

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF TOURISM FOR MERRITT

CITY OF MERRITT
TOURISM ASSET INVENTORY REPORT
December 2018



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The following list of acronyms and abbreviations will be used throughout this document:

DBC	Destination BC		
GCCS	Gold Country Communities Society	RDMO	Regional Destination Marketing
Organization			
DMO	Destination Management/Marketing Organization	TNFC	Thompson Nicola Film Commission
MNVDMS	Merritt Nicola Valley Destination Marketing Society	ITABC	Indigenous Tourism Association of BC
TOTA	Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association	TAI	Tourism Asset Inventory

Disclaimer:

The asset assessment may not be an inventory of all tourism assets in Merritt. It is an attempt to capture the clear majority of tourism assets using several sources to inform the tourism development process. For example, most tourism assets are listed on the municipal website, in the Merritt Visitor's Guide, the Gold Country Visitor's Guide, HelloBC.com, the TOTA asset inventory for the Nicola Valley and other business directories. These lists were utilized as the foundation of the identification process. Online research went deeper to identify other tourism assets that may not be listed and was done through the lens of a potential visitor. If a tourism business could be easily found through a website search it was included, if it wasn't readily accessible it may have been missed. There is confidence with the consultant that the clear majority of Merritt tourism assets have been captured, therefore providing a solid basis for tourism asset assessment.

"A tourism product is what you buy; a tourism experience is what you remember."

DESTINATION CANADA



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MERRITT IS LOCATED 271 KILOMETERS (168 MILES) NORTHEAST OF VANCOUVER IN THE HEART OF THE NICOLA VALLEY. WITH A POPULATION OF APPROXIMATELY 7,000 RESIDENTS AND A TRADING AREA OF APPROXIMATELY 15,000, MERRITT IS THE HUB FOR TRAVELERS IN THE NICOLA VALLEY AND COMMERCIAL CENTER FOR THE AREA.

According to the Census Canada; 2016 census profile¹, the average age of the Merritt population is 43.9 years old. At one time, the community supported by a vibrant forestry and mining sector and was a popular destination for retirees to settle, however in recent years, tourism has become an important sector to the local economy. In order to align to the opportunities of the tourism industry, considerations to short term and long term planning and implementation must continue, thereby ensuring a more diverse economy. As tourism-related items consist of 20% of the Merritt Economic Development Action Plan, enhancing the industry sectors and providing on-brand tourism products is key to a sustainable tourism industry. The 2013/2014 Tourism Plan was prepared for Merritt and the Nicola Valley through Destination BC's Community Tourism Foundations program and remains a guiding document in tourism strategies and initiatives today.

The primary purpose of the Merritt Tourism Asset Inventory (TAI) project is to build upon existing information relating to the current status, capacity of and business opportunities in Merritt and outlying area within the Nicola Valley. The adoption of a TAI approach aims to accentuate on Merritt's positive assets and thereby direct resources and development efforts in a way that will build and capitalize on these assets¹. An assessment of Merritt and the Nicola Valley tourism related assets is a necessary step to help define what Merritt and the Nicola Valley has to offer in relation to their infrastructure, culture, activities and events that visitors can experience. The Merritt TAI focuses on identifying and documenting the positive assets and resources instead of the needs or inherent problems of the community and region. Through this undertaking, the inventory of these assets provide clarity around where the greatest opportunities are presently as well as identifies gaps and potential for tourism development and promotion.

To better understand the local capacities of Merritt, the TAI also articulates the community assets that are, or could be utilized by residents, businesses and organizations to draw on resources for future development and growth as well as provides stakeholders with a framework to support destination development, planning and marketing of the community and its attributes.

The Merritt tourism asset inventorying process will aid in the ability to showcase all the necessary information of Merritt's man-made and natural attractions, products and services; it will also enable the community to better understand the value of tourism, what makes a community a destination for travelers, and what are its natural, cultural, man-made and historical conditions.

1. Cheryl D. Crowell, "Asset Mapping as a Tool in Economic Development and Community Revitalization: A Case Study of New Richmond, Ohio," (Master's thesis, University of Cincinnati, 2008)

2

INTRODUCTION



TOURISM HAS MANY SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS TO MERRITT AND THE OUTLYING NICOLA VALLEY REGION. MOST BUSINESSES DERIVE SOME BENEFIT FROM VISITORS WHO CAN POTENTIALLY PROVIDE A SOURCE OF INCOME FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES, AND THE TOURISM INDUSTRY HELPS TO SUSTAIN LOCAL SERVICES AND PROTECT THE COMMUNITY ASSETS. IN ADDITION, A WELL-MANAGED TOURISM STRATEGY CAN HAVE POSITIVE IMPACTS ON:

- the opportunity to support local employment, not only supporting local businesses but encouraging an entrepreneurial spirit for new and sustainable businesses
- protecting and enhancing the local assets such as places of interest and the natural environment
- tourism related projects and improvements to local facilities that can enhance the offer of Merritt and the outlying area for visitors and locals

The tourism industry in Merritt plays a significant role by enhancing the prosperity of the local business economy, and by raising public awareness that Merritt and the Nicola Valley is an attractive place to live, work, play and visit. Visitor spending contributes greatly towards the financial success of accommodation, retail, commercial, food and beverage, attractions, outdoor activities and the entertainment sector of the local economy.

The Merritt TAI project takes direction from the broader 2013/14 [Tourism Plan for Merritt and the Nicola Valley](#) and the [Merritt Economic Development Action Plan 2014/2015](#) and dives deeper within priority **7.1.1** of the “Destination Experiences” Strategic Priorities identified in the 2013/2014 Tourism Plan:

7.1.1 Inventory of Destination, Products, Events and Stakeholders

***Objective:** Develop and maintain a local destination inventory of unique features, experiences, tourism products, events and stakeholders that can serve as a research base.*

***Rationale:** In order to quantify, track and evaluate the tourism industry for trend and gap analysis, communications, industry composition, packaging and marketing, an inventory of tourism businesses and features is required.*

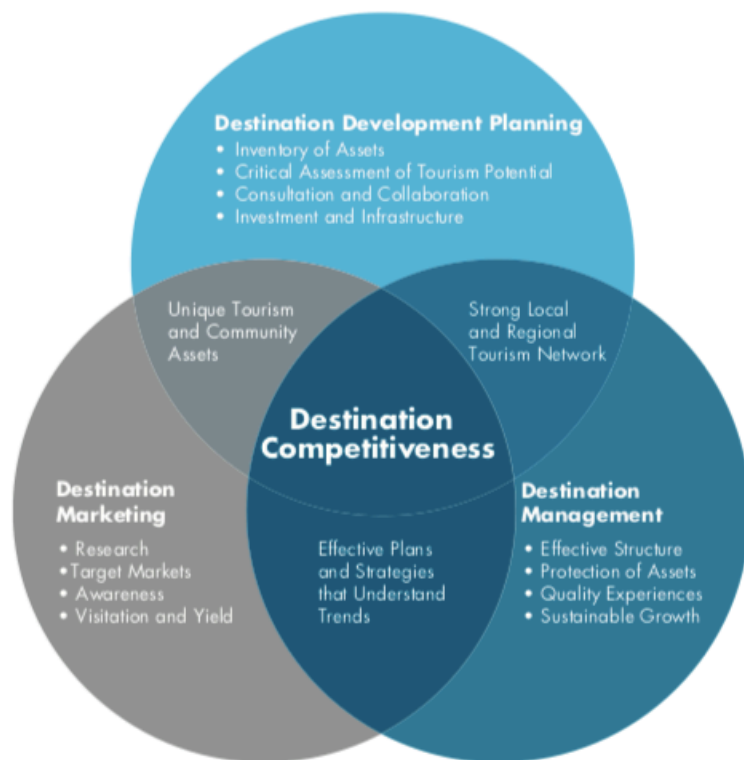
Within this objective, 4 (of the total 55) strategies were developed:

10. Compile data to create a master inventory of destination and operator information
11. Incorporate completed inventory into the official consumer website for the Nicola Valley
12. Create an additional component that would include all organizations directly or indirectly involved in tourism development and marketing. This would include government, community clubs, industry groups and individual operators.
13. Develop a maintenance schedule for the tourism inventory. Ensure the inventory is web-accessible so it can be maintained and updated as a real-time snapshot of the industry.

In the Merritt Economic Development Action Plan, **tourism** is identified as one of the five focus areas designed to stimulate, attract and maintain business activity, investment and employment growth in Merritt and which will have the strongest economic impact on the community. Tourism asset inventory was one of the recommended action steps:

5.2 Asset Inventory

Tourism opportunities within Merritt are not being fully realized. There are a number of tourism attractions, operators and services but there is no coordinated inventory of the actual products available. A community inventory lists categories of tourism products as well as community infrastructure that support tourism. An inventory of these assets will enable a community to review the number, range and quality and also identify any gaps that need to be addressed.



As identified in the World Tourism Organization (WTO) Destination Management Planning Tool, there are three distinctive relationships that work in harmony together in positioning the destination's competitiveness.

- Destination Development & Planning
- Destination Management
- Destination Marketing

Through the tourism asset inventory project, Tourism Merritt is investing resources in *Destination Development Planning*, by identifying the current inventory of assets and critical assessment of the potential of the local and regional tourism industry while also identifying the unique tourism and community assets; thereby better positioning strategic marketing initiatives aimed at the ideal target markets.

Figure 1: Destination Management Planning Tool (Source: World Tourism Organization, 2007)

By identifying tourism assets, this report is designed to introduce recommendations to tourism growth opportunities. In turn, this will lead to the community's ability to maximize existing tourism assets and redeploying resources to initiatives that are uniquely suited to Merritt and the Nicola Valley. Key insight to the current situation provides foundational data, and review of other jurisdictions support the recommended forward direction. Feedback from stakeholders was essential to gain insights and support and as such, government officials, complimentary business organizations, individual business operators and other interested parties were engaged.

The goal of the TAI project is to develop and implement a process that will be executed effectively and efficiently and will play a pivotal role in building economic development through greater contributions to the visitor economy while being in line with current trends, staying relevant to today's visitor and but looking to the future to provide the best opportunities to meet expectations around tourism revenues for Merritt and the Nicola Valley in the years ahead.

This report is organized into the following sections:

Section 1: Executive Summary

Section 2: Introduction to Project

Section 3: Methodology

Section 4: Situation Analysis

This section presents an overview of key trends and issues that are impacting or could impact development and growth for Merritt, including a review of the tourism industry, tourism in the region and community, a market assessment including stakeholder engagement and an updated SWOT analysis.

Section 5: Asset Inventory - This section identifies the demand generators and summarizes the Merritt tourism assets.

Section 6: Best Opportunities and Recommendations for Next Steps - And includes potential sources of funding

Section 7: Appendices

The City of Merritt and Tourism Merritt continue to invest resources in research and strategic plans aimed at economic diversity and growth. Of note, significant effort, stakeholder input and community consultation was undertaken in the development of the Tourism Merritt and Nicola Valley 2013-2014 Tourism Plan, and as such, this report builds off and aligns to the plan with specific focus on the best, most effective approach for the future.

