



SUNSHINE COAST TOURISM STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN 2015-2019

Where We've Been

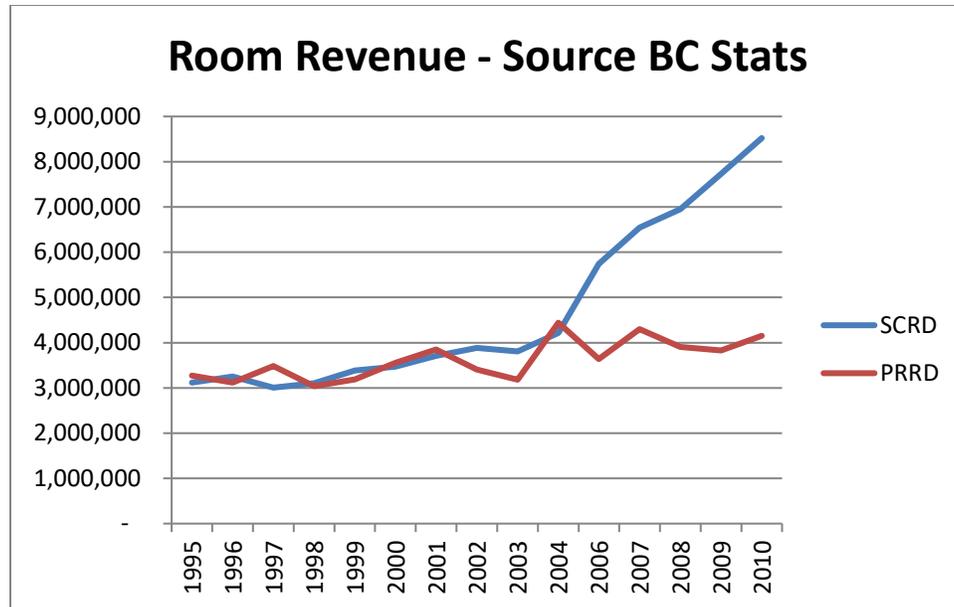
Strategic planning has provided a critical foundation to the development of Sunshine Coast Tourism as the region's Destination Marketing Organization (DMO). Efforts funded by Community Futures, Human Resource Development Canada, and Western Economic Diversification in 2002 laid out a vision for creating a regional DMO and laid out early marketing tactics. As a result, Sunshine Coast Tourism Partnership (SCTP) was formed and began working with Tourism Powell River (TPR)...both predecessors of today's Sunshine Coast Tourism. Through Destination BC's Community Tourism Foundations Program, planning workshops were held to bring SCTP and TPR together under one regional umbrella to focus scarce resources on bold steps in marketing the region. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed in 2007 between the two organizations to create a framework and objectives for a regional DMO and the founding of Sunshine Coast Tourism. A multi-year plan was established with many objectives being achieved over the following years.

Size and value of the visitor economy

In 2002, SCTP surveyed accommodations on occupancy rates in 2001. The southern Sunshine Coast had the lowest average accommodation occupancy in British Columbia at an estimated 43%. Summer months met the provincial average but other seasons were significantly below average. Overall room revenues reported by BC Stats in 2001 were \$3.7 million for Sunshine Coast Regional District and \$3.8 million for Powell River Regional District.

Tourism BC conducted [a study](#) to provide information on the characteristics and volume of travellers to the Sunshine Coast via BC Ferries in the summer of 2007. In those three months, 343,000 visitors were counted whose expenditures on the Sunshine Coast were estimated at \$77.6 million. In that same year, room revenues totalled \$6.5 million for Sunshine Coast Regional District and \$4.3 million for Powell River Regional District. It should be noted that two months of data are missing from PRRD statistics that year due to low volumes of individual hotels reporting in those months and BC Stats confidentiality requirements. The true number was likely \$4.8 million. 29% of non-business overnight travellers reported staying with friends and family.

For the period 2006-2010, room revenues in Sunshine Coast Regional District increased an average of 10% each year reaching \$8.5 million. Significant increases were seen across each quarter except for the January-March quarter, showing improvements in the spring and fall seasons but not winter. Data cannot be compared in a similar manner for Powell River as there is missing monthly data due to low volumes of individual hotels reporting in certain months and BC Stats confidentiality requirements. However, there is enough data to reasonably estimate that room revenues were fairly static over this period.

