-round visitation with both existing and new cultural experiences. Established public art programs provide opportunities to integrate storytelling throughout the planning area.
- Culinary Experiences — agricultural experiences, local foods, and culinary offerings that are connected to the land (e.g., farm-to-table, culinary events, etc.).
- Touring — the Sea-to-Sky Corridor is part of the Coast Mountain Circle Route. Self-guided touring provides an ideal way to move around from place to place, experiencing various parts of the destination.
- Marine-based — there are opportunities to draw upon the area's oceanfront and coastal communities. A rich Indigenous culture and a history of marine-based tourism provide experiences that present an alternative to highway transportation thereby lessening the pressures on the land. Existing efforts to secure UNESCO status for the Howe Sound Biosphere could be leveraged.
- Education and learning — educational opportunities have been identified as experience enhancers, to be woven into the offerings of all other motivating experiences (e.g., culinary schools, outdoor education, and Indigenous cultural understanding).
- Meetings and Conventions — the Sea-to-Sky Corridor offers 35 meeting and convention facilities with over 190,000 square feet in space combined. The Whistler Conference Centre is the largest facility and generates more than 80,000 room nights annually.
- Health and Wellness — the development of new health and wellness product experiences should tie into and support the abundance of nature-based experiences within the Sea-to-Sky Corridor.
- Attractions and Activities — the Sea-to-Sky Corridor is home to some of BC's most popular and iconic attractions and activities, including: Grouse Mountain, Capilano Suspension Bridge, Cypress Mountain, Sea to Sky Gondola, Britannia Mine Museum, West Coast Railway Heritage Park, and the PEAK 2 PEAK Gondola in Whistler.

3

AT A GLANCE

VISION STATEMENT Vibrant, diverse, and authentic, the Sea-to-Sky Corridor pairs a year-round sustainable and prosperous tourism management model with being the most sought-after destination for world class nature-based outdoor recreation. and thriving cultural experiences.

THEME 1	LEADING THE WAY: STEWARDSHIP AND SOCIAL COMMITMENT				
<p>ADOPT SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES</p> <p>Establish a Sustainable Tourism Council and measurable sustainability goals. Work with tourism businesses and municipalities to incorporate sustainability best practices into their infrastructure and operations.</p>	<p>BUILD RESILIENCE</p> <p>Develop a Sea-to-Sky Corridor climate change resiliency plan specific to tourism assets and visitor needs. Encourage tourism businesses to prepare their business-specific climate change resiliency plans.</p>	<p>BE PREPARED</p> <p>Work with go2HR and Emergency Management BC to encourage tourism businesses to prepare their business-specific emergency plans. Ensure visitor needs are considered and their safety and care is prioritized in times of emergency.</p>	<p>SPREAD THE WORD</p> <p>Develop a Sea-to-Sky Corridor welcome, safety, and visitor education program. Encourage tourism businesses and staff to incorporate visitor education within their operations and add additional interpretation signage to promote visitor safety and awareness of cultural, historical, ecosystem, and environmental considerations along the Sea-to-Sky Corridor.</p>	<p>SUPPORT CERTIFICATION</p> <p>Support in principle the efforts to achieve UNESCO Biosphere certification for Howe Sound and ensure key learnings from the implementation of such a designation are applied to other waterways in the Sea-to-Sky Corridor, as well as to other geographic areas as relevant.</p>	
THEME 2	A SUSTAINABLE APPROACH: PROACTIVE VISITOR GROWTH MANAGEMENT				
<p>IMPROVE EXPERIENCE</p> <p>Apply learnings from the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNR) Visitor Use Management Framework throughout the planning area. Develop an understanding of the capacity of the resource base to withstand change, and improve the situation for visitors and residents in areas experiencing increasing visitation.</p>	<p>TAKE RESPONSIBILITY</p> <p>Within the context of a Visitor Dispersion action plan, work with all Sea-to-Sky Corridor planning area partners to develop and abide by a policy of educational marketing, in a way that leads to responsible tourism.</p>		<p>PROMOTE WISE LAND USE</p> <p>Engage operators, recreation users, mountain bikers, accommodation providers, and Indigenous communities and entrepreneurs in promoting understanding, streamlining approval processes, protecting the environment, and promoting sustainable use. Safeguard wild places and work with FLNR on the Bridge River Valley land use project.</p>		
THEME 3	DEEPLY ROOTED: INDIGENOUS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT				
<p>UNDERSTAND ASPIRATIONS</p> <p>Indigenous Tourism Association British Columbia (ITBC) to work with Indigenous communities and entrepreneurs to gain and articulate a robust understanding of the Indigenous tourism aspirations throughout the Sea-to-Sky Corridor.</p>	<p>FOSTER RECOGNITION</p> <p>Ensure genuine and appropriate recognition is afforded Indigenous communities when working together within the tourism industry and when communicating with visitors. Work with ITBC to explore representation models and secure funding to support the Vancouver, Coast & Mountains region specific to increasing Indigenous tourism development, relations, and partnerships in tourism.</p>	<p>RESOURCE & EQUIP</p> <p>Leverage relevant, available, and affordable skills training programs that support mentoring for Indigenous Peoples. Execute programs to improve customer service skills levels through First Host.</p>	<p>PROFILE AUTHENTIC VOICES</p> <p>Extend cultural journey viewpoints and signage that uses Indigenous language in the entire Sea-to-Sky Corridor. Leverage the province's language training programs and explore opportunities to connect Indigenous storytelling of sacred places and people.</p>	<p>NURTURE CULTURAL EXPRESSION</p> <p>In developing and resourcing new Indigenous tourism products throughout the Sea-to-Sky Corridor, focus on their potential to become visitor and market ready. Work with Indigenous communities and entrepreneurs to add new guided tours and connect the breadth of Indigenous experiences to other experiences in the planning area.</p>	