A man in a blue and white life vest and dark shorts is standing on a blue and white inflatable paddleboard, using a black paddle. He is on a calm lake with a forested hill in the background. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright lens flare and reflecting off the water. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The foreground shows the tip of another pink and black paddleboard.

3

METHODOLOGY

The delivery of the TAI project for the City of Merritt was built on an action plan that combines understanding and respecting the community and region as well as its stakeholders, business owners and residents. While the consultant is external to the situation, this assured a broader context of knowledge and specialized expertise was brought to the project while lending an impartial outside perspective.

The project was structured in four strategic phases:



The Merritt tourism asset inventory project represents *Phase 1* of a recommended multi-faceted approach and implementation plan for an updated tourism strategy and compliments the work currently delivered by the Economic Development and Tourism Department of the City of Merritt.

BACKGROUND REVIEW

A wide range of reports and documents were reviewed including the 2013/2014 Merritt Nicola Valley DBC/Community Tourism Foundations Plan, City of Merritt Economic Development Action Plan, City of Merritt Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plan, City of Merritt OCP, City of Merritt Wayfinding Strategy, City Centre Improvement Plan, City of Merritt's Integrated Growth Strategy, DBC Regional Profiles, DBC Sport Tourism Strategy, TOTA Regional Strategy, TNRD Regional Plan, Gold Country Communities Society Business & Strategic Plan, City of Merritt Cultural Mapping Report and various tourism plans of neighbouring and competitive communities.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The consultation process involved one-on-one interviews with 15 stakeholders representing municipal government, Destination BC (DBC), ITABC, TOTA, Gold Country Communities Society, Community Futures Nicola Valley, Merritt and Nicola Valley Chamber of Commerce, Baillie House/Merritt Visitor Information Centre, local tourism industry businesses and services and an online tourism engagement survey in which there were 134 participants.

TOURISM SITUATION ANALYSIS

The situation analysis included; summary of the tourism industry climate from a national, provincial, regional and community level perspective, tourism strengths, weaknesses and opportunities, travel trends relative to Merritt, survey results, interview responses, input from the workshops, current roles and initiatives of Tourism Merritt and identification of other industry initiatives whose goal is to increase awareness and visitation to the destination.

DRAFT and FINAL STRATEGIES

Input from the stakeholder workshop, Open House, survey results, interviews and case studies was used to refine the asset inventory report. A Draft report was submitted for review December 21st, 2018 to ensure input from the Economic Development and Tourism Department of the City of Merritt. The final report was submitted in January 2019 and included a presentation of key findings and recommendations to Merritt City Council.

WORKSHOP and OPEN HOUSE

On December 6th, 2018, a workshop and community open house was conducted; The workshop was extended by invitation to 30 stakeholders consisting of City of Merritt representatives and key industry stakeholders. There were 9 participants. The Open House took place immediately following the workshop and was open to all businesses, organizations and residents in Merritt and the Nicola Valley. There were 14 participants representing a cross section of industry stakeholders. The Open House session added value to the workshop and included opportunities to provide discussion and additional input to the current tourism asset situation, product and servicing gaps and short/long term visioning of tourism development, education and communication.

A person wearing a black long-sleeved shirt, denim shorts, and a grey bicycle helmet is sitting on a black bicycle. They are positioned on a grassy hill, looking through binoculars. The background features a blue sky with scattered white clouds and a concrete retaining wall on the right side of the hill. The foreground is filled with tall, green grass.

4

SITUATION ANALYSIS

4. SITUATION ANALYSIS

4.1 TOURISM INDUSTRY CONTEXT

4.1.1 Worldwide

Tourism is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world with international travel between countries representing the third largest export sector in the global economy. Based on data reported by the UNWTO, international tourism arrivals (ITA's) grew by an overwhelming 7% in 2017, reaching a total of 1,322 million. This momentum is expected to continue in the years to come, at a forecast rate of 4-5% annually.

Looking ahead, it is forecast there will be continued growth in the global tourism industry, growing at a much faster rate than the global economy, providing a source of growth for those countries that are able to attract today's increasingly diverse market of visitors.

The industry's continued growth has also resulted in increased competition among destinations including a rise of deepening diversification and emerging markets; not just travel destinations, but as sources of tourists as well. Asia is now the leading source of international tourists and it is expected to expand and play an increasingly important role in the tourism sector in the coming years.

North America is expected to continue to realize healthy growth, benefitting from increasing demand from Asia and the America's. The shift in exchange rates in recent years and the ability and perception of providing a safe and secure travel destination are considered the current contributing factors to the growth forecast.

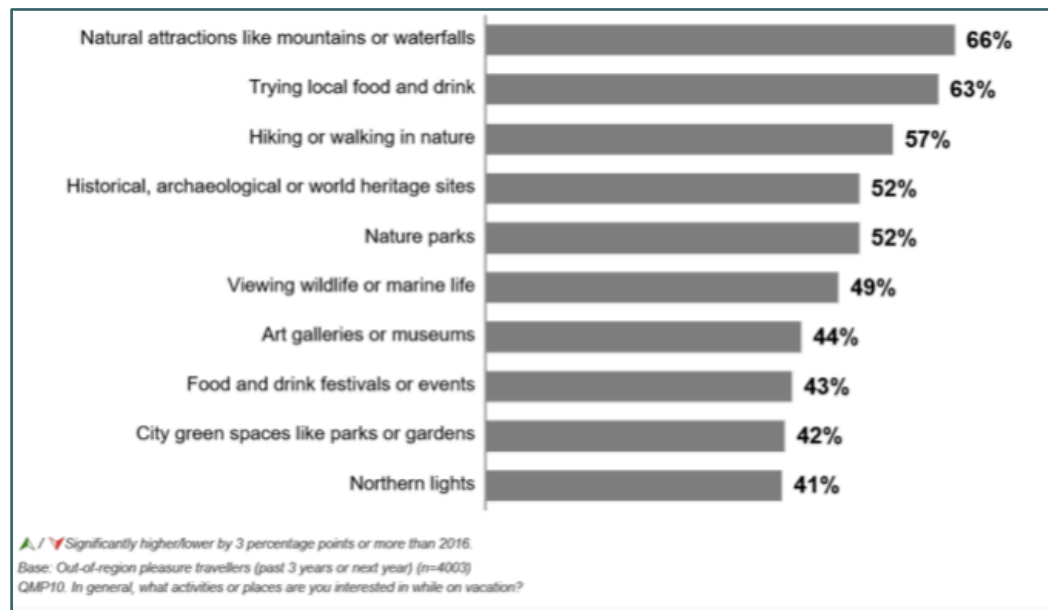
4.1.2 Canada

[Destination Canada](#) identifies tourism as Canada's top service export and in 2017 achieved a record-breaking 20.85 million overnight arrivals, surpassing the previous record set in 2002. Tourism generated \$41.2 billion in gross domestic product (GDP), up 6.3% from the previous year. Total tourism expenditures from domestic and international visitors in 2017 reached \$97.4 billion, also up 6.3% over 2016.

Despite the fact that Canada's current market share is not keeping pace with other countries on the global scale, it remains amongst the top twenty of most visited countries. Increased international visitation, favorable currency exchange rates, increased air capacity to Canada (7%) and increased marketing initiatives have set a platform for continued improvement. The share of international overnight arrivals to Canada from countries other than the United States reached an all-time high of 31% in 2017, up from 19% during the previous peak year of 2002. Overnight arrivals from non-US (overseas) origins (+7.2%) expanded at a pace slightly ahead of global international arrivals as reported by the UNWTO (+6.7%), with Destination Canada's ten overseas markets (+9.1%) expanding at twice the rate as non-Destination Canada markets (4%).

Domestic tourism expenditures gained 6.3% in 2017, which was primarily driven by passenger rail transport (+12.1%), vehicle fuel (+12.0%), passenger air transport (+9.7%) and pre-trip expenditures (+5.8%).

In terms of things to see and do while on vacation regardless of the destination, Canadian travelers are most interested in natural attractions like mountains or waterfalls (66%). A close second is the chance to sample local food and drink (63%). This is followed by other outdoor activities such as hiking or walking in nature parks (57%), visiting historical, archaeological or world heritage sites, and viewing wildlife (49%). Older travelers aged 55+ are more interested in natural attractions and historical sites, they are less interested in hiking or walking in nature, food and drink festivals, nature parks, and Northern Lights. Younger visitors aged 18-34 are the most interested in outdoor activities and renting an RV. The following identifies the Top 10 general activities and places of interest for travelers within Canada from the most recent Destination Canada [Global Tourism Watch](#) (2017).



Improved messaging on accessibility and differentiation of authentic Canadian experiences compared to overseas offerings present opportunities for all destinations in Canada. Additionally, there remains a general interest and demand by visitors within Canada in niche activities with large gaps in participation and wide availability of marketable products. These activities fall into two groups, soft and active activities; there is opportunity to better position these activities as add-ons for different types of Canadian travelers.

Soft Activities:

- Guided airplane or helicopter tours
- Guided train or boat tours
- Guided nature tours
- Culinary tours or cooking classes
- Exploring Aboriginal culture, traditions or history
- Spa or wellness centers

Active Activities:

- Zip lining
- Snowshoeing or cross-country skiing
- Kayaking, canoeing or paddle boarding
- Downhill skiing or snowboarding
- Mountain biking

When in the destination, Canadian travelers continue to show a preference for mid-priced hotels (46%) followed by luxury hotels (19%), and budget hotels (17%). A similar pattern is true among domestic travelers (49% opted for a mid-price hotel, followed by 17% respectively for luxury and budget hotels). Owing to the prevalence of VFR travel, it is not surprising that 13% of travelers overall and 16% domestically stayed with friends and family.

IMPLICATION FOR MERRITT

In terms of activities and experiences, Merritt and the Nicola Valley is well positioned to meet the motivators and demands of domestic travelers.

4.1.3 Current Tourism Climate in BC and Thompson Okanagan Region

BC's tourism sector continues to be a key economic driver in British Columbia. Defined as one of the world's fastest growing industries, the tourism sector in BC is experiencing continuous and rapid growth and is recognized as the top contributor to BC's GDP among the primary resource industries that includes forestry, agriculture, mining and fishing. Despite a competitive global business climate, the long-range outlook for the tourism industry in BC remains positive.

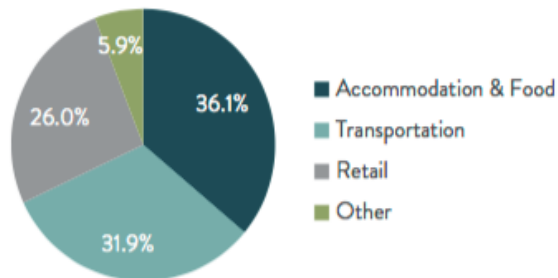
“THE BC CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PERSPECTIVE SURVEY CONDUCTED IN EARLY 2017 RANKED TOURISM AS THE MOST IMPORTANT SECTOR TO BC'S ECONOMY. THE SURVEY OF BC BUSINESSES FOUND THAT ALMOST 90% OF RESPONDENTS FELT BRITISH COLUMBIA'S VISITOR ECONOMY WILL BECOME EVEN MORE IMPORTANT OVER THE NEXT DECADE”.

