



Labrador Straits Tourism Summit

Wednesday, Oct 30, 2024 from 9am-5pm
Northern Light Inn, L'Anse au Clair, NL



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Labrador Straits Tourism Summit

Summary Report of Workshop Plenary Discussions

Four Workshop Tables (~8 participants). Four Questions posed to each table with the following plenary report of discussion.

Summary Report Pages 2-5; Summary of Priorities and Planned Actions Page 6; Plenary Reports Pages 7-14.

1. Collaboration and Partnerships

The discussion focused on building stronger partnerships across the Labrador Straits to encourage a collaborative approach to tourism that would benefit all stakeholders and communities:

- **Diverse Representation:** Attendees noted the importance of diverse voices, representing various geographic areas and organizations. This inclusivity helps to ensure that different community perspectives and needs are considered, making collaboration more balanced and effective.
- **Communication and Information Sharing:** Regularly sharing updates on tourism initiatives, such as new packages and products, among stakeholders was seen as essential. For instance, distributing shared tourism packages to visitor services and front-line staff can enhance the visitor experience and ensure that all communities benefit.
- **Regional Mindset Over Community-Centric Thinking:** Planning at a regional level, rather than focusing only on individual communities, was emphasized. A unified regional strategy could lead to more cohesive tourism development and marketing, benefiting the Labrador Straits as a whole.
- **Volunteerism as an Opportunity:** Engaging volunteers from different communities can strengthen connections and help tackle operational challenges, especially for smaller communities with limited resources.
- **Tourism Networking and Education:** Municipalities need to view tourism as a priority industry. Hosting familiarization (Fam) tours for local front-line staff can transform them into ambassadors who can directly influence visitor experiences and encourage tourism spending.
- **Need for a Leadership Role in Communication:** To keep all stakeholders aligned, a central leader or organization should be responsible for regular communication and coordination. This leader could organize periodic meetings to discuss challenges, share resources, and update plans.

2. Barriers and Challenges

The primary barriers to tourism development in the Labrador Straits were identified as infrastructure limitations, seasonal issues, and the need for enhanced collaboration:

- **Accommodation and Housing Constraints:** Accommodation shortages are a significant barrier, with available rooms often being used for staff housing during peak seasons. Participants noted that seasonality exacerbates these issues, as demand fluctuates, leaving rooms empty in the off-season.
- **Expanding to Shoulder Seasons:** Extending tourism into shoulder seasons could attract more visitors year-round, but this requires additional staffing and community buy-in. Increased training for front-line staff and support for seasonal employees could facilitate a year-round industry.
- **Transportation and Accessibility:** Road conditions on the Quebec side and ferry schedules are major issues, as they affect visitor access and ease of travel in the region. Ferry schedules need to be more adaptable to tourism peaks, enhancing both resident and visitor experiences.
- **Meeting Independent Traveler Needs:** Most marketing and infrastructure cater to bus tours, yet there is an opportunity to engage more independent travelers and small groups. This might involve developing products tailored to individual travelers and supporting small businesses to cater to unique, personalized experiences.
- **Food Quality and Service Options:** Improving the quality and variety of food services available to tourists could enhance visitor satisfaction. There is a need for more food providers offering high-quality, culturally rich products to appeal to tourists.
- **Support for RV Travelers:** Increasing numbers of RV travelers require specific services, such as RV parks with amenities. These travelers represent an opportunity for local businesses to capture additional revenue.
- **Lobbying for Policy Changes:** Working together to lobby the government for critical changes, such as improved ferry service and tourism infrastructure investment, could help address these persistent challenges. Participants noted the value of sharing insights from studies, like the Accommodations Study, to inform these efforts.

3. Labour Challenges

Labour shortages and workforce development emerged as key issues, with participants brainstorming ways to create a skilled, passionate tourism workforce:

- **Attracting and Retaining Workers:** Labour shortages directly impact the quality of visitor services, and attracting a reliable workforce has been challenging. Encouraging retirees to work, along with engaging newcomers, changes to Old Age Security clawbacks, were all suggested as a strategy to bring in more staff.
- **Mentorship and Small Business Passion:** Business owners could mentor new staff, instilling in them a passion for tourism and small business. This mentorship might help employees see tourism as a rewarding career, potentially improving retention.
- **Improving Perceptions of Tourism Careers:** Tourism work is sometimes viewed as a career. Changing this perception by offering living wages and career growth opportunities could attract a broader range of workers and encourage them to stay.
- **Educational Integration and Youth Engagement:** Integrating tourism, history, and culture into school curricula could foster a tourism-friendly mindset from an early age. Summer employment programs and initiatives that promote tourism as a viable career path were also seen as important.
- **Community Strategy for Labour and Housing:** Labour challenges in tourism are intertwined with housing and community integration. A community-wide approach to addressing these challenges, such as providing housing and social integration support, may improve worker retention.
- **Advocacy for Tourism-Focused Immigration:** Participants discussed the potential for tourism-specific immigration pathways and temporary worker programs to attract workers who are passionate about the industry and interested in long-term residence in the area.

