

State of the Destination Executive Summary

Toronto Destination Master Plan

OCTOBER 2025

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Project Background

The Toronto Destination Master Plan is a strategic initiative to guide tourism development and positioning over the next decade.

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This State of the Destination Executive Summary provides insights from the research completed and data collected in the first phases of the initiative. These will be used to inform the development of the Destination Master Plan; to be released in early 2026.

The comprehensive planning process of the master plan builds upon Toronto's established position as a major North American destination while addressing emerging challenges and opportunities in the evolving global tourism landscape.

The master plan development follows a systematic approach designed to ensure alignment with current market realities, stakeholder priorities, and future growth opportunities. Through extensive research, community engagement, and industry consultation, the plan will establish a 10 year roadmap for sustainable tourism development that benefits visitors, residents, and the broader economy.

According to the study, [Economic Impact of Visitors in Toronto](#), Toronto welcomed 26.5 million visitors annually, generating \$8.8 billion in visitor spending and supporting thousands of jobs across the tourism ecosystem. As the destination faces increasing competition from other major cities and evolving visitor expectations, the master plan will provide essential strategic direction for maintaining and enhancing Toronto's competitive position.

The State of the Destination Report Executive Summary provides research insights, highlighting visitor trends, competitive dynamics, assets and opportunities to enhance visitors' experiences. The master plan will draw on Toronto's unique assets while confronting infrastructure gaps that limit the destination's potential.

Project Approach

The creation of the Toronto Destination Master Plan follows a phased approach designed to ensure comprehensive analysis, broad stakeholder engagement, and actionable strategic outcomes. The process incorporates multiple research streams and consultation methods to develop evidence-based recommendations.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The master plan development incorporated multiple research methodologies to ensure a comprehensive analysis and a broad representation of community and industry perspectives. The research was structured around five key modules that examined different aspects of Toronto's tourism ecosystem.



Executive Summary

The first module, Our Visitors Today, involved analysis of key markets and visitor behaviours to understand current demand patterns, including examination of 26.5 million annual visitors across domestic and international segments. The second module, State of the Destination, provided an assessment of the visitor economy, hospitality performance, and supply of products and experiences, incorporating detailed competitive benchmarking against peer destinations.

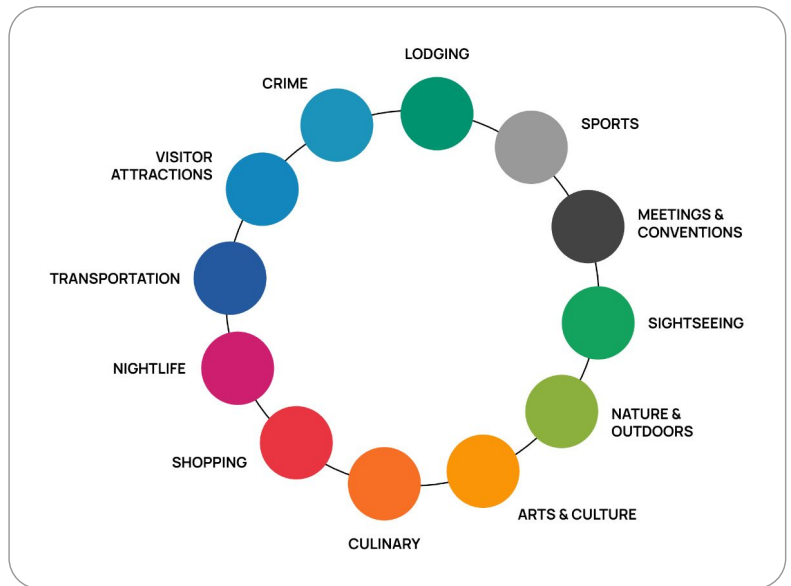
The third research component, Voice of the Community, gathered insights from industry surveys and stakeholder perspectives to reflect the priorities and concerns of tourism sector participants and community members. The final module, Future of Tourism, conducted a review of travel and tourism trends shaping the competitive landscape, including emerging visitor expectations and market dynamics.