BC CHAMBER OF COMMERCE NEWS RELEASE, FEB. 2017.

TOTAL TOURISM REVENUE

Tourism revenue measures the money received by businesses, individuals, and governments due to tourism activities. In 2016, the tourism industry generated \$17.0 billion in revenue, a 7.9% increase over 2015, and a 39.3% increase from 2006.

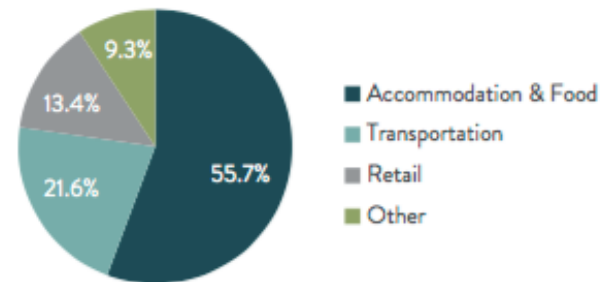
2016 tourism revenue by service area



TOURISM EMPLOYMENT

In 2016, 133,100 people were employed in tourism-related businesses, a 3.6% increase over 2015, and a 16.0% increase since 2006.

2016 tourism employment by service area



The BC economy is diverse and evolving. Built on the foundations of the resource sector, the economy now primarily relies on the service industry (including tourism). The tourism industry continues to play a significant role in the BC economy :¹

The most recent provincial tourism economic impact statistics are available for 2016 and recognize the following highlights.

- In 2015, the economy grew by 3.6%,² which was the highest rate among provinces in Canada and much higher than the national average.
- The tourism industry contributed \$7.9 billions of added value to BC's gross domestic product, an increase of 5.6% from 2015. The economy has been projected to continue to grow in 2017.
- In 2016, there were 19,170 tourism-related businesses in BC, up 1.2% from 2015.
- A total of 133,100 people were employed in tourism-related businesses, a 3.6% increase over 2015 and a 16% increase since 2006. The tourism industry provides 1 out of every 16 jobs in the province. In 2016, the tourism industry paid \$4.7 billion in wages and salaries, up 3.2% from 2015 and a 29.9% increase since 2006.

More recent tourism performance indicators demonstrated that 2016 was the second consecutive year of exceptional growth for the BC tourism industry, with a forecast of additional growth for 2017 and beyond. There was an increase of 12% in total overnight international visitor arrivals. Growth was due to an almost 11% increase in visitation from the United States, 14% growth from the Asia/Pacific and 13% growth from Europe.

Destination BC's *2017 Global Marketing Plan* predicts 2 billion annual international travellers to BC by 2030 and has summarized that to achieve their goals, it is going to rely on partnerships, collaboration and the industry's ability to deliver remarkable experiences that exceed the visitor's expectations.

“STRONG TOURISM PRODUCTS, SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE ARE NECESSARY FOR OUR LONG-TERM COMPETITIVENESS”.

DESTINATION BC, ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN AUG. 2016

¹ Value of Tourism 2016. A Snapshot of Tourism in BC 2016. Destination British Columbia.[https://www.destinationbc.ca/getattachment/Research/Industry-Performance/Value-of-Tourism/Value-of-Tourism-in-British-Columbia-A-Snapsho-\(2\)/Value-of-Tourism-2016-Snapshot_FINAL.pdf.aspx](https://www.destinationbc.ca/getattachment/Research/Industry-Performance/Value-of-Tourism/Value-of-Tourism-in-British-Columbia-A-Snapsho-(2)/Value-of-Tourism-2016-Snapshot_FINAL.pdf.aspx)

By comparison, the Thompson Okanagan region currently ranks third in the characteristics of travellers to the province.

Travel characteristics by region	Total			% change (2013-2014)			Regional share of total		
	Overnight visitors (000s)*	Spending (\$000s)	Nights (000s)	Overnight visitors	Spending	Nights	Overnight visitors	Spending	Nights
All travellers in BC	18,944	\$9,221,492	84,961	1%	2%	5%			
Cariboo Chilcotin Coast	528	\$169,715	1,719	19%	24%	2%	3%	2%	2%
Kootenay Rockies	2,070	\$654,286	6,700	-3%	-10%	-8%	11%	7%	8%
Northern BC	936	\$412,398	4,105	3%	6%	21%	5%	4%	5%
Thompson Okanagan	3,721	\$1,405,721	13,430	-1%	-2%	-3%	20%	15%	16%
Vancouver, Coast & Mountains	9,225	\$4,812,306	43,179	3%	4%	9%	49%	52%	51%
Vancouver Island	4,430	\$1,767,065	15,828	8%	6%	13%	23%	19%	19%

*Please note the visitation of all regions will exceed the provincial total as travellers can visit multiple regions on one trip.

The Thompson Okanagan region covers 94,000 km² of the province, which is characterized by distinctive landscapes that range from desert and arid grasslands to abundant valleys, lakes, forested highlands, and alpine meadows. The population of the Thompson Okanagan region continues to grow and is characterized by an older demographic than the province with 53% aged 45 years or older compared to the provincial average of 46%.

The Thompson Okanagan received 3,721,000 overnight visits in 2014 and generated over \$1.4 billion in related spending. Domestic overnight travelers accounted for 85% of visitation and 83% of related spending. International travelers accounted for 15% and 17%, respectively.

On average, travelers to the Thompson Okanagan region stayed 3.6 nights and spent \$105 per night. BC travelers stayed 3.0 nights and spent \$90 per night during their trip. Other Canadian travelers stayed 4.9 nights and spent \$123 per night.

4.1.4 Tourism in Merritt

At this time, Merritt does not have an official tourism marketing organization or Destination Marketing/Management Organization (DMO) and most destination development and promotion activities currently come under the direction of the Economic Development and Tourism department of the City of Merritt with informal and formal partnerships with TOTA, Gold Country Communities Society and industry stakeholders. Through the guidance of Destination BC's *Community Tourism Foundations Program* and support from TOTA, the 2013/2014 Tourism Plan was prepared for Merritt and the Nicola Valley and remains a guiding document for destination development.



THE PURPOSE OF TOURISM MERRITT IS:

“TO PROMOTE VISITATION TO MERRITT, INCREASE OVERNIGHT STAYS AND HIGHLIGHT TOURISM EXPERIENCES FOR BOTH VISITORS AND LOCALS TO ENJOY”.

Direct contribution to tourist marketing and promotion by Tourism Merritt includes the following

- Annual Merritt Travel Experiences Guide; 15,000 copies
- Tourism Merritt Website and Calendar of Events
- TOTA Experience Guide
- Merritt Visitor Centre at the Baillie House
- Giveaway Contests and Merritt Branded Products
- Promotional Video Creation and Distribution
- Gold Country Communities Society Membership
- Tourism Merritt Mobile Visitor Kiosk
- Merritt Summer Student Ambassador Program
- Tourism Merritt Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and You Tube)
- Print Advertising

Tourism Merritt works with the following in various programs and projects:

- Destination BC
- Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association
- Cariboo Chilcotin Coast Tourism Association
- Gold Country Communities Society
- Indigenous Tourism Association of BC
- Nicola Valley Heritage Society
- Merritt and District Chamber of Commerce
- Merritt and Nicola Valley Destination Marketing Society

In 2012, the Merritt and Nicola Valley Destination Marketing Society was established. Through the MNVMS, two initiatives have been formalized;

[Experience Nicola Valley](http://ExperienceNicolaValley.com) (ExperienceNicolaValley.com) is a program developed from funding received by the Rural Dividend Fund and consists of a team of volunteer bloggers of various lifestyles and passions in the Nicola Valley. Their focus is to inspire, educate and share stories about experiences and things to see and do in Merritt and the Nicola Valley.

The Merritt and Nicola Valley Destination Marketing Society evolved from the Merritt Hotel & Motel Association and today, the not-for-profit Society is primarily funded by a voluntary destination marketing fund (DMF), made up of seven accommodation properties in the City of Merritt. Governance is comprised of a volunteer Board of Directors made up of local accommodation owners/operators and local business representatives.



Launched in May 2018 by the Merritt Small Business Centre, an online marketing initiative nicolavalleyadventures.ca was created to showcase the areas product offerings and to provide additional information about the local community and region.

"We do obviously know that Tourism Merritt already has a website, but their focus is on the Merritt brand and experiences, not on the businesses and hotels that are available, and we want to do both. We want to show visitors the experience from an adventure perspective, and provide a platform for our members to showcase their businesses." – Founder, Kerstin Auer

4.1.5 Merritt Visitor Services and Visitor Statistics Review

In 2018, there was a significant change in the Merritt visitor servicing model. The closure of the Provincial Visitor Centre located at the crossroads of the Coquihalla Highway and Okanagan Connector in 2018 resulted in all visitors being redirected to the Merritt Visitor Centre at the Baillie House for local and regional tourist information. Previously, the Merritt Visitor Centre had offered local support, material and resources for the Provincial Visitor Centre for many years. This change has resulted in a significant increase in the number of visitors to the center of Merritt, providing additional opportunities for Visitor Centre Counsellors to encourage visitors extended stays and increased expenditures in Merritt and the Nicola Valley region.

“OUR STAFF HAS HEARD MANY ANECDOTAL STORIES THAT RESTAURANTS, SPORTS STORES AND THE MUSEUM ARE ALSO EXPERIENCING AN UPSWING IN VISITOR TRAFFIC AND SALES SINCE THE VISITOR CENTRE ON THE HIGHWAY WAS CLOSED.”

– SANDY CURNOW, MANAGER, BAILLIE HOUSE

At the time of this report, there has been an increase of over 27% of the number of visitors to the Merritt Visitor Centre compared to the same periods in 2016 and 2017. Challenges are presented however, with a lack of RV parking and adequate washroom facilities for visitors to this location.

	2017 JAN-DEC	2016 JAN-DEC	2015 JAN-DEC	% Difference 2017/2016
Visitor Parties	13,517	14,321	13,543	-5.6%
Visitors	23,781	24,614	22,515	-3.4%
Tour Buses	6	0	4	

Visitor Stats Third Quarter 2018 vs Third Quarter 2017						
	July 2018	August 2018	September 2018	Third Quarter Total 2018	Third Quarter Total 2017	% Difference - / +
Visitor Parties	2423	2481	1719	6623	5374	+23.2%
Visitors	5044	5094	3156	13,294	10,417	+27.6%
Tour Buses	0	4	2	6	2	+200%

In 2015, Tourism Merritt visited opportunities to enhance visitor servicing, and greeted visitors during the peak visitor season (May to September) at the Canadian Country Music Hall of Fame. This resulted in serving an additional 1,100 visitors that year, and paved the way for a revised program in 2016 with a kiosk and Ambassador Program. The Ambassador and kiosk approach to visitor services is a modernized method that enables flexibility to go to where the visitors of greatest opportunity are and continues to be delivered during the peak visitor season.