3

AT A GLANCE

THEME 4

COLLABORATE TO INNOVATE: NEW PRODUCTS AND IMPROVED TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

DEEPEN THE EXPERIENCE

Foster regional collaboration around thematic product development and experience enhancements, and participate in Destination BC's Remarkable Experiences workshop. Develop a Sea-to-Sky Tourism Acceleration Fund to support small-scale experience development.

SPREAD THE BENEFITS

Implement the Sea to Sky Corridor Recreation Trail Strategy and set goals for maintenance. Identify opportunities to ease the pressure on the more popular sites by promoting areas with the capacity to accommodate visitor demand. Develop and implement a master trails plan with all communities involved for a Sea-to-Sky Corridor approach.

CURATE & CELEBRATE

Complete a planning area inventory of festivals and events to identify gaps and complementary opportunities. Establish a Sea-to-Sky Corridor Festival and Event Coordination Committee. Coordinate, curate, and program a calendar of events that showcases the unique and diverse traditions of the destination.

CLOSE TO NATURE

Develop and implement a master trail plan, and create a string of nature appreciation and nature-based learning opportunities throughout the Sea-to-Sky Corridor. Strategically augment the supply of campsites/campgrounds, and integrate nature-based wayfinding throughout the planning area. Develop a hot springs tourism development and management strategy.

HERITAGE REVEALED

In building the Sea-to-Sky Corridor as a cultural destination, work with relevant partners to identify the known and hidden places of historic interest with potential to create unique experiences that match visitor interests. Support Indigenous communities to develop and showcase cultural sites.

CREATE FLAVOUR TRAILS

Work together to develop a specific palette of flavours for each community and use this themed approach to develop a linked culinary route throughout the destination. Encourage the development of diverse farm-to-table experiences, culinary schools, workshops, cooking classes, and food experiences.

THE WATER'S EDGE

In dispersing visitors from land-based experiences, offer more choice by developing easily accessible oceanfront and coastal travel experiences. Fully implement the Sea to Sky Marine Trail, and, in revitalizing and connecting waterfronts, ensure access (viewpoints, parking, signage, and learning opportunities) are factored in to the plan.

GO WITH THE FLOW

Encourage the development of new health and wellness product experiences that tie into the nature-based experiences. Explore the business proposition to develop a wellness centre and/or retreat.

THEME 5

SPIRIT OF PLACE: COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND PERSONALITY BUILDING

STORYTELLING

Within the context of articulating a cohesive narrative for the destination, work with local governments to leverage programs to enhance cultural placemaking. Harness the storytelling power of public art programs and ensure that the tourism benefits of cultural building are reflected in community plans and arts and cultural strategies.