The engagement process was extensive, incorporating 586 industry survey responses, 178 stakeholders in 19 focus groups, and more than 40 in-depth stakeholder interviews. This comprehensive consultation ensured diverse perspectives informed the strategic recommendations.



Toronto's performance was evaluated against 14 other major North American cities using a comprehensive framework of 51 indicators across 12 categories, enabling systematic comparison of tourism assets, infrastructure, and market position. The methodology incorporated multiple data sources including Tourism Economics, Destination Canada, DOMO analytics, CoStar hospitality data, Google analytics, and various government and industry databases to ensure comprehensive and reliable analysis.

Canada	U.S.	
Toronto	New York	Philadelphia
Montreal	Los Angeles	Boston
Vancouver	Chicago	San Francisco
Calgary	Washington DC	Seattle
Ottawa	Atlanta	Denver



Project Governance

The Toronto Destination Master Plan is overseen by a distinguished Steering Committee that provides strategic guidance throughout the planning process. The committee contributes input at key milestones, helps define priority focus areas, and ensures findings are interpreted within Toronto's unique context. The Steering Committee represents diverse perspectives across tourism, hospitality, arts and culture, economic development, and city-building sectors.

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Andrew O'Neil, Vice President of Development, Oxford Properties Group

Andrew Weir, President & CEO, Destination Toronto

Cameron Bailey, Chief Executive Officer, Toronto International Film Festival

Dolf DeJong, Chief Executive Officer, Toronto Zoo

George Zegarac, President & CEO, Waterfront Toronto

Jennifer Sullivan, Vice President, Operations and General Manager, Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment

Karen Mazurkewich, Vice President, Stakeholder Relations and Communications, Greater Toronto Airport Authority

Kathy Haley, President & CEO, Metro Toronto Convention Centre

Kendra Bator, General Manager, Mirvish Productions

Kojo Modeste, Executive Director, Pride Toronto

Patrick Tobin, General Manager, Economic Development & Culture, City of Toronto

Pauline Larsen, Executive Director & CEO, Downtown Yonge Business Improvement Area

Roselle Martino, Executive Vice President, Policy, Advocacy, and Stakeholder Relations, Toronto Region Board of Trade

Sara Anghel, President & CEO, Greater Toronto Hotel Association

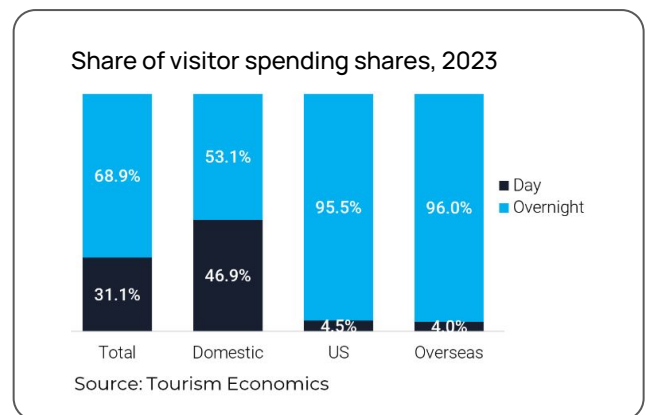
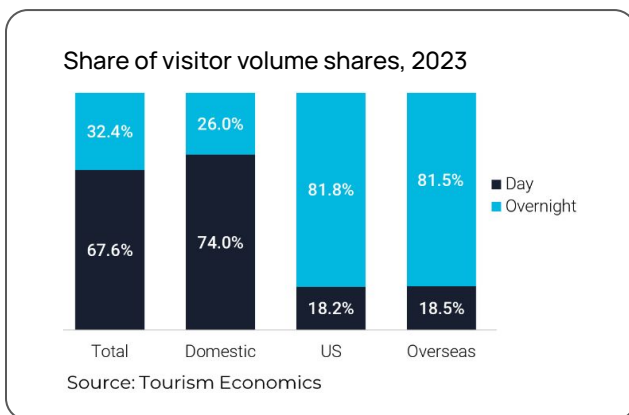
Stephen Lund, President & CEO, Toronto Global