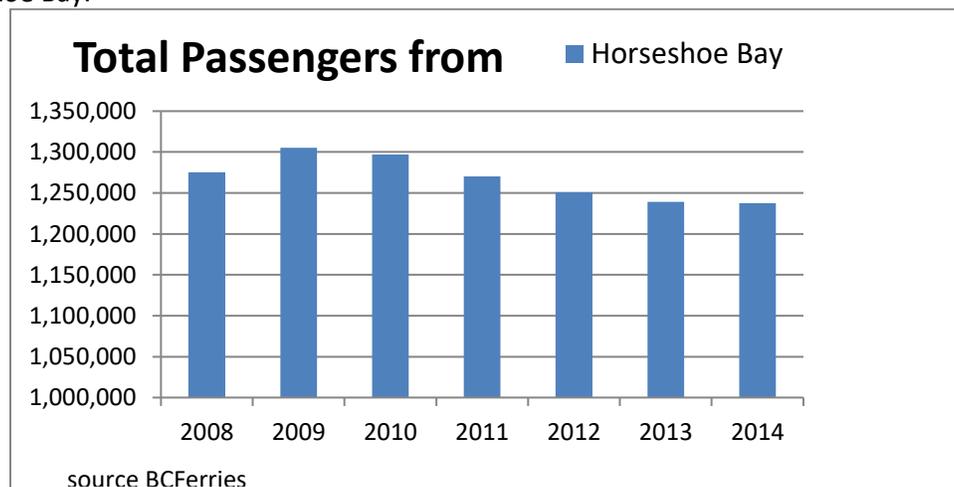


There are three major factors which correspond to the increases in the Sunshine Coast Regional District:

- Significant Private Investment – Rockwater Secret Cove Resort replaced Lord Jim’s, Painted Boat Resort, Spa & Marina replaced Loew’s Resort, West Coast Wilderness Lodge expanded and upgraded. Significantly higher revenues per room and more rooms were the result.
- Worldwide recession led to “Staycations”. The southern Sunshine Coast is Vancouver’s backyard
- First focused Sunshine Coast marketing with the founding of Sunshine Coast Tourism

Unfortunately, room revenue data has not been available for the Sunshine Coast since British Columbia introduced HST in 2011. Currently room revenues are only reported based on Municipal & Regional District Tax (MRDT) reporting, leaving communities like the Sunshine Coast who do not currently collect MRDT without an important metric.

The next best concrete statistic is BC Ferries passenger statistics. An important item of note is that there is no way to separate visitor versus resident passenger statistics. Nonetheless, significant changes to visitor volumes would be reflected in this data. The vast majority of visitors to the Sunshine Coast arrive via Horseshoe Bay.



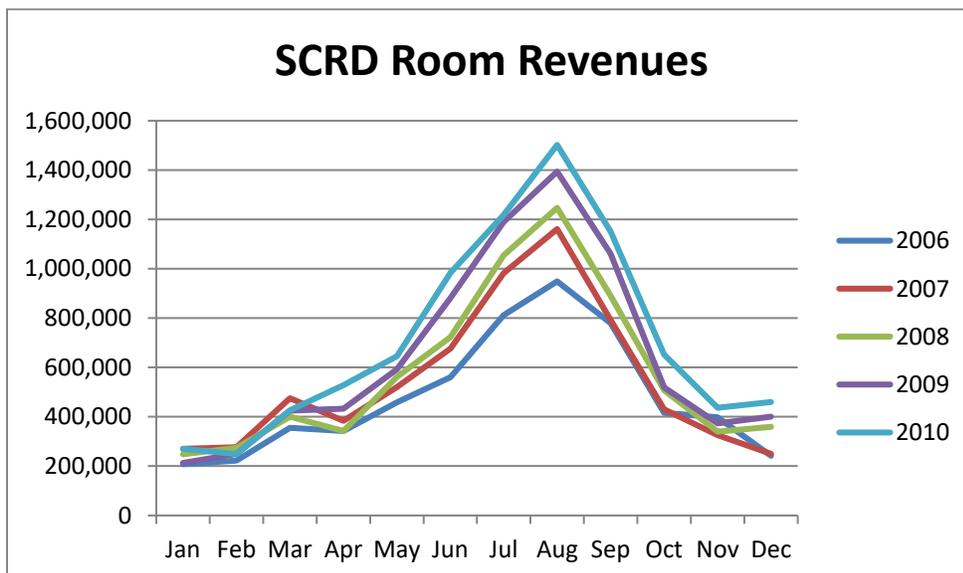
Approximately 1.3 million people arrive from Horseshoe Bay each year. Passenger arrivals increased from 2007-2008 levels by 2% in 2009 and held steady in 2010. In 2011 volumes fell back to 2007-2008

levels and were down 1% in both 2012 and 2013. 2014 was on par with 2013. The declining trend looks to come to an end with the first half of 2015 up 4% reaching between 2009 and 2010 levels.