4. Business Sustainability and Profitability

Building sustainable, profitable business models in the tourism sector involves adapting to new technologies, collaborating locally, and diversifying offerings:

- **Technology as a Cost-Saving Tool:** Leveraging technology, such as artificial intelligence (AI), can help businesses cut costs and improve efficiency. However, training in the correct use of AI tools is necessary to maximize these benefits.
- **Local Business Support Networks:** Local businesses supporting each other through partnerships or resource-sharing arrangements was encouraged. Cross-promotions and shared resources can help small operators reduce expenses while creating a stronger regional tourism experience.
- **Product Diversification and Market Expansion:** To reach broader markets, businesses should consider customizing their products to appeal to different demographics, such as residents or niche groups within the tourism market. This approach could help fill gaps during off-peak seasons.
- **Responding to Visitor Feedback and Trends:** Monitoring visitor feedback and staying aware of industry trends were noted as essential for adapting products and services to meet new demands.
- **Encouraging Local Tourism in Shoulder Seasons:** Marketing campaigns that encourage locals to explore the region during the shoulder seasons can help sustain business in slower times. Adapting Employment Insurance (EI) policies to be more flexible could support businesses and workers in managing seasonal fluctuations.
- **Youth Engagement and Social Media Use:** Engaging youth through volunteer hours and tapping into their social media expertise could help raise awareness about local tourism offerings and attract younger audiences.
- **Connected Community Initiatives:** Businesses that are actively involved in and connected to their communities were seen as more resilient and likely to succeed long-term. Creating marketing campaigns to encourage longer visitor stays and highlighting community-driven tourism experiences were suggested as strategies to increase visitor spending.
- **Revenue Loss from RV Travelers:** It was noted that the region might be losing revenue from RV travelers who are not paying for services. Providing specific services for these travelers could capture additional revenue.

Summary of Priorities and Planned Actions

The recent discussion on strengthening tourism in the Labrador Straits generated valuable insights and highlighted key challenges, opportunities, and barriers along this visitor route. As we work together to build a collaborative, vibrant, and sustainable tourism season, both during peak and off-peak periods, *continued engagement and strategic action* will be essential.

The next step is to prioritize key actions and establish a clear path forward through stronger partnerships across the region.

A follow-up session(s) prior to the peak summer season of 2025, will **focus on refining these priorities** and developing **a regional action plan**, ensuring a coordinated approach to maximizing tourism opportunities and enhancing the visitor experience.

Active participation in this session will be essential, bringing together a core group of tourism stakeholders:

- community representatives
- government partners
- Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador (HNL)
- and other key industry collaborators.

Their collective expertise and commitment will help drive meaningful progress in strengthening tourism in the region.

Workshop Round Table Plenary Reports

Question 1 Collaboration and Partnerships

Question: How can we encourage and strengthen local partnerships across the Labrador Straits to ensure collaboration remains central to our tourism development, fostering shared growth and resilience for all communities/stakeholders in the region?

- Representation at the table was varied – mix was encouraging from a geographical standpoint to an organizational stand point
- Making a concerted effort to understand and know what we are collectively up to – communication and info share amongst stakeholders
- Shared tourism package for distribution – packages and new product to visitor services and frontline staff
- Interactions between VICs – digital dissemination of information
- Feeding into planning and management processes – like what PC has asked the community to do during the session
- Our thinking and planning need to be regional – instead of community based
- Volunteerism as an opportunity
- Need to find the common links among our communities and regions
- Regionality and tourism networking – municipalities need to recognize tourism as a priority
- Cohesive regional plan and not just at the organizational level
- Educate benefits of tourism
- Local Fam tours – front line training; they can become ambassadors and drive visitation to tourism operators – flexibility in visitor schedules
- Regular meetings for stakeholders – challenges and opportunities
- Communication is key – needs a leader

Question 2 Barriers and Challenges

Question: What are the primary barriers to tourism development in the Labrador Straits, and how can local stakeholders work together to overcome these challenges?