The State of Toronto's Visitor Economy

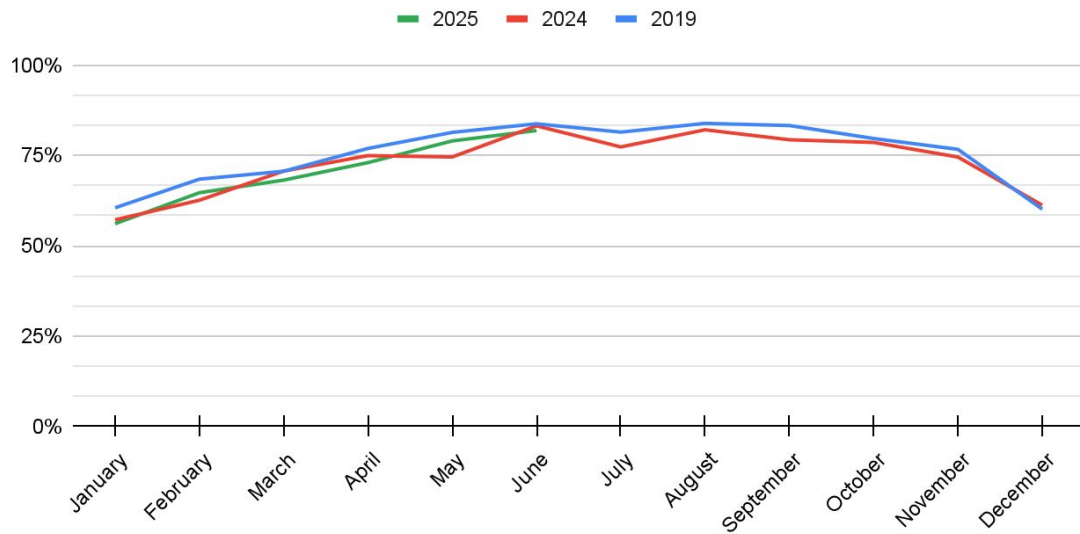
Toronto's visitor economy demonstrates significant scale and resilience, with strong recovery following the global pandemic and continued growth potential across multiple market segments. The destination welcomed 26.5 million visitors in 2023, positioning it comparably to Philadelphia and Washington DC, and above all other Canadian destinations in terms of visitor volume.

The economic impact of tourism remains substantial, generating \$8.8 billion in visitor spending that has fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels. Overnight visitors, while representing only 32% of total arrivals, generate the majority of economic value at 69% of total spending, compared to day visitors who comprise 68% of arrivals but contribute 31% of spending. Average spending per visitor varies considerably by market origin, with overseas visitors spending \$1,584 per trip, U.S. visitors \$1,011, and domestic visitors \$860.

The visitor profile reflects Toronto's dual role as both a regional hub and an international gateway. International visitors account for 33% of arrivals but generate 42% of total spending, while domestic visitors represent 67% of arrivals and 58% of spending. Among specific markets, the United States represents the largest spending segment at 33% of total expenditure, while overseas markets and Ontario each contribute approximately 25%. Visitation from other Canadian provinces accounts for only 15% of spending, indicating significant growth potential compared to other major Canadian destinations.



Monthly Hotel Occupancy Rate in 2019, 2024, and 2025



Toronto Hotel Occupancy Rate
Source: CoStar, 2019, 2024, 2025

The hospitality sector shows mixed performance indicators. Hotel occupancy has largely recovered, achieving a 73% annual occupancy rate that ranks fourth among benchmarked cities.