For the summers of 2016 and 2018, the kiosk was located on Dewolf Way and for the summers of 2017 and 2018, was located at two key events; Rockin' River and Bass Coast Music Festivals. The program also delivers "Meet and Greet" programs for busses where and when required.

	Hall of Fame	Kiosk	Roaming Ambassadors	Events	Total Number of Interactions
2015 Pop-up Visitor Centre (Country Music Hall of Fame only)	1,107				1,107
2016 Kiosk & Ambassadors	1,272	386	388		2,048
2017 Ambassadors	2,252		793	800	3,672
2018 Kiosk & Ambassadors		1,121	312	1,600	3,033

IMPLICATION FOR MERRITT

The completed process of reviewing tourism and tourism promotion activities in Merritt and the Nicola Valley summarized a lack of understanding from residents, local businesses and industry stakeholders on roles, responsibilities and activities developed and delivered by both Tourism Merritt and Merritt and Nicola Valley Destination Marketing Society (MNVDMS). With limited resources and increased competition from other destinations, a strategy needs to identify the designated official DMO and areas of collaboration and efficiency within Merritt and the Nicola Valley. Where there is leadership, resources and effective practices implemented, a long-term tourism vision for Merritt and the Nicola Valley can be effective and successful.

4.2 MARKET ASSESSMENT

4.2.1 Tourism Industry Trends

Trends that influence the province and region's tourism industry has the potential to affect visitation to Merritt and the Nicola Valley. It is important to understand the current trends as they reflect how people travel, the types of activities that visitors want to participate in and their willingness to pay for them. As with most communities and regions in the province, the tourism industry in Merritt and the Nicola Valley is influenced by a variety of factors including trends that are global, and not in the community's control. Awareness of the current trends are also considerations when identifying the opportunities vs. barriers that guide the directional course.

Environmental Trends

- Increased demand for responsible, eco-tourism
- Increased impacts of climate change (forest fires, floods, etc.)
- Expectations and government regulations in the reduction of carbon emissions

Technology Trends

- Influence and increased use of online booking tools (OTA's, etc.)
- Influence of social media platforms and mobile applications
- Impact of influencers on path to purchase (i.e. bloggers)
- Visitor expectations re: availability of technology resources (i.e. Wi-Fi, fiber optics, etc.)

Tourism Industry Trends

- Increased expectations to collaborate regionally
- Sub-regional and sector development and marketing
- Investment in product development

Social and Cultural Trends

- Growth in baby boomer market, interested in travel
- More demand for inclusiveness

- Adjusting to new markets (millennials, multi-generational, etc.)
 - Emerging global middle-class travelers
- Influence of lifestyle values vs. destination

Economic Trends

- Unstable exchange rates; may determine destination
- Rising fuel costs
- Household debt

Competition Trends

- Increase in number of DMO's
- Increased resources available to DMO's
- Increased competition between tourism destinations
- Increased competition between sectors (i.e. fishing, mountain biking, etc.)

Tourism Business Trends

- Increased number of vacation rentals (Airbnb, etc.)
- Growing dependence on domestic markets
- Volatility of global and domestic political arenas and agendas
- Changes to roles and responsibilities of DMO's

Trends also include visitor revenues, forecasts of visitor growth, size and growth of different types of experiences (e.g. golf, ski, heritage and culture, indigenous, wine and food), which are not reflected in this project and report.

4.2.2 Travel Trends Relative to Merritt

The following is an overview of current travel trends that are relative to Merritt, and provide an introduction to where the opportunities may be in development or expansion of tourism assets.

TRAVEL TRENDS	DESCRIPTION	OPPORTUNITY
Shorter Trips, Closer to Home	For several years, rising costs of fuel and the lower Canadian dollar has realized people are taking more frequent and shorter trips closer to home. This trend is expected to continue over the next couple of years and both Gold Country and TOTA align marketing strategies to this ongoing trend.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Work with accommodation providers and businesses to develop packages for “staycation” travelers. ○ Identify target markets and develop messaging and marketing strategies to reach these various markets.
Immersing in Culture and Heritage	History, arts and culture remain a key attraction for visitors and forms an important part of a tourism experience. DBC research concludes visitors to BC search for authentic experiences that enable them to understand and become familiar with the people, places and events that make a community or region different.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Work with Merritt Arts Council and Theatre Society in awareness and growth of product offering. ○ Work with indigenous community to educate and encourage First Nations product development.
Discovering Untouched and Unique Places	While major hubs and regions draw in vast tourism numbers, today’s visitors are showing a desire to explore beyond, into the perceived rural or suburban areas to experience unique places offering authentic experiences including “living as a local”.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop and promote suggested itineraries that include product offerings unique to Merritt & Nicola Valley. ○ Work with accommodation providers and businesses to develop themed packages aimed at identified target markets.
Spas and Wellness	People are becoming increasingly aware of healthy lifestyles and more travelers are including preventive health and healthy-aging holidays in their travel plans. Education on diet, exercise and holistic treatments are services most sought after in this niche market trend.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Educate accommodation providers and businesses on preventive health/healthy-aging trends and encourage investment or expansion and/or packaging with their product.
Themed Routes	Circle routes and corridors e.g.: BC: Gold Rush Trail, Ale Trail, Route 97, Alaska Highway, Kettle Valley Rail, Circle Farm Tour Alberta: Cowboy Trail Ontario: Butter tart Trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue to align Merritt and the Nicola Valley promotion activities with GRT and KVR. ○ Work with neighboring communities and regions to develop new themed routes and corridors delivering new product experiences; historical, indigenous, cultural, agricultural, etc.

		For example: Agriculture, Artisans & Rodeo Tour.
All-Season Destinations	In efforts to remain competitive as well as support accommodators during the shoulder seasons, destinations are focusing promotion tactics on “all-season” activities and experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Merritt and the Nicola Valley is well positioned to be an ideal destination to outdoor enthusiasts seeking experiences and activities year-round. ○ Support business expansion to include equipment rentals catering to outdoor activities. Ensure Merritt visitor services and stakeholders have up to date information.
Niche Product Offerings	<p>Identifying niche product offerings connects the destination and its community to visitors who appreciate the experiences that only your place can provide. Examples include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agri-tourism 2. Astro-tourism 3. Film tourism 4. Equine tourism 5. Luxury eco-lodge accommodation 6. Cannabis tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Encourage and support horse-back riding opportunities and market region to equine target market ○ Identify farm-gate locations and evaluate market readiness for visitors ○ Work with TNFC to identify and promote popular film locations ○ Develop a regulatory framework including policies for the development of cannabis tourism, to be aligned with provincial regulatory framework.

4.2.3 Best Practices and Organization Reviews

Tourism Dawson Creek and Destination Campbell River

Business Model: Fee for Service contract agreement with municipalities and contractor/service providers
Product: Outdoor Adventure (fishing and wildlife viewing), heritage & culture (Alaska Highway corridor, indigenous product), RV and Touring
Location: British Columbia

In 2017, both the City of Campbell River and the City of Dawson Creek pursued opportunities to invite submissions for proposals from qualified proponents for the provision of managing and operating their city's destination marketing and visitor information services. Both municipalities entered in to a Fee for Service contracts that provided a legal framework for the joint strategies of providing services.

The RFP process enabled their Selection Committees to source the most suitable service provider that could meet the strategic objectives of the municipality, be at arms-length of municipal government while offering visitors excellent tourism and visitor services and could market and promote their city's businesses, attractions and events. Proponents were rated on their ability to provide:

- Company history and background in providing similar services;
- Explain how tourism and visitor servicing would be provided;
- Identify innovative ways to destination marketing and visitor servicing;
- Staffing complement for the operations;
- Collaborative partnerships with other community organizations;
- Method, processes, and standards to be followed;
- Amount of assistance and support expected from City staff and resources;
- Draft operating budget with projected costs, operating budget, proposed fee schedule, sources of revenue, etc.

The five-year Fee for Service contracts include sustainable governance and funding models as well as details to Terms of Reference and Terms of Agreement; funding for the organizations slightly differ. *Destination Campbell River* receive \$250,000 annually from the City of Campbell River and funds from the 3% accommodation tax (approximately \$250,000 annually), with the expectation for the service provider/contractor to seek additional funding opportunities and leveraging funding.

The City of Dawson Creek provides *Tourism Dawson Creek* with approximately \$450,000 annually from their general revenue. Tourism Dawson Creek leverages its funding to obtain supplemental program funding while also generates revenue through retail sales.

The municipalities are the governing authority and are guided by their appointed Tourism Advisory Committees.

Destination Campbell River:	Service Provider: <i>Destination Think</i>	Approx. Annual Budget: \$600,000
Tourism Dawson Creek:	Service Provider: <i>Spectra Comcast Spectator</i>	Approx. Annual Budget: \$450,000

Gold Country Communities Society

Business Model: Not-for-Profit, membership based
Product: Outdoor Adventure, heritage & culture (Gold Rush Trail, indigenous product), touring
Location: British Columbia

Gold Country Communities Society is a not-for-profit sub-regional destination marketing organization (DMO) that represents a current 12-member base; Ashcroft, Cache Creek, Clinton, Lillooet, Logan Lake, Lytton, Merritt, and TNRD Area E (70 Mile, Green Lake, Loon Lake), Area I (Hat Creek, Spences Bridge, Walhachin), Area J (Savona, Tunkwa Lake, Deadman Valley), Area M (Upper and Lower Nicola, Quilchena, Douglas Lake) and Area N (Brookmere, Aspen Grove). Their mandate is to increase economic development and tourism for the Gold Country region. The organization offers services to an area of approximately 9000 sq. miles. The organization recently adjusted their focus and is no longer the managing contractor for the Village of Cache Creek Visitor Centre.

Since its incorporation in 1991, the GCCS has provided a framework for their participating communities and stakeholders that enable national, provincial, regional and local marketing and industry development and has most recently been guided by the adoption and implementation of the Gold Country 2018-2022 Business & Strategic Plan. The organization is funded through several revenue streams that include membership fees, grants and fee-for-service agreements.

Approximate Annual Budget: **\$175,000**

Shuswap Tourism

Business Model: Department within Columbia Shuswap Regional District and Economic Development
Product: All-season outdoor Adventure, RV and touring
Location: British Columbia

Shuswap Tourism is a department within the Columbia Shuswap Regional District and Economic Development. Shuswap Tourism is a community based destination management and marketing organization (DMO) which assists in tourism development and marketing and promotional services for tourism businesses and operators within the geographic boundaries of Chase, South Shuswap, North Shuswap, Enderby, Salmon Arm, Sicamous, and CSRD Electoral Areas C, D, E, and F. These services promote the long-term development and marketing of the Shuswap region to increase visitation for recreational, leisure, or business purposes.

Shuswap Tourism is primarily funded through the Municipal Regional District Tax (MRDT) at a level of 2% as well as various grants and leveraged opportunities through DBC. Their annual budget is included in the Economic Development annual budget, however, it does not a stand-alone budget for Shuswap Tourism.