176,000 people arrive in Powell River from Comox each year. Passenger arrivals decreased steadily 2009-2012 from a high of 197,000. 2013 saw a slight increase whereas 2014 decreased primarily due to the terminal construction and rerouting at the beginning of the year. The first half of 2015 shows similar improvement as the Horseshoe Bay route with passenger volumes higher than 2012 passengers.

Given that decreased resident travel due to higher fares is a component in these numbers, it is reasonable to expect that overall room revenue data would not be significantly different than when last measured in 2010.

While overall SCRD room revenues increased each year 2006-2010, this chart shows the extreme cyclical nature of the Coast's industry. Without adding rooms or properties, there is huge potential to increase revenues outside the summer months. Relatively good weather months of April, May, June and October should have strong focus for marketing initiatives.



The PRRD chart is similar in shape with peak revenues in summer months and significantly less the rest of the year. However as explained earlier, reporting limitations leave some months void of data skewing any chart.

Mission

Sunshine Coast Tourism's mission is to build a strong tourism economy on the Sunshine Coast consistent with the values of residents. Sunshine Coast Tourism will:

- Promote the Sunshine Coast to leisure and business travelers as a year-round destination in targeted markets through a strategic, research-based marketing strategy
- Facilitate the continuing evolution of the destination
- Increase awareness of the value, contribution, and importance of tourism among the government, population, and businesses on the Sunshine Coast.

In the fall of 2011, Sunshine Coast Tourism again took the opportunity to engage the Community Tourism Foundation Program to facilitate a revisit check-up and set course for the next five years. That report set out the following priorities:

1. Continue to develop a strong, unified organizational structure and maintain efforts to strengthen the partnership-based approach to supporting the growth and development of tourism through:
 - a. Completing the 2% MRDT application process
 - b. Adjusting the structure of the SCT board to ensure representation from all key partners, including the 2% accommodation properties (assuming a successful application)
 - c. Working with Tourism Powell River to define complementary roles and responsibilities
 - d. Establishing a regional vision, goals and objectives for tourism that reflect a renewed regional perspective on developing tourism
2. Consolidate the positioning of Sunshine Coast as a destination through the implementation of an integrated marketing communications program that focuses on differentiating the Region on the basis of its unique selling propositions
3. Work with stakeholders to promote new market-ready experiences and encourage an on-going commitment to developing product and visitor experiences that will strengthen the core attributes of the Sunshine Coast
4. Expand SCT's role in providing leadership to the tourism industry

Decision Time

A common element all previous strategic reviews have identified is actual funding levels falling well below proposed plans. This has played a major role in limiting the size and scope of SCT's initiatives, marketing campaigns, member programs, and staffing levels. SCT has relied on a number of partnerships in order to achieve positive results to date. These partnerships include funding cooperation from the Town of Gibsons, District of Sechelt, Sechelt First Nation and the Sunshine Coast Regional District. The City of Powell River provides a part-time staff position through funding to Tourism Powell River and the Powell River Regional District provides funding to Tourism Powell River.

Vancouver, Coast & Mountains and Tourism Vancouver Island have provided access to programs and countless hours of professional guidance and support over the years. In addition to ongoing marketing and media programs this has included critical foundational support at SCT's formation, development of initial media kits and media relations efforts, and access to a digital asset management system. SCT has leveraged many provincial programs including Community Tourism Foundations, Community Tourism Opportunities, and Governing for Success – Enhancing Board Performance.

All of the previous planning processes have outlined the need to implement one more provincial program, the 2% Municipal and Regional District Tax (MRDT). It is estimated that the MRDT would raise \$250,000 annually to be used for Sunshine Coast regional tourism initiatives. In comparison, the organization has operated on a \$115,000 annual budget plus a 50% staff member provided by Powell River. Formal presentations were held in 2010 and 2011 with the boards of Sunshine Coast Tourism and Tourism Powell River who both agreed to pursue MRDT implementation as a regional organization. Presentations were made to six local governments who each gave their support to the MRDT initiative.

This document lays out a business plan for the next 5 years for consideration by the region's accommodation sector should they approve an MRDT application submission.

MRDT is a tax of up to 2% charged on sales of taxable accommodation in participating municipalities and regional districts in British Columbia. The MRDT assists municipalities, regional districts and other eligible entities in promoting tourism in their area and financing new tourism facilities or programs. Approximately 50 communities in British Columbia currently collect MRDT. For further details, please refer to the PST and MRDT Guide for Accommodation Providers http://www.sbr.gov.bc.ca/documents_library/bulletins/pst_120.pdf.