Average daily rates have increased between 2019 and 2024, now comparable to Chicago and Seattle, though still trailing Boston, Vancouver, and Washington DC. Seasonal patterns present both challenges and opportunities for the destination. Visitation peaks during summer months from July through September, with notably lower volumes from January through March. This concentration limits year-round economic benefits and creates capacity constraints during peak periods while underutilizing tourism infrastructure during off-seasons.

Toronto’s competitive position among major North American cities is strong, ranking fourth overall in a comprehensive assessment of 15 peer destinations, after New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago.

This assessment evaluated 51 indicators across 12 categories, using composite scoring to compare the relative competitiveness of tourism assets, infrastructure, and visitor experiences.

The destination demonstrates particular strength in visitor-facing assets and experiences, achieving second-place rankings in both visitor attractions and sightseeing categories. Additional third-place rankings in arts and culture, nightlife, shopping, and culinary experiences underscore Toronto’s appeal across diverse visitor interests.

However, the assessment reveals significant challenges in infrastructure and transportation that limit the destination’s full potential. Transportation and connectivity ranks eleventh among peer cities, with particular weaknesses in walkability and bikeability. Sports infrastructure capacity ranks ninth, while meetings and conventions infrastructure ranks eighth, highlighting constraints that limit Toronto’s ability to compete for large-scale events and conferences. Moreover, when compared against a broader set of North American cities beyond the benchmark group, Toronto’s relative score for conference infrastructure drops even further, reinforcing the urgency of strategic investment if the city is to remain competitive in attracting major conventions.

City	Rank
New York	1
Los Angeles	2
Chicago	3
Toronto	4
Montreal	5
Atlanta	6
DC	7
San Francisco	8
Boston	9
Seattle	10
Philadelphia	11
Denver	12
Vancouver	13
Calgary	14
Ottawa	15

Key Findings

The analysis highlights Toronto's strongest assets as well as the structural challenges that constrain its competitiveness. The following findings summarize the city's current position in the North American visitor economy.

1. TORONTO DELIVERS WORLD-CLASS EXPERIENCES

Benchmarking analysis comparing Toronto with 14 North American peers demonstrates that the city consistently ranks within the top tier for arts and culture, culinary experiences, retail, and attractions. Toronto placed third overall in cultural offerings, driven by the quality and popularity of museums, galleries, and theatres; second for sightseeing; and third for both shopping and culinary categories. These rankings reflect the strength of flagship institutions such as the Royal Ontario Museum, Art Gallery of Ontario, and TIFF, combined with a diverse dining scene now recognized by the MICHELIN Guide. Visitor behaviour data reinforces these findings: arts, culture, and shopping are among the most frequently cited reasons for visitation, particularly among domestic travellers from Ontario.

2. INFRASTRUCTURE CONSTRAINTS LIMIT GROWTH

Despite its experiential strengths, Toronto falls behind its competitors in the infrastructure required to support growth. The city ranks seventh among peers for lodging, with hotel supply growth remaining relatively flat between 2015 and 2025, while comparable destinations expanded significantly. Toronto's convention sector is constrained by limited capacity at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre and a lack of large venues. In fact, Toronto's relative position drops even further when benchmarked against a broader set of North American cities, underscoring the scale of the challenge. Traffic congestion further compounds these issues, making it difficult for visitors to move efficiently between districts and reach key venues, attractions, and the airport. Stakeholder consultations reinforced these findings, emphasizing that infrastructure gaps in convention capacity, anchor hotels, mobility, and transportation flow reduce Toronto's competitiveness in attracting large international events and high-value business tourism. Without targeted investment, these constraints will continue to hinder Toronto's ability to fully capitalize on its strengths and realize its growth potential.

3. BUSINESS TOURISM CAPACITY FALLS SHORT

Benchmarking analysis demonstrates that Toronto performs below many of its peers in the high-value business events sector. The city's eighth-place ranking for meetings and conventions is largely attributable to the limited capacity of the Metro Toronto Convention Centre and a constrained supply of nearby lodging. Stakeholder consultations reinforced these findings, with many emphasizing the difficulty of competing against U.S. destinations, where convention facilities are significantly larger and more flexible. It is important to note that this ranking reflects only a select peer set; when additional U.S. convention destinations are considered, Toronto falls even further behind, underscoring the urgency of investment. Without major investment in expanded convention infrastructure and complementary hospitality development, Toronto risks losing market share in the business event segment.