Approximate Annual Budget: **\$540,000**

Tourism Kamloops

Business Model: Not-for-profit Destination Management Organization (DMO)
Product: Sport and Event Hosting, golf, agri-tourism, All-season outdoor Adventure
Location: British Columbia

Located 87 kilometers from Merritt, (via BC-5N) is the city of Kamloops. Tourism Kamloops is the organization responsible for destination marketing on behalf of the Kamloops tourism industry and the City of Kamloops. Since 2005, tourism in Kamloops has evolved significantly to position itself to become an attractive, affordable and accessible getaway, targeting outdoor enthusiasts, families, athletes and “weekend warriors”. The tourism industry in Kamloops welcomes approximately 1.8 million visitors annually and generates \$449 million in economic value. The projected 2018 accommodation revenues for Kamloops is \$60 million.

In 2018, Tourism Kamloops re-branded their tag line to “*Boldly Unscripted*” and included the launch of a new website. Tourism Kamloops concentrates their marketing efforts strategically through 5 sectors; mountain biking, biking, fishing, golf, sport & tournament and winter adventure; which is aimed at driving visitation during the shoulder tourism months

Approximate Annual Budget: **\$1.84 million**

Tourism Chilliwack

Business Model: For-profit Organization, part of the Chilliwack Economic Partners Corporation (CEPCO)
Product: Fishing, mountain-biking, hiking, agri-tourism, Sport and Event hosting, indigenous product
Location: British Columbia

Established in 1998 as part of the Chilliwack Economic Partners Corporation, the organization was created to forge a partnership between the City of Chilliwack and the tourism industry, to promote growth and diversification and to increase the economic impact of tourism to the local economy. Tourism Chilliwack is a non-traditional DMO responsible for marketing and promotions as well as the day to day operations of the Chilliwack Visitor Centre. The organization also has a business function; with a fee-for-service agreement to operate Chilliwack Heritage Park and is the official Flag Shop retailer and representative for the community and region.

Tourism Chilliwack is one of the 3 founding DMO’s that collaborated in Destination BC’s Co-op Marketing Program, initiating “The Fraser Valley” in 2013. Today, the collaboration has expanded to include *Advantage Hope* and is currently reviewing additional opportunities with neighboring destinations to grow the campaign and program in 2019.

Approximate Annual Budget: **\$600,000**

LESSONS LEARNED FOR MERRITT

An official destination management or marketing organization requires an in-depth review of the community’s internal and external assets and available resources to deliver effective and efficient initiatives, programs and services for their community and visitors. Demonstration of results as well as excellent collaboration and communication between key stakeholders are primary indicators of success.

5

ASSET INVENTORY



5.1 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

As part of the stakeholder engagement process, a Tourism Asset survey was distributed throughout the community and the Nicola Valley with a return of 134 respondents. The objective of the survey was to gather perspective and opinions about the status of the tourism industry in Merritt and to capture observations and ideas regarding the future of tourism development opportunities. In addition a workshop and Open house was held in the community on December 6th, 2018. Email invitations were sent to 30 industry stakeholders and social media and newspaper advertising promoted the event. The objective of the session was to seek additional input on the survey results and to identify the community's awareness and support for opportunities in destination development and growth.

In summary, feedback from the sessions determined there is a range of opinions on what motivates visitors to Merritt and the Nicola Valley as well as the extent of the current product and service offerings however, there is support and recognition that tourism can play a vital role in diversifying the local economy; strengthening and growing the local businesses in return. A complete summary of the survey review, including highlights of comments, is captured in Appendix ii. It is important to note that the statements in the summary represent a cross section of individual opinions and not consensus.

In addition to the workshop and Open House, one on one telephone interviews and in-person meetings were held with the following industry stakeholders as sources of information:

City of Merritt
TOTA

Destination BC

Indigenous Tourism Association of BC
Nicola Valley Community Futures
Vision Merritt
Gold Country Communities Society
Merritt and District Chamber of Commerce
Baillie House/Merritt Visitor Information Centre
Thompson-Nicola Film Commission
Nicola Valley Explorer's Club
Ministry of Forests Lands, Natural Resource
Operations & Rural Development

Will George, Manager of Economic Development & Tourism
Ellen Matthews, Vice President, Destination & Industry Development and
Simone Carlisle-Smith, Managing Director
Heather Boyd, Manager, Remarkable Experiences and
Seppe Mommaerts, Manager, Destination Development
Sharon Bond-Hogg, Secretary
Manuel Olguin, Business Development Officer & Mae Ketter, CEO Coordinator
Amber Papou, Coordinator
Marcie Down, Executive Director
Meagan Preston, Executive Director
Sandy Curnow, Manager
Victoria Weller, Film Commissioner
Tom Reynolds, Member
Greg Hodson

5.2 MERRITT and NICOLA VALLEY TOURISM ASSET INVENTORY

To understand the supply and distribution of the community's tourism resources, an inventory of tourism products, attractions, features, amenities and services was undertaken.

The tourism asset inventory has been developed to provide the City of Merritt and Tourism Merritt with a fulsome picture of the tourism assets that exist in the community and outlying area. This includes demand generators; assets that independently draw visitors into the community and region, as well as supporting infrastructure; the assets that may not attract visitors, but are necessary to support their visit or their stay; i.e. accommodation.

To achieve the goal of the inventory, the focus is on assets that attract visitors to the community and region. This was not to diminish the importance of supporting assets that ensure that visitors have access to necessary services during their visit or stay. Examples of supporting assets that may be used by visitors to the region, but would not be classified as a 'tourism asset' for the purposes of this project's inventory, are businesses providing services primarily used by residents (e.g. gyms, banks, real estate offices, fast-food enterprises etc.), and big box stores, and chain restaurants that are also found in communities outside of the region.

The development of the inventory entailed an analysis of the existing tourism assets and is complemented by information gathered from provincial (DBC), and regional (TOTA) organizations data bases, regional community destination marketing organizations, Merritt Visitor Services, online listing platforms, as well as consultation with community stakeholders. To guide the process of inventory development, Destination BC's [Tourism Asset Mapping Inventory](#) template was incorporated, however, tailored and personalized to better suit the community. This table provides a summary of categories and inclusions/exclusions as well as identifies the initial direction to the inventory development. A complete inventory of Merritt tourism assets can be found in Appendix i.

TOURISM PRODUCT CATEGORIES	INCLUSIONS	EXCLUSIONS
ACCOMMODATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All accommodations that are for visitors. Inventory includes hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, specialty resorts, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Short-term vacation rentals identified in airdna.co (3 "hosts")
CAMPGROUNDS & RV PARKS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provincial campgrounds ○ Private campgrounds ○ Forestry recreation sites (Fee and no fee) 	
SPORT, EVENT & MEETING ROOM FACILITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Facilities with capacity to host sport, meetings and special events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Meeting places and public places not suitable for large groups. ○ Local sport fields, ice rinks that cater to local resident programs
PARKS, RECREATION SITES & NATURAL AREAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Parks with facilities/amenities/attractions that attract visitors from outside of the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Neighborhood parks and others that primarily cater to residents.

	<p>region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Nature parks, Forest trails, conservation areas, regional and provincial parks. 	
FESTIVALS & EVENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Annual cultural events aimed at local and out of town attendees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Craft fairs, concerts, fund-raisers aimed at residents
HERITAGE, ARTS & CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Buildings/attractions with historical/heritage links, that provide a historical service. E.g. museums, historic experiences etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Buildings with heritage status that are not used for a heritage/history-based use. ○ Arts & cultural attractions in planning stages.
OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All outdoor activities and outdoor experiences available to visitors year-round ○ Hiking and interpretive trails ○ All golf courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Outdoor activities primarily supported by residents.



Merritt's most significant strengths and opportunities lay in its scenic and natural landscapes, deep rooted history and cowboy culture theme, diverse arts and culture scene as well as its geographic location at the convergence of Highways 97, 97C and Highway 5 (the Coquihalla Connector). The community is also strategically located within close proximity to the Lower Mainland of BC, and its proximity and ease of access to the other regions within the province. Merritt hangs it's hat with the reputation of being known as the *Country Music Capital of Canada* and as a result of this recognition, benefits from attractions and events that support this.

5.3 BARRIERS TO DEVELOPMENT and GROWTH

Barriers to the future development and growth of tourism as it relates to the current industry assets in Merritt and the Nicola Valley should also be taken in to consideration.

Connection and Collaboration

It is essential that proponents in the tourism industry work together in collaboration to support the industry opportunities including development and growth. While it is important for tourism businesses to be viable, market ready and sustainable, industry proponents should also be aware that collaboration and working together to promote Merritt and the Nicola Valley will increase awareness, increase visitation and result in an overall stronger and sustainable visitor economy.

Collaboration is healthy and more productive than focusing on individual product offerings. Merritt and the Nicola Valley is supported by both natural and man-made attributes. It is a unique and historical part of the Thompson Okanagan tourism region; however, it is not unique to other parts of the province or nation. Continued collaboration with sub-regional initiatives such as Gold Country, and identification of opportunities with other regional initiatives that are aligned with TOTA and the CCCTA (i.e. Kettle Valley Rail and Gold Rush Trail) programs will be key.

Product Offerings

Tourism proponents in Merritt and the Nicola Valley must review their offerings from a visitor perspective, i.e. festivals and events entrance and exit fees, business hours of operation and accessibility. Attention should be given to visitor feedback and negative feedback should be reviewed, addressed and adjusted accordingly. Over promising and under delivering are obstacles in destination development. Industry providers should understand the significant role of review platforms, in particular, **Trip Advisor** and update product offerings in information distribution channels as well as respond to reviews on a regular basis.

Additionally, Destination BC's [*HelloBC*](#) program is under-utilized by Merritt industry stakeholders, with only a few Merritt accommodation properties, experiences and recommended activities listed.

Enhancing the Community Brand

Merritt's community brand should deliver on its most competitively appealing assets in the eyes of its prospective visitors and build its story from these assets that set the destination apart from its competitors. This narrative should run consistently through all promotion, communication and marketing initiatives. Ideally, it also means that the residents and stakeholders "frontline ambassadors" should reflect the destination's brand values.

There remains conflicting messaging with Merritt recognized by visitors and residents as the *Canadian Country Music Capital of Canada* and *A Lake a Day as Long as You Stay*.

Silo Effect

Marketing and promotion of Merritt and the Nicola Valley is generally scheduled year to year. The Baillie House Visitor Centre is funded in part by the City of Merritt, however, the infrastructure may not meet the continuous demands and expectations of the visitor. The municipality's Tourism Merritt has great initiatives such as their social media platforms, Ambassador program and website, however, there are silos of communication that may confuse the visitor and potential visitor. Breaking through silos is a necessary requirement in order for the destination to be competitive and relevant.

Support and Respect

The community and region is home to many industry pioneers who have both broken ground in tourism development and have implemented plans for future development. These product and service providers offer many opportunities for alignment and promotion and provide a holistic approach across Merritt and the Nicola Valley as a tourism destination. The available wealth of knowledge and experience of tourism from professional bodies, advocates and successful tourism industry businesses should be embraced and coordinated in an effective manner.