The following requirements must be met for a successful MRDT application:

- A five year organizational business plan (MRDT must be implemented for a period of 5 years)
- A three year organizational budget
- Letters of support from all relevant local governments
- Approval of the eligible accommodation sector (a minimum of both 51% of businesses and 51% of eligible rooms)

Operating Plan – 2015-2019

Position the Destination based on our Unique Selling Propositions

Unique Selling Propositions – qualities and products that set the Sunshine Coast region apart from other regions such as Victoria, the Okanagan, or Whistler

Three Unique Selling Propositions have been defined and considerable effort should be made so that all marketing and media relations efforts tie back to those three points.

1. A string of rural, ocean-side communities
 - This is not a metropolitan area. Slow down & escape from the city.
 - There are many communities to explore, each with their own character.
 - The Pacific Ocean is here on our doorstep alongside stunning scenery
2. Outdoor Adventure
 - Super Natural British Columbia is our attraction, not a supermall or a structured venue
 - Hike, bike, sail, paddle, golf, dive, swim, climb, ski, ride...your adventure starts here surrounded in natural beauty
 - A partnership of land and water activities and natural attractions
3. Arts, Culture & Heritage
 - Home to three First Nations who have a remarkable story to tell & continue to develop
 - Historic Townsite – national heritage district as well as our forestry and fishing heritage
 - An amazing concentration of artists in all genres who live and work and are inspired by place
 - Festivals and events celebrating a range of interests all year long

Destination BC announced its new three year marketing strategy in November 2014. "Our target consumers most connect with the unique combination of ocean, rainforest and mountains in BC, as well as the stunning natural beauty and wildlife." SCT needs to highlight its strengths in these areas. Destination BC has identified 5 iconic experiences that showcase those aspects of BC in a compelling way: Canadian Rockies, *Rainforests*, Cities in Wilderness, *Ocean Coast*, and Ski.

Destination BC has defined key trip-motivating travel experiences as: *Touring & Exploring*, City Stays, *Outdoor Adventure*, Skiing, *Aboriginal Cultural Tourism*, Cruise, Wine Touring, Golfing and *Fishing*. International marketing campaigns will highlight these areas. The Sunshine Coast can leverage its strong positioning in the highlighted experiences.

Key Markets and Target Audience

Markets and target audiences can be defined based on geography, demographics and by targeted activities and interests. Once defined, they guide marketing tactics as you have identified who you most want to see your message. The tactics and specific tools will vary and change as trends and society change over time, but articulating your audience always come first. In 2015 we expect to undergo more training related to Explorer Quotient (EQ). This will help us define our target audience by using psychographics, looking at the types of travelers who best match our Sunshine Coast product offerings.

The Sunshine Coast's largest visitor base is the BC resident with primary focus on the close-in markets of the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island. With a growing population of 2.5 million, BC's Lower Mainland includes the province's two largest cities and neighbouring metro communities. Vancouver Island is home to .75 million residents. Together this makes up 70% of the British Columbia population all in close physical proximity to the Sunshine Coast.

Alberta, Washington, Oregon and northern California form the next key geographic targets, specifically the metropolitan areas of Calgary, Edmonton, Seattle, Bellingham and Portland. For Alberta there is the strong draw of the landlocked to the shores of the Pacific Ocean. Milder temperatures and year-round adventure are also strong messages. For the U.S. Pacific Northwest, there is the draw of international travel up-close and driveable or arrival by personal boat. Canada remains a bit wilder, more natural, yet with comforts of home. The relationship of the US/Canadian dollar is very important in this market. The current dip in the loonie should be seen as an opportunity. Destination BC has targeted Alberta, Washington and California as growth investment areas in its marketing strategy.

Ontario is a tertiary market largely driven by visits to friends and family or business travel to Vancouver. Saskatchewan is of growing interest with a growing youth population and strong economy for many of the same reasons as Alberta.

Visitors from Western Europe, especially Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the UK have traditionally made up the region's largest international demographic. These travelers are highly educated, usually speak English, and are seeking the wild Canadian wilderness. Products such as the Sunshine Coast Trail, guided kayaking or boating excursions are high value to this audience. Destination BC sees Germany, UK and Australia as key markets for its international marketing focus.

Australia and New Zealand visitors have grown in recent years and are similarly affected by international currency markets. High youth populations from these countries have found employment in Whistler and Vancouver strengthening the Commonwealth relationship and bringing friends and family to visit. There are natural ties to Australia's Sunshine Coast that can be played up in any advertising campaigns.