FIRST & LASTING IMPRESSIONS

Within the context of developing a Sea-to-Sky Corridor beautification program, ensure that the visual quality of travelling routes and access points are enhanced.

3

AT A GLANCE

THEME 6	FIT FOR PURPOSE: INFRASTRUCTURE AND SHARED TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS			
	<p>CRITICAL CONNECTIONS</p> <p>Continue to work with transportation partners and governing authorities to make transformative enhancements to the highway, ferry, and cycling transportation systems to enable visitors and tourism staff to access tourism experiences.</p>	<p>YEAR-ROUND CONNECTIONS</p> <p>Work with the provincial government to improve transportation access and management to the Bridge River Valley (Hurley and Highway 40). Develop the 5 Nations Highway as a year-round touring route, offering visitors and residents a viable travel alternative and residents an emergency exit route.</p>	<p>ON TRACK</p> <p>Work with CN Rail on a feasibility study to determine economic options to start up the passenger train again, including a business plan to ensure tourism experiences and visitor amenities will motivate demand for the train once the service is activated.</p>	
	<p>GREATER CHOICE</p> <p>Encourage private investment in transportation experiences and alternatives to personal vehicle travel. Assess the feasibility of adding water-based transportation throughout Howe Sound. Encourage shuttle services throughout the corridor, and facilitate ride sharing.</p>	<p>MEET & GREET</p> <p>Develop new, and expand existing, meeting and convention facilities, including the expansion of the Whistler Conference Centre and a new oceanfront convention centre at Squamish. Incorporate meeting facilities as part of new hotel development in North Vancouver and West Vancouver, as well as the future Cypress Village development.</p>	<p>COMPELLING STAYS</p> <p>Identify areas for new accommodations, including: Squamish, North Vancouver, West Vancouver, Pemberton, Lillooet, and Bridge River Valley. Ensure that the type of accommodation matches the growth aspirations of each community, encourages the dispersion of visitors, and offers a compelling experience.</p>	
THEME 7	MOVING FORWARD: ATTRACTING TALENT AND WORKFORCE SUSTAINABILITY			
	<p>FINDING A HOME</p> <p>Work with the government of BC, SLRD and municipalities to advocate for affordable housing in the Sea-to-Sky Corridor for tourism employees and entrepreneurs. This would include seasonal (smaller accommodations) and middle management (family homes) positions.</p>	<p>FAIR'S FAIR</p> <p>Create a business culture that aspires to provide a living wage for tourism staff. Work with Living Wage Canada and go2HR to develop educational tools and messaging for this initiative. Learn from other regional tourism areas that have implemented living wage initiatives.</p>	<p>INSPIRE, ENTHUSE, & EQUIP</p> <p>Enhance knowledge building programs that inspire and educate frontline staff on experience delivery and product knowledge. Extend the Tourism Challenge program throughout the Sea-to-Sky Corridor for direct experience training with attractions and activities.</p>	<p>RECRUIT & RETAIN</p> <p>Leverage employee attraction/recruitment work being implemented in Squamish and Whistler to apply to the rest of the Sea-to-Sky Corridor.</p>
THEME 8	COMMON AGENDA: PARTNERSHIPS AND WORKING TOGETHER			
	<p>COLLABORATIVE MANAGEMENT</p> <p>Vancouver, Coast & Mountains team to work together with key partners along the Sea-to-Sky Corridor to help champion destination development initiatives going forward, bring partners together regularly, conduct reporting, provide support for updating action plans, and priorities in future.</p>	<p>INSIGHTS</p> <p>Implement Sea-to-Sky Corridor research and data gathering to develop baselines, identify goals, and prioritize opportunities to improve. Leverage Visitor Services channels for intelligence gathering.</p>		<p>RESPONSIVE RESOURCING</p> <p>Work with the government of BC to increase funds and human resources to better manage and maintain government owned tourism amenities and assets (e.g., trails, garbage services, clean-up, outhouses on Crown land, parking, etc.). Explore the scope to expand provincial funding programs to new areas within the Sea-to-Sky Corridor.</p>