Product Market Readiness

The City of Merritt TAI is guided by Destination BC's [Market Ready Standards](#), however, this report does not include a value ranking system or assessment on the level of standards of the identified assets. In keeping with the future goal of increasing visitation, the length of stay and the ability to encourage increased spending, consideration should be given in identifying the market readiness of the assets, thereby demonstrating future opportunities.

Destination BC's *Market Ready Standards* are broken down into 3-categories of "readiness" to assist tourism-related business operators:

Visitor Ready: Refers to a business that has all their licenses, permits and insurance in place to operate legally.

Market Ready: Refers to a business that markets to potential visitors in the planning stages, communicates with potential visitors year-round, and is ready to accept advanced reservations.

Export Ready: Refers to a business that markets to and through travel trade distribution sales channels, understands commission or net rate pricing, agrees to trade bookings and a cancellation policy.

A detailed description of the *Market Ready Standards* can also be found in Appendix ii.

Wayfinding and signage

Visitor-centric wayfinding and signage has been identified as an ongoing challenge and requires improvements and enhancements.

5.4 GAP ANALYSIS

PRODUCT TYPE: ACCOMMODATIONS	
CURRENT STANDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Diverse mix of 16 fixed roof hotels and motels, primarily concentrated within two distinct areas of the city ○ Approximately 525 rooms ○ Includes 6 branded properties, 10 independent, 7 resorts/lodges/ranches and 2 B & B's. ○ Several properties (7) participate in a voluntary destination marketing fund (DMF), contributing funds to the Merritt & Nicola Valley Destination Marketing Society
DEFICIENCY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of bed and breakfast accommodation properties in Merritt and the Nicola Valley region ○ Limited accommodation at “ranch-style” properties ○ Low occupancy rates during shoulder season
DESIRED GOAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure increased and updated information of accommodation providers to HelloBC ○ Educate and encourage accommodation providers with value of Trip Advisor and online reputation mgmt. ○ Research demands for bed and breakfast accommodation and encourage further expansion of product ○ Provide accommodation listings in Merritt & Nicola Valley Experiences Guide for additional promotion ○ Increase demand for accommodation during shoulder season periods
PRODUCT TYPE: CAMPGROUNDS and RV PARKS	
CURRENT STANDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Two private campgrounds/RV Parks within the city limits of Merritt, 4 in total in the Merritt & Nicola Valley region ○ Campgrounds/RV Parks are at capacity during peak visitor season ○ Visitors arrive to Merritt and region assuming campground/RV Parks can accommodate ○ Difficulty in securing provincial campsites due to current booking/reservation process (annual sell out) ○ Trend of frequent out-of-town RV'ers and campers from the lower mainland using Merritt storage units to store recreational vehicles and equipment during off season
DEFICIENCY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Not enough private campgrounds and RV Parks in Merritt and the Nicola Valley to meet demand
DESIRED GOAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increased availability of number of campgrounds and RV parks in Merritt and the Nicola Valley ○ Increased promotion of camping availability at Forestry Recreation Sites in the Merritt and Nicola Valley region

PRODUCT TYPE: SPORT, EVENT and MEETING FACILITIES	
CURRENT STANDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Home to oldest BCHL Hockey Team – Merritt Centennials ○ Capacity to host regional meetings, tradeshow and conferences ○ Main hosting facilities limited to Aquatic Centre, Arena, NVIT Gym and Civic Centre
DEFICIENCY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of services to support large meetings and/or events (i.e. catering)
DESIRED GOAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increased awareness of Merritt and the Nicola Valley as a desirable host to regional meetings and events ○ Increase # of regional multi-sport events focused on community/region strengths (i.e. fishing derby, mountain bike races, cross-country skiing, etc.) ○ Supporting services in place to meet demands and expectations of meeting and event organizers ○ Capacity to host meetings, events and small conferences of 500+ attendees
PRODUCT TYPE: PARKS and NATURAL AREAS	
CURRENT STANDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2 Provincial Parks offering 178 campsites ○ Approximately 60 Forestry Recreation Sites, offering 512 RV and campsites (48 sites no-fee, 12 sites \$12.00 daily fee). ○ Provincial parks and recreation sites include infrastructure for all-season outdoor activities
DEFICIENCY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provincial campsites are booked to capacity for the season, usually on opening day for reservations ○ Many Forestry recreation sites have limited accessibility for RV's and vehicles, and require four-wheel drive vehicle access ○ Lack of knowledge from visitors on availability and access to recreation sites
DESIRED GOAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increased promotion of recreation sites to visitors ○ Improved access to rustic recreation sites ○ Resource protection and management processes in place

PRODUCT TYPE: FESTIVALS and EVENTS	
CURRENT STANDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Diverse mix of annual Festivals & Events; music, rodeo, country fairs, car rally, exhibitions, etc. ○ Festivals and Events delivered year-round ○ Signature Festivals and Events draw visitors primarily from the region, the province and parts of Alberta ○ Most attendees to music festivals include on-site camping
DEFICIENCY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of events celebrating First Nations culture ○ Limited knowledge of Merritt & Nicola Valley for festival and event attendees ○ Limited collaboration between festival and event planners and local businesses ○ Lack of awareness of pre/post festival and event activity opportunities for visitors ○ Outdated information on community Calendar of Events
DESIRED GOAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Extended overnight stays and daily expenditures from festival and event attendees ○ Consistent, updated content on community Calendar of Events ○ Increased communication to potential and returning visitors attending festivals and events on Merritt and the Nicola Valley ○ Increased opportunities to meet and greet festival and event goers
PRODUCT TYPE: HERITAGE, ARTS and CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS	
CURRENT STANDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Recognized as Canadian Country Music Capital of Canada ○ Deep rooted history of region and community ○ Passionate and dedicated volunteers supporting history, arts and culture sector ○ Region is home to Canada's largest working ranch – Douglas Lake Ranch
DEFICIENCY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Limited indigenous product offerings ○ Lack of product aligned with market trends; i.e. cultural or historical trails, packages, ○ Lack of understanding from sector on value of tourism and value of market readiness
DESIRED GOAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Enhance the city's arts, culture & history experiences ○ Determine level of market readiness on tourism assets; work with TOTA to further develop tourism industry businesses and operators market ready standards ○ Enhance and increase indigenous tourism product and experience offerings ○ Fruition of proposed Community Theatre project

PRODUCT TYPE: OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES	
CURRENT STANDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All-season destination, with diverse blend of product offerings for all levels of recreation ○ Approximately 150 km. of hiking trails and 60 km. of groomed trails for winter (cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, sledding). ○ Community and region renowned for mountain-biking, ATVing and world-class fishing & hunting ○ Locals promote “A Lake a Day as Long as You Stay”, based on 200 lakes within a one hour drive of Merritt ○ Dedicated volunteer base (Merritt Mountain Biking Association, Naturalists Club, Sled Merritt, etc.)
DEFICIENCY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of outdoor tour guides/operators ○ Lack of businesses offering equipment rentals (boats, canoes/kayaks, fishing rods, etc.) ○ No dedicated source of information on all outdoor activity opportunities in Merritt & Nicola Valley
DESIRED GOAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Enhance the city’s position as a regional hub and gateway to outdoor activities and experiences ○ Enhance communication tools aimed at messaging to outdoor enthusiasts ○ Coordinated and integrated approach to marketing and promotion of outdoor activities ○ Educate local businesses and industry stakeholders on the value of tourism ○ Encourage business development and expansion dedicated to providing value to outdoor enthusiasts (i.e. guides/operators and equipment rentals).

Merritt’s tourism resources are the built and natural assets and infrastructure that facilitates visitor experiences and are enhanced by the setting and natural environment. Collectively, the tourism assets are the community’s competitive advantage and is the base on which Merritt has sustained its current tourism industry, in preparation for its growth.

5.5 CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

The following have been identified as the critical success factors that contribute in the ability to progress tourism development, while the key restraints have been identified as factors that are currently impeding both the nature and the rate of progress in building or strengthening tourism asset inventory in Merritt and the Nicola Valley.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

- Geographic location and ease of access to region
- Country-themed, country-music character of community
- Access to wealth of outdoor, all-season activities
- Vibrant arts & culture community
- Reputation for hosting signature Festivals & Events
- Passionate and dedicated volunteer base
- Growing population, luring younger demographic residents
- Municipal support for tourism industry development & growth
- New indigenous tourism product offerings
- New business ventures to meet demands of residents and visitors

KEY CONSTRAINTS

- Community and region was a popular destination for retirees; tourism not identified as economic driver
- Lack of understanding from stakeholders, businesses and residents on the value of tourism
- Resources; staffing levels and funding for tourism development and initiatives
- Competition from neighboring DMO's



5.6 STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES & THREATS

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diversity of natural and man-made assets and potential to develop further• Geographic location, serving as a hub for activities and events and entry point to outdoor experiences• Interest and desire to grow tourism• Favorable economic climate for tourism growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fragmentation in destination development and marketing structure• Lack of a coordinated brand and vision for tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pursuit in educating residents and stakeholders in the value of tourism• Further development of the community and region's under-realized tourism activities and experiences• Alignment and strengthening of tourism leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continued silo effect• Limited resources to demonstrate tourism opportunities and further develop potential for Merritt and Nicola Valley to serve as a hub for unique experiences, activities and events



5.7 COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE and UNIQUE ASSETS & SELLING PROPOSITION

Merritt continues to diversify their economy and tourism is becoming an increasingly important industry. The diversity of the vast landscapes, natural settings and history and culture makes the region appealing to visitors and provides the foundation of the regions ability to deliver on a variety of experiences; from outdoor activities to authentic historical and cultural experiences that are found in historic sites, museums, attractions and events.

Of note, these unique assets and selling propositions can also serve in the development of marketing and promotion initiatives and recommended associated imagery/video that will leverage in motivating travel to Merritt and the Nicola Valley.

THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS OF THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED THE CURRENT FOUNDATION OF MERRITT AND THE NICOLA VALLEY UNIQUE ASSETS AND SELLING PROPOSITION.

- *Country Music Capital of Canada; Canadian Country Music Hall of Fame*
- Country Music Walk of Stars
- Region is home to Canada's largest working ranch – Douglas Lake Ranch
- Rich and diverse representation of the history, culture and arts – museums, heritage sites, self-guided walking tours and festivals/events contribute to and enhance the local experience.
- Authentic country/cowboy culture experiences that include accommodation at specialty and working ranches and year-round activities and events that support this culture
- All-season outdoor activities for all levels of participation and enjoyment
- *"A Lake a Day as long as you Stay"*

IMPLICATIONS FOR MERRITT

By enhancing current assets, seeking new opportunities and differentiating its products, services and experiences, Merritt can distinguish itself from competitive destinations, while complimenting the overall visitor experience within the region and encouraging return visits.