4. VISITATION IS CONCENTRATED IN THE SUMMER MONTHS

Analysis of monthly visitation and spending patterns from 2024 shows that tourism in Toronto is concentrated in the summer months, with spending peaking between July and September and declining by as much as 40 percent from January to March. This seasonal imbalance, while not uncommon among northern cities, limits the city's ability to sustain longer average stays, reduces year-round employment in the visitor economy, and leaves cultural and recreational assets underutilized outside the peak period. Feedback from stakeholders and industry surveys consistently identified the lack of distinctive winter programming as a critical weakness. Targeted investment in winter events, indoor attractions, and outdoor recreation would help balance visitation throughout the year and reinforce Toronto's positioning as a true four-season destination.

Key Findings

5. LIMITED INTERPROVINCIAL VISITATION

Market analysis indicates that while Toronto attracts strong international and Ontario-based visitation, travel from other Canadian provinces remains comparatively low. In 2024, spending from other provinces accounted for only 15 percent of total visitor expenditures, lower than most peer destinations except Vancouver. This limited penetration of the domestic market represents an untapped opportunity. Growing appeal among interprovincial travellers could help stabilize demand and offset seasonal fluctuations.

6. RETAIL A KEY DRIVER OF ONTARIO-BASED TRAVEL

Visitor behaviour data highlights the central role of retail in Toronto's visitor economy. Shopping is a primary motivator for Ontario-based travellers, with Yorkdale and the CF Toronto Eaton Centre ranking among the most visited attractions. Benchmarking confirms Toronto's strength in this category, with the city ranking third overall for shopping and first for popularity of its shopping centres.

7. STRONG GLOBAL CONNECTIVITY SUPPORTS INTERNATIONAL APPEAL

Toronto's connectivity through Pearson International Airport is a defining strength. The city ranks sixth among peers for direct flight connections and above average overall in international air access. This connectivity has translated into strong international visitation, with overseas visitors accounting for one-quarter of total spending and demonstrating the highest per-trip expenditures. The data confirm that maintaining and expanding Toronto's route network, alongside investments in airport transit integration, will be critical to sustaining competitiveness in long-haul and overseas markets.

8. STREET LEVEL EXPERIENCE NEEDS STRENGTHENING

Toronto ranks 11th among its peers for transportation and connectivity, with below-average scores in walkability and bikeability. While some key areas offer engaging public spaces, many neighbourhoods lack the pedestrian design and active ground-floor uses that encourage exploration. Visitor surveys identified transit reliability, confusing wayfinding, and safety concerns as barriers to positive experiences. Stakeholders emphasized the need for investments in cleanliness, safety, and placemaking to improve Toronto's global standing as a walkable, visitor-friendly city.

Key Findings

9. PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY IMPACT THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

While Toronto is considered a comparatively safe city within the North American context, qualitative feedback indicates that perceptions of safety, particularly in the downtown core, have become a growing concern. Visible social challenges, cleanliness issues, and inconsistent maintenance of the public realm are frequently cited by stakeholders as detracting from the city's overall appeal. Addressing these perceptions will be essential to ensuring that Toronto maintains its reputation as a welcoming and comfortable destination.

10. STRONG AFTER DARK FOUNDATION WITH ROOM TO GROW

Benchmarking analysis places Toronto third overall among peer cities for nightlife, a ranking supported by the popularity of its bars and live entertainment. Stakeholder consultations reinforced this strength while underscoring the need for greater diversity of programming, extended operating hours, and enhanced safety measures. Recent bylaw changes now create an opportunity to expand nightlife and after-dark programming into more parts of the city, broadening access and dispersing benefits beyond the core. Expanding the city's after-dark economy would lengthen visitor stays, stimulate additional revenue for local businesses, and further establish Toronto's reputation as a dynamic, 24-hour urban destination.