The fastest growing geographic market is international visitors from Asia visiting friends and family in greater Vancouver. International visitors from China to BC are growing at a rate of 20% each year. These visitors stay for longer periods and often include multiple short trips around BC within their stay. This makes the Lower Mainland Asian resident population an even more desirable target audience as they

are more likely to showcase a close-by region such as the Sunshine Coast full of natural beauty to visiting friends and relatives.

As stated in SCT's mission, it will promote the Sunshine Coast to leisure and business travelers as a year-round destination. The majority of SCT's marketing efforts to date have been related to leisure travel. However, significant work was completed in 2009-2011 to develop a basis for a meetings and retreats sector. The objective of this project was to increase visitation to the Sunshine Coast, specifically during the off-season period and create awareness of the Sunshine Coast as a tourism destination. The project encompassed research and development of a venue database as well as creation of a branding initiative for the Sunshine Coast as a corporate retreat destination. The overall goal was to build a sustainable and vibrant tourism economy on the Sunshine Coast that will increase direct tourism spending and indirect economic impact through secondary industries resulting in the creation of new jobs, products and services on the Sunshine Coast. New hotels and conference centres are on the drawing board for both Gibsons and Sechelt. Should one of those move forward, SCT gains a strong partner to re-engage with attracting larger conferences, corporate retreats, and additional destination weddings to the region. Powell River already has facilities capable of conferences. All of these events should be seen as an opportunity to WOW attendees on their first visit to the region so that they become ambassadors to distant family and friends and return visitors for a longer leisure experience through more of the region.

Marketing Tactics and Campaigns

As mentioned earlier, tactics and specific tools will change over time. Who would have included facebook and twitter in a strategic plan written 5-10 years ago? This document seeks to lay out some broad objectives which are more defined for 2015 and less so for later years. It is meant to be a foundation that is developed on as trends emerge and new tools become available.

No matter the medium, compelling imagery is critical in telling our story and selling our brand. This includes photography, video, and use of infographics and other graphic design tools alongside the imagery. SCT has made significant strides in collecting high quality photos of the region. However, this content must be renewed and refreshed over time. Areas where current imagery is lacking includes Aboriginal content, boating activity, and large festivals and events. Video content has improved over the past year, but needs to be championed. Short active clips can be used in so many ways. Significant funding allows for growth into television and a range of online video ad placement options.

Destination BC has launched a new 3 year strategy to increase overall visits to British Columbia. It relies on a magnetic brand whose goal is to move people to visit now rather than to visit someday. It will feature experiences and encourages travelers to become our best ambassadors in sharing those BC experiences with family and friends. SCT's marketing plan needs to leverage partnership opportunities with Destination BC and to highlight areas where the province's larger brand marketing reach aligns with specific Sunshine Coast USP's.

It goes without saying that a destination needs to put its best self forward online. This means an active, engaging and informative website and social media strategies. This means up to date technology ready for mobile devices and whatever comes next in this fast changing digital world. It means providing succinct information to a variety of audiences while being available to answer questions and inquiries in whatever form potential travellers choose to engage. It must include strong and enticing imagery that is easily sharable so that consumers can share with friends and family. Websites and social media strategies need daily attention which means appropriate staffing levels to carry out initiatives.

Sunshine Coast Tourism completed significant improvements to <http://sunshinecoastcanada.com/> in 2014. Compelling images and videos have stronger placement and effect. A weekly blog project championed #52weeksoftrails highlighting 52 different trails (hiking, biking, skiing, snowshoeing, and even paddling) throughout the region. The blog attracted significant new website visits, built a great deal of new content for Search Engine Optimization, and has been leveraged across facebook, twitter and instagram. Activities and members who provide those activities have much greater profile throughout the site making trip planning easier. The Member Directory has new features that allow members to better showcase their services and make direct contact easier. Unique visitors to the website were up 30% in 2014 compared to the previous year and topped 95,000 by year end. Work continues, specifically around updating the member information into the increased directory capabilities and adding Aboriginal content and images from our three First Nations.

Vancouver, Coast & Mountains and Tourism Vancouver Island are Regional DMOs (RDMOs) who execute a variety of marketing programs under the Destination BC umbrella. Currently, SCT cannot participate in the vast majority of these programs due to limited financial resources. Provincial tourism changes mean that VCM no longer exists as of March 31, 2015. Much is unknown as to exactly how Destination BC will replace those functions, but the concepts remain true even if the specific partner changes. MRDT funding would allow for a significant increase in regional participation. The strongest examples include:

- Regional print co-op advertising spreads before major long weekends in The Province, Vancouver Sun, and Victoria Times Colonist newspapers. These are timed for the close-in market weekend getaway decisions. The Sunshine Coast should have a significant presence alongside Whistler, Tofino, and other communities.
- Ride BC <http://604pulse.com/things-to-do/?cat=1015> is an example of niche market targeted campaigns facilitated by VCM, in this case motorcyclists. SCT should be a significant participant whenever there is a strong match to regional product offerings. BC Chinese Residents campaign is a similar niche market initiative complete with Chinese language ads and articles focused on attracting close proximity residents and their visiting family members.
- Regional experience guides are mailed to thousands of enquiring future travellers by Destination BC and are on display at consumer trade shows and in visitor information centres. The Sunshine Coast should be well represented with both editorial and compelling advertising.
- VCM and TVI tear off maps and other Visitor Information Centre presence across the province should always include Sunshine Coast content and direct travellers to SCT's online network
- All major Sunshine Coast events and festivals should be listed on <http://www.hellobc.com/> as well as other wide exposure media calendars including Georgia Straight, CBC and others.
- SCT should be sure it is well represented in provincial initiatives such as Mountain Bike BC and BC Ocean Boating Tourism Association. These sector driven associations cater to specific interest groups and offer additional cooperative marketing programs.

Consumer shows and active networking opportunities are highly valuable experiences as they give face to face opportunities to introduce or deepen someone's awareness of the Sunshine Coast. SCT has limited itself to 2-3 opportunities each year due to limits on staff and funding. The Outdoor Adventure Show in Vancouver has been a mainstay with expansion to Calgary and Saskatoon in 2014. SCT should seek other opportunities for face to face contact with potential travellers. This could include women's shows, bridal expos, boat shows, craft beer festivals, film festivals and other lifestyle events. Events should be chosen based on priority match to USP's and target markets mentioned earlier. Professional networking events such as Meeting Planners International, BC Rural Tourism Conference, Aboriginal Tourism Association should all be evaluated for attendance on an annual basis. In 2015, SCT attended

the Outdoor Adventure Travel Show in Vancouver and Calgary, the Vancouver Boat Show, and the International Sportsman's Exposition in Sacramento, California.

Media relations have been SCT's most successful marketing tactic over the past few years. SCT's goal has been to bring a variety of writers and journalists to enjoy a Sunshine Coast experience which they can then write & publish in various online and print publications. Independent media articles are always more relevant and believable to the reader than straight advertising. Much of SCT's work to date has depended on funding partnerships from Destination BC and VCM as well as voluntary contributions of product and activities by SCT member businesses. Concentrated resources and effective relationship management resulted in over \$700,000 in advertising equivalency in more than 130 stories and 27 media visits in 2012-13. This tactic should be expanded to more targeted approaches matching both USP and target market fit when additional staff time can be devoted. SCT staff must work in partnership with Destination BC and other community DMO's.

Attracting small to medium corporate meetings and retreats to the region brings an entirely new clientele. The intent is not only the immediate business created by the event itself, but hopes to deliver a positive experience to the business traveller who will then want to return and explore the region further in his or her leisure time with friends and family. Low hanging fruit awaits when SCT can devote staff and resources to actively seeking and responding to RFP's by companies and organizations who seek new locations for annual meetings and conferences. This tactic offers significant potential for strengthening spring, fall and winter.

A similar strategy focusing on sport tourism has the ability to leverage Powell River's work in this area outlined in a 2012 Sport & Recreation Tourism Strategy funded by the City. Sporting venues exist as do large host hotels. The community's experience in hosting Kathaumixw and PRISMA position it well to host such events and efforts in accessibility offer an expanded view of sport tourism. New venues such as the Gibsons Community Recreation Centre, Sechelt Aquatic Centre and the recently improved Sechelt Arena are also capable of hosting events. This strategy requires dedicated staff and resources in order to move forward and offers significant potential for strengthening spring, fall and winter.

Promote and develop product and experiences

The tourism industry is never stagnant. Product and attractions continue to develop as the region evolves. The following assets have truly come into their own as prime visitor attractions in recent years:

- Sunshine Coast Trail – Canada's longest hut to hut hiking trail
 - 13 overnight huts, welcome kiosk, 2014 passport program, 180km and growing international reputation
 - A significant challenger to the West Coast Trail. Strong product to European, Australian and New Zealand trekking communities
 - Year round snow free hiking in the first 70km of the trail
- Powell River Historic Townsite – national historic district & Canada's longest running movie theatre
 - Significant rejuvenation, improved accommodation, brewery, nightlife
- Dakota Ridge Winter Recreation Area
 - 20km groomed ski trails and 7km marked snowshoe trails (expanded 2013/14)
- Sunshine Coast Botanical Garden
 - New rhododendron gardens, regular expert programming, new viewpoints, wedding venue

- Powell Forest Canoe Route – 57km route including 8 lakes and 5 portages
 - Improved infrastructure 2012/13/14

These attractions are not represented by individual businesses. They are significant attractions to the region, just as our never ending beaches and trails are important attractions. It is SCT's role to be sure that collateral showcasing these attractions is developed and distributed widely. They must be part of marketing strategies and media relations efforts. SCT must play a communication role with Destination BC to build awareness and to be sure these attractions are represented on <http://www.hellobc.com> and included in media and travel trade itineraries and story ideas.