6

OPPORTUNITIES & NEXT STEPS

6. BEST OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

DESTINATIONS TODAY ARE CRAFTING EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES THAT PROVIDE VISITORS WITH UNIQUE, ENTERTAINING, AND/OR EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES THAT MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR THEM TO HAVE A PERSONAL CONNECTION TO THE COMMUNITY AND ITS PEOPLE AND MERRITT AND THE NICOLA VALLEY REGION IS WELL POSITIONED TO BUILD UPON ITS CURRENT TOURISM ASSETS AND STRENGTHS.

Recognizing that Tourism Merritt is embarking on identifying the current situation as well as new opportunities in tourism development and promotion, consideration has been given to the understanding that trying to be “all things to all visitors” does not result in the desired goals and return on investment. The following recommendations are prioritized and realistic.

Based on the understanding of current resources, the assumption is that a tiered approach is required. An approach that manages expectations, and accepts the capability and capacity limitations in the near-term for industry and the community and region, and will be the most effective over the long-term. Recommendations are identified in a phased approach and have been developed for the;

- Immediate Term (2019)
- Mid-term (2020)
- Long-term (2021 and beyond)

Recommendations are focused on three primary areas:

1. Collaboration
2. Industry Development
3. Product/Experience Development

Recommendations are presented by:

- A. **A Key Finding**, written as a statement or fact, capturing an important observation.
- B. Based on the analysis of available information of each key finding, a **summary** statement describing the findings follows. Each **Recommendation** is outlined in a series of actions with appropriate performance metrics and timing and suggested network/partnership.

RECOMMENDATIONS & FINDINGS: IMMEDIATE-TERM (2019)

KEY FINDING #1:

If Merritt and the Nicola Valley wants to differentiate itself within BC and the Thompson Okanagan tourism region, as well as strengthen its unique identity and visitor experiences, it is important that there is business and community support for the strategic directions of Tourism Merritt and there is participation in specific initiatives that could impact and benefit Merritt and the Nicola Valley businesses.

RECOMMENDATION: IMPROVE TOURISM COLLABORATION

Responsibility: City of Merritt, Tourism Stakeholders, TOTA, Gold Country Communities Society

Proactively collaborate to efficiently leverage tourism opportunities in Merritt and the Nicola Valley. In particular, define the roles and responsibilities of Tourism Merritt and MNVDMS and communicate to tourism industry stakeholders to ensure that efforts are streamlined, thereby avoiding any duplication and ensuring that current gaps can be addressed. Working cooperatively allows organizations to use their financial and human resources most effectively. It is important to share the results of the Tourism Merritt Asset Inventory and stakeholder survey with the local community and use this as a catalyst to elevate the understanding of the importance of tourism to the local economy.

ACTION	PERFORMANCE METRIC	POTENTIAL NETWORK
1. Build understanding and agreement to roles and responsibilities to support and move forward the Merritt TAI.	Present Merritt Tourism Asset Inventory report and findings to City of Merritt Council, early 2019.	City of Merritt Tourism Merritt
2. Establish an effective destination leadership model to ensure a recognized destination management/marketing organizational structure i.e. Tourism Merritt.	Work with the City of Merritt and industry stakeholders to develop and implement an agreement and understanding that identifies a recognized destination marketing/management organization. Details include the working relationship, expectations, roles, responsibilities and deliverables.	City of Merritt TOTA Gold Country Communities Society MNVDMS Community Futures Nicola Valley
3. Enhance industry communications to tourism industry stakeholders where Tourism Merritt is the liaison.	Present annual industry updates to Merritt Council. Deliver industry updates to industry stakeholders on a quarterly basis. Increase industry communication on social media platforms.	City of Merritt Destination BC TOTA Gold Country Communities Society Tourism Merritt

KEY FINDING #2:

There is an overall lack of understanding on the value of tourism to Merritt and the Nicola Valley from residents and businesses, and as a result, many of the tourism assets in the community and region are underdeveloped; i.e. lack of market readiness to attract and service guests and provide them with unique and memorable experiences. There is an opportunity to provide various levels of industry training to develop the skills; from basic to more advanced training to investment in or enhancement of business operations that support the tourism industry, thereby enhancing the overall tourism appeal of Merritt and the Nicola Valley to visitors and residents.

RECOMMENDATION:

PROVIDE BUSINESSES AND POTENTIAL INDUSTRY OPERATORS WITH TOURISM SPECIFIC TRAINING

Responsibility: City of Merritt, Tourism Merritt and active involvement from tourism stakeholders

Take a proactive role in facilitating and participating in tourism industry product and servicing development.

- Identify training needs & initiate training/education opportunities targeting tourism business owners, event planners and operators.
- Product development involves creating opportunities to inform and educate residents, businesses, potential investors and operators on the aspects that are specific to the tourism industry.
- Tourism market readiness training, tourism experience development and education on online presence (i.e. FB, IG, YouTube, Trip Advisor) are examples of industry development.
- Education and training in the service industry relates to customer service and overall exceptional visitor experience.
- Leverage the expertise of local industry associations and interest groups to deliver specific industry training.
- Leverage the programs and services of Destination BC, Go2HR, Community Futures and the Chamber of Commerce who offer and deliver training and development programs.

ACTION	PERFORMANCE METRIC	POTENTIAL NETWORK
1. Work with key industry stakeholders to identify training requirements that align with industry demands.	Identify existing training opportunities currently delivered by other organizations. Determine opportunities to deliver, co-host or promote existing programs to business owners/operators. Number of businesses, operators and residents participating in industry training	DBC TOTA Go2HR Merritt Chamber of Commerce Community Futures Nicola Valley

2. Provide owner operators with knowledge and skills to update their own websites, leverage social media and Trip Advisor presence.	Owner-operators, especially accommodators and attractions participate in social media and TripAdvisor training and have active accounts in place by January 2020.	Merritt Chamber of Commerce
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KEY FINDING #3:

At present, Merritt and the Nicola Valley tourism stakeholders have limited resources to advance tourism. To the community's advantage, there are supportive and valuable partners who are open to collaborative efforts designed to raise the competitiveness and appeal of the destination as well as support promotion to ideal markets.

RECOMMENDATION: STRATEGICALLY ALIGN WITH TOURISM AGENCIES AND OTHER GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

Responsibility: Tourism Merritt

Once lead tourism organization roles and responsibilities are defined and understood for Tourism Merritt, work proactively with Destination BC, TOTA, Gold Country Communities Society and regional First Nations to leverage and influence tourism development. Tourism asset development and growth that are aligned with DBC and regional initiatives will have greater opportunity for success and may require less resources.

ACTION	PERFORMANCE METRIC	POTENTIAL NETWORK
1. Update Merritt and Nicola Valley Tourism Plan	A revised, five-year Merritt & Nicola Valley Tourism Plan will identify opportunities for industry growth and aid in aligning tourism assets with target markets.	TOTA Tourism Merritt
2. Communicate and deliver results of DBC Destination Development Highway 1 Corridor Research and Plan to Merritt and Nicola Valley stakeholders.	Number of Merritt and Nicola Valley businesses and stakeholders participating in DBC Destination Development Program.	DBC TOTA Tourism Merritt
3. Regularly engage with tourism industry stakeholders to ensure support and participation in key initiatives.	Develop and deliver semi-annual information exchange sessions to industry stakeholders. Spring and Fall, 2019	Tourism Merritt TOTA Gold Country Communities Society Local First Nations Band offices Local Industry Associations

4. Participate in key provincial and regional tourism industry events to ensure communication and information gathering.	Attend TIABC AGM Attend TOTA AGM Participation in DBC/TOTA Destination Development Program	Destination BC TIABC TOTA CCCTA Gold Country Communities Society
4. Ensure regular communication with other key public agencies and City of Merritt departments who play a role in maintenance/operations of infrastructure that is important to visitors (i.e. trail maintenance, signage, road/highway maintenance, preservation of heritage and conservation areas, etc.)	Tourism Merritt to conduct semi-annual information exchange meetings with industry stakeholders.	City of Merritt Tourism Merritt

RECOMMENDATIONS & FINDINGS: MID-TERM (2020)

KEY FINDING #4:

Through a focused approach to destination development and management, it is recommended that resources be directed at further developing assets that a. differentiate Merritt and the Nicola Valley from other destinations and b. enhance the market readiness of the tourism product and service offerings. This focus will continue to develop in future Merritt and Nicola Valley Tourism Plans.

RECOMMENDATION: ENHANCE MERRITT AND THE NICOLA VALLEY TOURISM OFFERINGS THROUGH TOURISM PRODUCT AND EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT.

Responsibility: City of Merritt, Tourism Merritt and active involvement of related industry stakeholders.

Develop and initiate strategies focused on:

- Product and experience development
- Partnership opportunities

ACTION	PERFORMANCE METRIC	POTENTIAL NETWORK
1. Determine market readiness of current tourism asset inventory, working with DBC <i>Market Ready Standards</i> guidelines.	Number of <i>Visitor Ready, Market Ready</i> and <i>Export Ready</i> tourism assets in Merritt and the Nicola Valley.	DBC TOTA Tourism Merritt
2. Conduct research to better understand Merritt & Nicola Valley target markets.	Identification of key target markets that align with tourism assets.	TOTA Gold Country Communities Society Tourism Merritt
3. Provide owners and operators with knowledge and skills to update their own websites, leverage social media and Trip Advisor presence.	Deliver Online Reputation Management Workshops to industry owners and operators. Provide Tourism Business Essentials to industry owners and operators.	DBC Gold Country Communities Society Merritt Chamber of Commerce
4. Encourage existing accommodators to ensure their product meet visitor demands and expectations. Educate property owners on the value of property enhancements. Explore packaging offerings between accommodation and industry product providers.	Increased occupancy Increased daily average rate Increased revenues to local businesses	
5. Support the development of new and existing tourism businesses that offer rentals for visitors (i.e. boats, canoes/kayaks, fishing gear).	Through gap analysis and Merritt Visitor Centre reports, identify opportunities for local businesses to expand product and service offerings.	SDIT Community Futures Nicola Valley FishBC
6. Support industry associations and encourage improvements and/or enhancements to recreational sites and trails, expanding from seasonal to all-season accessibility.	Statistical evidence identifying number of trail users.	Ministry of Forests Lands, Resources and Rural Development Merritt Mountain Bike Association Sled Merritt Nicola Naturalists Society
7. Enhance Tourism Merritt website to include all-season outdoor activities, historical, arts & cultural activities, testimonials from visitors and influencers and additional links to relevant product and service offerings.	Increase in number of followers on FB, IG, Twitter. Increased visitation to website and web page views.	Tourism Merritt

RECOMMENDATIONS & FINDINGS: LONG-TERM 2019 – 2021*

Identification of recommendations for the long-term (2019-2021) will be dependent on several factors that include, but not limited to, the success of strategies and actions developed and implemented in 2019 and 2020, ever-changing demands and expectations of the visitor, market trends and the measured success and ROI to tourism-related businesses, operators and stakeholders. Due to a lack of available, and up-to-date research, information 2018 actuals (with the exception of visitor statistics), the following recommendations and action steps are presented given current market conditions and alignment to the expectations of both Tourism Merritt, the municipality and the Nicola Valley region.