11. A DIVERSE CULINARY SCENE AS A STANDOUT STRENGTH

Toronto is positioned third among peer cities for culinary offerings, ranking behind only New York and Los Angeles. This performance is driven by both the popularity and diversity of restaurants, ranging from MICHELIN-starred fine dining to neighbourhood-based street food. Survey results confirmed that dining and culinary experiences are among the most satisfactory elements of the Toronto visitor experience. Investment in food festivals, culinary districts, and neighbourhood dining can elevate Toronto's position as a global culinary capital.

12. LEVERAGING ART AND CULTURE FOR GLOBAL IMPACT

Toronto ranks third overall for arts and culture, a position reinforced by strong subcategory performance: third among peer cities for museums and galleries, second for theatres and concerts, and third for festivals. This strength reflects the combined impact of flagship institutions such as the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, Massey Hall, and the Aga Khan Museum alongside grassroots cultural spaces that deliver both high-calibre programming and inclusive platforms for creative expression. Stakeholders emphasized that expanding access, supporting year-round cultural events, and investing in emerging creative spaces will be critical to further enhancing Toronto's reputation as a global cultural capital.

Priority Areas

From the findings of the State of the Destination analysis, a series of key priorities were identified to guide the future of Toronto's visitor economy.

Visioning Workshop #4: Events & Programming

KEY PRIORITY ALIGNMENT: Festivals & Events, Neighbourhood & Public Space Activation

Visioning Workshop #1: Multi-modal Connectivity, Wayfinding, & Visitor Information

KEY PRIORITY ALIGNMENT: Transit & Mobility

Visioning Workshop #5: Meetings & Event Competitiveness

KEY PRIORITY ALIGNMENT: Convention Centre District & Downtown Core

Visioning Workshop #2: Investment in Tourism Attractions & Infrastructure

KEY PRIORITY ALIGNMENT: Signature Attractions, Culinary Tourism, Arts & Entertainment, Festivals & Events

Visioning Workshop #6: Sense of Place: Safety, Visitor Information & Activation

KEY PRIORITY ALIGNMENT: Neighbourhood & Public Space Activation, Toronto's Waterfront, Convention Centre & Downtown Core

Visioning Workshop #3: Inclusive Programming that Reflects Toronto's Diversity

KEY PRIORITY ALIGNMENT: Welcoming City, Festivals & Events, Neighbourhood & Public Space Activation

Visioning Workshop #7: Signature Destinations

KEY PRIORITY ALIGNMENT: Toronto's Waterfront, Convention Centre & Downtown Core, Neighbourhood & Public Space Activation, Arts & Entertainment

Priority Areas

Visioning Workshop #8: Pearson Airport District & Development

KEY PRIORITY ALIGNMENT: Pearson Airport District,
Transit & Mobility

Visioning Workshop #9: Workforce Development

KEY PRIORITY ALIGNMENT: Workforce Readiness &
Service Excellence

Project Next Steps

Moving forward, the Toronto Destination Master Plan is now in Phase 4: Destination Strategy Development, the focus is on transforming the research findings and stakeholder insights into actionable strategic recommendations for Toronto's tourism future.

A series of visioning workshops were held in fall 2025, bringing together a cross-section of participants from different sectors and communities.

The workshops represent the cornerstone of this phase, bringing together key stakeholders to collaboratively define Toronto's tourism vision and strategic priorities. These facilitated sessions built upon the research findings to identify the most impactful areas of focus for tourism growth and stewardship over the next decade.

Project Funding

This project is jointly funded by Destination Toronto and the Government of Canada through the [Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario](#) (FedDev Ontario). Destination Toronto is serving as the lead partner and project coordinator.



Executive Summary

Let's Empower Toronto Together.

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