4 GEARING UP

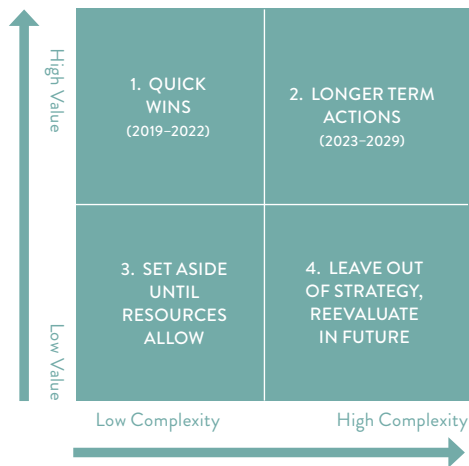
SUCCESS NETWORKS

This strategy is intended to inform actions for the future, which over time may be embedded in local, regional, and provincial decision-making. The result will be an integrated system of priorities to achieve better development decisions, drive greater tourism revenues, and realize benefits for businesses and communities in the Sea-to-Sky Corridor planning area. All of this will contribute to a thriving, vibrant, and growing economy.

Joint strategy ownership amongst all planning area tourism partners is a critical component of this program's success. The strategy identifies a suggested success network of tourism partners to champion and move actions within each objective forward.

FRAMEWORK

The strategy presents the destination development objectives using a consistent framework to determine the prioritization of each objective and the relative timing for implementation. Objectives with a provincial or regional scope are identified as well and will inform the regional and provincial destination development strategies.



GATES LAKE
Photo: Mason Mashon

4 GEARING UP

CATALYST PROJECTS

The following 15 actions were identified as catalyst projects for immediately moving the strategy into implementation.

Leading the Way: Stewardship and Social Commitment

- Establish a Sustainable Tourism Council and measurable sustainability goals.

A Sustainable Approach: Proactive Visitor Growth Management

- Apply learnings from the FLNR Visitor Use Management Framework throughout the Sea-to-Sky Corridor.
- Work with all Sea-to-Sky Corridor partners to develop and abide by a policy of marketing responsibly, in a way that educates visitors and encourages responsible travel.
- Work with FLNR to identify the Bridge River Valley as an immediate catalyst project for land use planning.

Deeply Rooted: Indigenous Tourism Development

- ITBC to work with Indigenous communities and entrepreneurs to gain and articulate a robust understanding of the Indigenous tourism aspirations throughout the Sea-to-Sky Corridor.
- Work with ITBC to explore representation models, and secure funding to support Indigenous tourism in the Vancouver, Coast & Mountains region.
- Extend cultural journey viewpoints to the entire Sea-to-Sky Corridor.

Collaborate to Innovate: New Products and Improved Travel Experiences

- Participate in Destination BC's Remarkable Experiences workshop.
- Develop a Sea-to-Sky Tourism Acceleration Fund to support small-scale experience development.

- Develop and implement a master trails plan with all communities involved in the Sea-to-Sky Corridor.
- Develop a hot springs tourism development and management strategy.

Moving Forward: Attracting Talent and Workforce Sustainability

- Work with the government of BC, SLRD, and municipalities to advocate for affordable housing in the Sea-to-Sky Corridor for tourism employees and entrepreneurs, including seasonal (smaller accommodations) and middle management (family homes) positions.

Common Agenda: Partnerships and Working Together

- Work with Vancouver, Coast & Mountains to champion an enhanced destination management role for the entire Sea-to-Sky Corridor through ongoing project management support to move initiatives forward, bring partners together regularly, conduct reporting, and provide support for updating action plans and priorities in future, etc.
- Implement Sea-to-Sky Corridor research and data gathering to develop baselines, identify goals, and prioritize opportunities to improve.
- Work with the government of BC to increase funds and people to better manage and maintain government owned tourism amenities and assets (e.g., trails, garbage pickup, cleanup, outhouses on Crown land, parking, etc.).

LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION?

Read the detailed Sea-to-Sky Corridor Strategy for more information or reach us at:

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FRONT COVER PHOTO: SEA-TO-SKY HIGHWAY, Destination BC

WHISTLER MOUNTAIN
Photo: Blake Jorgenson