KEY FINDING #5

Adequate and aesthetically pleasing infrastructure is critical to delivering quality visitor experiences and forms a platform for private sector investment in the tourism sector. Community beautification, parking, public washrooms and public spaces in both urban and rural locations require continued attention and conservation.

RECOMMENDATION: PRIORITIZE AND INITIATE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE ENHANCEMENTS

Responsibility: City of Merritt, Nicola Valley industry stakeholders, Merritt Chamber of Commerce and support from local business community. The City of Merritt, through the Economic Development Department should lead a process to identify areas within the community that require ongoing attention and enhancement that relates to tourism functionality. This includes visitor servicing, parking, public washrooms, streetscape aesthetics, signage and wayfinding and maintenance. This attention makes Merritt a desirable destination to visitors and encourages them to stop, to extend their stay, to spend and to encourage others to visit and to return.

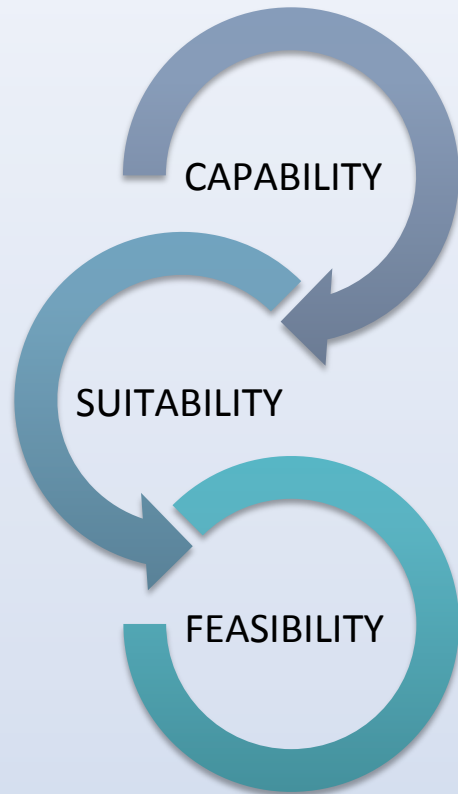
ACTION	PERFORMANCE METRIC	POTENTIAL NETWORK
1. Ensure the tourism industry remains identified as priority economic drivers in the Merritt OCP, Parks & Recreation Plan (including facilities, conservation and trail development), transportation, signage & wayfinding, Downtown Revitalization/Beautification projects.	Number of new tourism-related business licenses in Merritt and Nicola Valley	City of Merritt Merritt Chamber of Commerce

2. Review Merritt visitor services programs and access if model including location and amenities meet the demands of visitors and supporting businesses.	Number of visitors and demographic profiles of visitors to Baillie Visitor Centre and statistics from seasonal kiosk and Ambassador Program. Number of inquiries and requests from visitors utilizing visitor services Number of online visitor requests for information	City of Merritt Historic Baillie House
3. Identify opportunities to expand or enhance facilities that support sport, event and meeting/conference market segments and their ability to attract and host more regional, high quality activity.	Increased hosting from the community and region will increase visibility to Merritt and the Nicola Valley's natural and man-made assets, generate additional visitor spending and create additional employment opportunities.	City of Merritt Local sport associations Local event organizers

** Some planning activities will need to happen prior to 2021.*

6.2 ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

In an effort to move forward, and after review of the current tourism asset inventory and recommendations identified in this report, the City of Merritt and its stakeholders should also determine whether Merritt has the capacity to move forward, the resources in place to proceed, an updated Tourism Plan for Merritt and the Nicola Valley, identification of their target markets and their ability to align the products and services that support the demands of the marketplace and the visitor.



CAPABILITY

What do we have?

- What is possible with our natural, man-made and cultural resources?

SUITABILITY

What will we share?

- What is appropriate or desired in our community and region?

FEASIBILITY

What do our guests want?

- What is economically suitable?

MERRITT TOURISM INDUSTRY SNAPSHOT

BENEFITS OF TOURISM TO MERRITT

- Economic diversification
- Cultural preservation
- Recreational & educational facilities
- Industry growth; retail, entertainment, food services
- Enhance transportation corridors and road access
- Tax revenues
- Entrepreneurship
- Innovation and diversification
- New business investment
- Modernization
- Pride of place



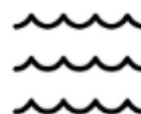
2 Provincial Parks and over 60 Recreation Sites, with approximately 700 RV & campsites, plus 150 km of trails, compliment the region's natural assets.



Over 525 Fixed Roof Hotel & Motel Rooms to accommodate all leisure and business demands.



Country Music
Capital of Canada.



200 lakes within a
one hour radius.



All major BC
highways
lead to Merritt.



Gateway to the
Okanagan &
Cariboo Chilcotin.



MERRITT, AND THE NICOLA VALLEY, IS AN ALL-SEASON DESTINATION, DELIVERING WORLD-CLASS OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES FOR ALL LEVELS OF ENJOYMENT.

77% of Merritt resident survey respondents feel tourism is critically important to Merritt's economy.

*Source: Stakeholder Survey
November 2018*

DISTANCES TO MERRITT & THE NICOLA VALLEY

Vancouver - 268 km | Hope - 85 km



Ashcroft - 68 km | Cache Creek - 114 km



Kamloops - 87 km | Kelowna - 113 km



Shuswap Lakes Region - 195 km



RESOURCES:

1. Destination Canada [Destination Canada 2017 Canada Public Summary Report](#).
2. Destination BC [TOTA Regional Profile](#).
3. Baillie House, Merritt Visitor Centre Statistics Review
4. Backroad Mapbooks – Thompson Okanagan BC, 4th Edition
5. Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations – sitesandtrailsbc.ca

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF FUNDING:

1. Destination BC; Co-op Marketing Program
<https://www.destinationbc.ca/getattachment/Programs/Regions-Communities-and-Sectors/Destination-BC-Co-op-Marketing-Program/DBC-CoOp-Application-Guidelines-v3-FINAL.pdf.aspx>
2. Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association
<https://totabc.org/programs/>
3. Creative BC
<https://www.creativebc.com/programs/development-funding/interactive-fund>
4. Hosting BC – Via Sport
<https://www.viasport.ca/grants>
5. Province of BC; Employment, Business and Economic Development. BC Rural Dividend Program
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/economic-development/support-organizations-community-partners/rural-economic-development/rural-dividend/how-to-apply-2>
6. Western Economic Diversification of Canada
<https://www.wd-deo.gc.ca/eng/16.asp>
7. Community Futures British Columbia
<https://www.communityfutures.ca>
8. Southern Interior Development Initiative Trust
<https://www.sidit-bc.ca/apply-funding/>
9. Federal Gas Tax Strategic Priorities Fund
<https://www.ubcm.ca/assets/Funding~Programs/Renewed~Gas~Tax~Agreement/Strategic~Priorities~Fund/2017-SPF-Application-Package.pdf>
10. Farm Credit Canada <https://www.fcc-fac.ca/en/we-finance/agribusiness-agri-food.html>
11. Service Canada [Canada Summer Jobs Program](#)



7

APPENDICES

APPENDIX:



Market Ready Standards

Destination BC in partnership with the tourism industry developed a set of market ready criteria to assist BC's tourism industry to remain competitive with other national and international tourism destinations. The Market Ready Standards have been broken down into 3-categories of "readiness" to assist tourism-related businesses in progressively increasing the quality and professionalism of their operation.

Visitor Ready

These criteria are used to determine if a tourism supplier is ready to offer "visitor ready" product to consumers.

Visitor Ready: Refers to a business which has all of their licenses, permits and insurance in place in order to operate legally.

Criteria

The following criteria must be met if a business is to be classified as "visitor ready". The business must:

- Maintain good standing of all applicable business licenses, insurance, and legislative requirements.
- Maintain a staffed business location with a set schedule of operating hours.
- Provide a contact telephone number or email contact year-round. If closed for season, provide automated response through voicemail and or email.
- Have branded on-site signage.

Comments:

This is the basic level required to legally conduct business in a British Columbia community. Meeting this standard means the operator/facility qualifies for a business listing, but not necessarily cost-shared promotions.

Market Ready

These criteria are used to determine if a tourism supplier is ready to offer "market ready" product to consumers.

Market Ready: Refers to a business that markets to potential visitors; communicates with potential visitors year-round, and is ready to accept advanced reservations.

Criteria

The following criteria must be met if a business is to be classified as “market ready”. The business must meet visitor ready criteria plus:

- Provide a published pricing policy.
- Have a published consumer billing, payment, and cancellation policy.
- Have marketing materials such as brochure, rack card or website.
- Have site based parking in close proximity.
- During operating season, maintain a 24-48 hour response time; or less, to inquiries and a 24 hour response time to reservation/booking requests.
- Be prepared to communicate and accept reservations by telephone, fax and/or e-mail and provide same day confirmation of booking arrangements.
- Have high resolution images and video footage for promotional and training purposes
- Have frontline staff who are trained in customer service (such as WorldHost® or equivalent customer training program)
- Be an active stakeholder or eligible to become a stakeholder of your local tourism association.

Comments:

This is the basic level of readiness to conduct tourism operations. Meeting this standard means the operator/facility qualifies for a business listing, is entitled to participate in cost-shared promotions for local and regional markets, and is entitled to participate in out-of-province marketing programs, but not overseas markets and/or the travel trade.

Export Ready

These criteria are consistent with Destination BC’s export ready standards and are used to determine if a tourism supplier is ready to offer “export ready” product to international markets.

Export Ready: Refers to a business that markets to and through travel trade distribution sales channels, understands commission or net rate pricing, agrees to trade bookings and a cancellation policy.

Criteria

The following criteria must be met if a business is to be classified as “export ready”. The business must meet “visitor and market ready” criteria plus:

- Be in business at least one year, with a proven track record for safe and professional operation.
- Demonstrate an adequate budget and marketing plan that includes international tourism operators.
- Understand the roles played by receptive tour operators, tour operators, travel wholesalers, and retail travel agents and understand rack or retail pricing, agent commissions and wholesale net rates at each level.
- Be willing to include receptive tour operators in your marketing and sales plan and provide contracted wholesale net rates to receptive tour operators.
- Provide detailed pricing and program information to tour operators and wholesalers at least one year in advance of selling season.

- Be prepared to set up billing arrangements with the tour operator, wholesale agency or receptive tour operator.
- If you plan to pursue group business, ensure you are able to accommodate and adapt to the needs of the market (e.g. tour bus access and parking, washroom facilities, maximum group size, group pricing, and frontline staff that speak the language of your target markets).
- Carry adequate insurance (discuss this with your receptive operator as sometimes they can add suppliers to their existing policies at nominal cost).
- Provide support (free or reduced rates) for international media and travel trade familiarization tours.
- Offer currency exchange rates consistent with industry norms.

Comments:

This is the highest level of readiness required to reach overseas markets. Meeting this standard means the operator/facility qualifies for a business listing and is entitled to participate in all cost-shared marketing programs including programs directed at overseas markets and/or the travel trade.