- Accommodations and housing – using accommodations for staff housing, peak season vs. low season.
- Opportunity for shoulder season – winter extension. Fall and spring
- Staffing is a challenge for extension of season
- Staffing and permanent residency and fast tracking is challenging for amalgamation to the community. More likely to stay if new Canadians have more time to integrate into community
- Transportation – Quebec side of the road
- Visitor experience – ensuring they have the information they need for planning and booking.
- Main theme at capacity at bus tours and accommodations
- Staffing – accommodations
- Ferry – can schedule be adapted to meet the reality of year-round service and peak-season demand
- Focus on marketing to independent travellers
- Develop product that responds to smaller groups and independent travellers
- Supporting entrepreneurship that responds to those
- Quality food services – lack of food but then layer on the need for quality product and food experiences
- RV travellers – need places to stay, services for them
- Seasons have broadened out – visitors arriving earlier in May and extending to Thanksgiving week, increased traffic from Labrador City/Goose Bay in shoulders – opportunity for anchor attractions to be open
- Neighboring regions may be at capacity
- Lobbying and encouraging investment
- Small population – challenges to improve and expand
- Business retention and planning
- Local community and stakeholders need to work together better to help address the challenges
- Sharing of information from the Accommodations Study is needed
- Concerted effort around lobbying gov for changes to the Ferry Schedule
 - Changes to user mix during summer high season

Question 3 Labour Challenges

Question: Labour Challenges: How can we address labour shortages and strengthen workforce development for tourism in the Labrador Straits to ensure skilled, passionate teams are available to deliver quality visitor experiences?

- Shortages of labour
- Quality of visitor services and local knowledge
- Attraction of retired workforce, newcomers – changes to regulations around old age claw backs
- Business owners in terms of a mentorship and helping staff understand the passion for tourism and small business
- Changing perception of careers in tourism and the need to address living wages
- Bringing tourism, history and culture and introducing that into school curriculum
- Student summer employment programs and equity in non-profit 50% vs for-profit 100% support
- Supporting your local community leaders
- Challenges are similar across rural Canada –resources and best practices to share
- The labour challenges are not just labour challenges but are also housing, community – strategy for addressing issues
- Ownership models, co-operative developments
- Advocacy on immigration pathways
- Tourism focused temporary worker programming

Question 4 Business Sustainability and Profitability

Question: How can tourism businesses in the Labrador Straits create sustainable, profitable models that support long-term growth and economic resilience for operators and local communities?

- Technology as ways to save money – use of AI
- Local business needs to support local business, create partnerships to support one another
- Using AI tools correctly – need training i.e., community sector council
- Where can businesses look to share resources – cross pollination
- Create more diversified offers to reach markets other than bus tour – can you customize product for local markets to fill gaps
- Better understanding on feedback that visitors want to give
- Imp of business adapting and responding to current trends of smaller groups, independent visitors
- Augmenting shoulder seasons to encourage residents to travel as well
- Youth and leveraging volunteer hours, using their social media
- Shared booking systems
- Technology adoption – supports exist – need to avail of programs that would be
- EI adaptation for shoulder season
- Addressing quality might allow to increase revenues
- Businesses should be connected to community
- Lost revenue from RVs who do not pay for service
- Marketing campaigns to encourage longer stays

Workshop Round Table Plenary Reports cont'd

Question One re Collaboration and Partnerships

Question: How can we encourage and strengthen local partnerships across the Labrador Straits to ensure collaboration remains central to our tourism development, fostering shared growth and resilience for all communities/stakeholders in the region?

Table 1

Concentrate efforts to better know what we do to have information like brochures and maps which allow partners to have local information. Provide farm tours to build awareness within the region and consider further training and sharing of information annually prior to May 31 each year. Digitize information to be shared with the visitor information centres, local businesses and provide interaction and opportunities for tourism employees to have the information available for networking.

Table 2

Regional thinking and volunteerism drive economic and tourism development. Need a link and focus like Labrador Pioneer Footpath which could be that regional link to focus efforts.

Table 3

Regional efforts last 35 years were good, but municipalities in communities built infrastructure and planned at different levels which is not cohesive to regional planning needs.

Table 4

Fam tours for summer students. Consider a one day tour for visitor information centre staff. Conduct regular meetings semi annually using the same format as this workshop. It will require communication and someone to lead. Bring things to see and do into one promotional piece.