Other traditional major attractions for the region that continue to draw visitors and media attention year after year:

- Skookumchuck Narrows Provincial Park
- Desolation Sound
- Princess Louisa Inlet
- Savary Island

Attractions on the horizon and making significant impact in 2015:

- Coast Gravity Park – a private company, but has potential to rival Whistler Mountain Bike Park with the added feature of year-round downhill riding with lift
- Craft Beer & Winery Tour – A brewery at each end of the coast and a new winery in the middle
- Davis Bay – wharf expansion in 2014 complimenting new park areas in 2012/13
- Regional Trails Strategies debuting at each end of the Coast in 2014 delivering improved signage, maps, trailheads and offering priorities for trail improvements
- Gibsons Public Market – a new anchor attraction for Gibsons Landing, renovations in 2016

Implementation Tactics:

SCT has steadily built a strong digital library of compelling images of the region. This includes photography and video and can be seen across <http://sunshinecoastcanada.com/>, social media channels, trade show collateral and marketing advertisements. This library must be continuously updated and expanded to include new product developments and new technologies. This digital library will feed all other marketing tactics. Focus for 2015 will be on Aboriginal Tourism content and expanded video content of the region.

The Sunshine Coast lacks a region-wide visitor guide that reflects the preferred positioning of the region. Messaging and advertising within the guide should be consistent with desired positioning and brand of the destination. Today, independent media companies offer a variety of printed guides that separate the region into smaller communities and do not reflect Sunshine Coast branding. Without resources to develop its own region-wide visitor guide, SCT is increasing its efforts to partner with the individual publishers to influence content and imagery. Contests are planned for 2015 which will link the print publications to social media opportunities to encourage our visitors be our online ambassadors.

First impressions are key when setting oneself apart at a busy trade show or conference. Compelling imagery is key to attracting participant attention and engaging collateral starts them down the individual trip planning path. Engaging and knowledgeable hosts, regional maps, targeting sector information (i.e. boat show, outdoor adventure show, wedding show), and methods to keep in touch (social media, e-newsletters, follow-up invitations) are required for a truly successful consumer show.

The Sunshine Coast is unique in that this geographic region that includes three municipalities does not have any large nationally branded hotels. This means visitors have an extra step in finding accommodation. They don't just find the closest Fairmont or Hyatt. They must discover what is available to fit their personal needs. A regional accommodation calendar & reservation system would take much of the work out of finding appropriate accommodation. There are 50 resorts, hotels and motels in the region of which many do not offer online reservations. In addition there are a large number of campgrounds, bed and breakfasts, and vacation rentals which can potentially make the work of finding accommodation for a given date tedious and time consuming. There is an opportunity to offer a regional accommodation tool, which would bring value to visitors. An example of such a model is the Whistler/Blackcomb Central Reservation System:
<http://www.whistlerblackcomb.com/reservations/Plan/ContactUs.aspx>.

Evaluation Metrics

No strategy is complete without a means to measure success. Today, we have a major disadvantage in that British Columbia no longer publishes Hotel Room Revenue and related data outside of MRDT collecting communities. In the absence of voluntary reporting from our accommodation sector, we have no metrics to show occupancy levels or room revenues. We only have anecdotal evidence from individual properties. This key indicator becomes immediately available when the Sunshine Coast opts into the MRDT program.

Understanding the accommodation sector is a huge step in calculating the value of tourism in a region. In 2012, Accommodation and Food Services contributed to 33% of the \$13.5 Billion of annual tourism industry generated revenues in BC. Transportation makes up the next third of the picture. Ferry statistics must continue to be collected. A missing piece of information is the volume of visitors arriving by plane and by boat. SCT needs to work with the Powell River and Sechelt airports as well as private float plane operators to measure this component. SCT needs to work with private marinas and harbour authorities in the region to understand the size and strength of the boating sector.

Individual marketing strategies also require evaluation so that continuous improvement is possible. This includes elements such as web traffic, social media interactions, distribution of printed collateral, and value of media coverage.

Where we go from here

Sunshine Coast Tourism has made significant progress in developing branding and messaging since its formation in 2007. It represents businesses across the tourism sector and has the support and partnership of local governments. If current annual funding of \$100,000 remains the same, similar results should be expected. The organization's success will greatly rely on the passion of volunteers which must constantly be renewed and rotated to prevent burnout and collapse. Staff will turn over as creative and developing personnel will seek other opportunities to grow and expand skill sets. Marketing opportunities will be missed for lack of financial and personnel resources. The list of desires will remain long while incremental steps slowly move the region forward. The gap between well-funded destinations like the Okanagan and Tofino will continue to increase.

The accommodation sector of the region can unite and decide to implement a provincial program that triples the current funding levels and is completely funded by visitors. It can follow the lead of 50 other British Columbia communities and all its major cities. The region can hire the necessary staff and equip them with the resources to carry out the projects and objectives listed earlier in this document.

Sunshine Coast Tourism’s Board of Directors unanimously supports implementation of MRDT across the region.

Timeline

January-July 2015 – Ratification of MRDT application by the Sunshine Coast accommodation sector

July-August 2015 – Letters of Support from all local governments; submission of MRDT application to Ministry of Finance

Fall 2015 – BC Cabinet approval, official notice to accommodation sector, normally a 3-6 month notice of implementation.

2016 – First funds received into Sunshine Coast Tourism’s operating budget

Proposed Budget

	2015	2016
Revenue:		
Memberships	\$ 35,000	\$ 35,000
Local Governments	\$ 40,000	\$ 40,000
Provincial 50/50 Grants	\$ 21,000	\$ 21,000
Co-operative Programs	\$ 19,000	\$ 19,000
MRDT	<u>-</u>	<u>\$250,000</u>
Total Revenue:	\$115,000	\$365,000
Expenses:		
Media Relations	\$ 23,000	\$ 45,000
Marketing		
VCM Co-ops	\$ 15,000	\$ 50,000
Online Marketing	\$ 15,000	\$ 25,000
Shoulder Season Campaigns	\$ 13,000	\$ 70,000
Trade Shows	\$ 8,000	\$ 20,000
Collateral Distribution	\$ 7,000	\$ 20,000
Meetings & Retreats	\$ 6,000	\$ 30,000
Destination Guide		\$ 20,000
Website/Communications	\$ 9,000	\$ 15,000
Administration	\$ 19,000	\$ 60,000
Contingency -	<u>-</u>	<u>\$ 10,000</u>
Total Expenses:	\$115,000	\$365,000

Actual expenditures would be governed by Sunshine Coast Tourism’s elected Board of Directors. These Directors are composed of:

- 4 members of MRDT accommodations (2 north and 2 south)
- 4 members at large (2 north and 2 south)
- 1 member representing the Recreation Sector
- 1 member representing the Arts Culture & Heritage Sector
- 1 member representing small accommodations and campgrounds

Directors are elected to two year terms at the Annual General Meeting with a number of alternating terms so that approximately half the board remains in place at any given time.

SCT has incorporated the following into its bylaws:

- 2.13 All those accommodators collecting MRDT on the Sunshine Coast will be considered members of Sunshine Coast Tourism and will not pay membership dues.
- 4.4 Accommodator Directors shall be elected by Members of the Accommodators' Sector.
- 4.5 The Director representative of Small Accommodations and Campgrounds shall be elected by the members of that sector.
- 4.6 All other Directors are elected by the general Sunshine Coast Tourism membership.

In recognition of the contribution to the region that MRDT collecting accommodations are making, those accommodators will receive the following suite of benefits not available to other businesses.

- SCT will create a Marketing Advisory Committee with eight committee members elected annually by the MRDT collecting accommodations to provide direct input on SCT marketing priorities. This committee will be balanced geographically and be chaired by one accommodation SCT board member.
- One or more co-operative ads per year will be designed exclusively for collecting accommodations and not available to other tourism businesses.
- Collecting accommodations receive \$200 credit each year toward a co-operative program. Co-operative examples in 2015 included The Province, Georgia Straight, British Columbia Magazine, Explore Magazine and Vancouver Island Visitor Guide.
- SCT will invest in a destination campaign on one or more booking engines such as TripAdvisor, Expedia, and Booking.com specifically designed to increase direct conversions to collecting accommodations.
- SCT will offer administrative support and training as necessary for the initial accommodation MRDT filings in 2016.

MRDT of 2% would be implemented within the entirety of the Sunshine Coast Regional District and the Powell River Regional District, including the municipalities of Gibsons, Sechelt and Powell River. Sunshine Coast Tourism will be the eligible entity charged with the administration of the funds and necessary reporting. Sunshine Coast Tourism is asking for an implementation date of January 1, 2016.