Workshop Round Table Plenary Reports

Question Two re Barriers and Challenges

Question: What are the primary barriers to tourism development in the Labrador Straits, and how can local stakeholders work together to overcome these challenges?

Table 1

Accommodation challenges is a provincial matter with recent Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador report. Strong message is required for ferry, changes, to look at peak commercial traffic. Food and beverage services requires elevated experiences. HNL needs programming launch. Parking is an issue now for increased traffic. Pop-up services free by contribution to community required. Ratings for Boondocker and Harvest Host may be opportunity to collaborate with these apps for expedition 51 itinerary.

Table 2

Small population a barrier. Summer season is good but in November not same. Hard to upgrade existing businesses. One solution is to retain help with succession planning. Maybe adapt fairy schedule. Provide travel incentive. Encourage more Air BnB's. Need programs to bring seniors to work. Industry on the ground to work with local region needs coordination.

Table 3

Smaller accommodations to match with small enterprises like bed-and-breakfast and other unique accommodations e.g. treehouses. Strategy needed to get investments from entrepreneurs. Develop small group traveler type accommodations. Quality and lack of food services a challenge where visitors now need elevated experiences. Strategically support investment for RV travellers and RV caravans. Question raised regarding 'how much money does bus tours leave in the region'. Season as broadened from May 24 weekend to Thanksgiving. People arriving much earlier than ever. Reservations required for all of July and August for ferry. Service is at capacity. Diversify visitors from bus tours.

Table 4

Accommodations in peak season a challenge but low season opportunities appearing with climate changes bringing less pack ice and ferry operations year-round. Getting shoulder season staff a challenge in low season with limited labour pool and immigration requires fast tracking. New immigrants challenged to stay longer to integrate into a community. SLDA efforts showing integration good. Transportation challenges. Expedition 51 itinerary link with Quebec Highway 138 but only cargo ferry to Quebec. Awareness required for travellers re the long distance 10 to 12 day itineraries.

Workshop Round Table Plenary Reports

Question Three re Labour Challenges

Question: Labour Challenges: How can we address labour shortages and strengthen workforce development for tourism in the Labrador Straits to ensure skilled, passionate teams are available to deliver quality visitor experiences?

Table 1

Housing a problem in rural areas with Airbnb's competing for housing. Consider things to do to enhance quality of life experiences for local and visitors.

Table 2

Provide more staff training and orientation on how to work with tourists and in increasing local knowledge. Attract more with incentives for local and new business owners. Need programs to attract and retain volunteers to have an impact and encourage ownership of tourism assets.

Table 3

Perception that tourism being an unpopular career and only a living wage is not good to attract and retain new employees. Attract seniors into workplace and build awareness of heritage with youth.

Work with NunatuKavut CC and Provincial offices for curriculum on culture and heritage. Speak with schools in the region. Canada student jobs not equitable; not-for- profits get 100% support and commercial clients get 50% support, when it should be equitable. Need community champions to drive industry and build with them.

Table 4

Challenges in rural areas so solutions may exist in other similar areas. Maybe something to learn from other places. Seniors and students in the region are important. Clawbacks to seniors are discouraging employment. A lack of housing is a problem. Need more education and awareness of things like HNL workforce action plan, accommodations study, and new exceptional experiences. Will need more time to receive information from HNL.

Workshop Round Table Plenary Reports

Question Four re Business Sustainability and Profitability

Question: How can tourism businesses in the Labrador Straits create sustainable, profitable models that support long-term growth and economic resilience for operators and local communities?

Table 1

Better engagement with exit surveys for Labrador Straits. Businesses are adaptive to new things for sustainability for shoulder season. Consider subsidies for shoulder season developments. Leverage youth and volunteers to share services and encourage technology adaptation. Ideas need help to get awareness.

Table 2

Winter is an opportunity. Exceptional cuisine and new menus. Need new startups in business. New markets in Labrador (Labrador City – Goose Bay) and increased RV traffic. Ferry schedules need review.

Table 3

Consider eco tourism and natural attractions for new experiences. Use AI technology to save time and money. Use ChatGPT more and provide more information where this can be used. Encourage local support for local partnerships to improve profit. Support each other. Look at community sector council learning sessions. Businesses on the edge of profit need these support services.

Table 4

Diversify offers in tourism to shoulder season and find quality times for increased traffic with more things to do in shoulder season. Locally lifestyles can make more festivals and encourage more festival for tourists.