



# SHUSWAP STRATEGY



Shuswap Tourism



**SHUSWAP**

Beautiful. Casual. Down-to-earth.

# CONTENTS

## A PEEK AT WHAT'S INSIDE:

- 02 Background
- 03 Process
- 04 Strategic context
- 05 Strategic approach
- 06 Vision
- 06 The gap in delivering on the vision
- 07 The Focus
- 08 Five-year mission
- 09 The foundation
- 11 Strategic objectives

## BACKGROUND

The Shuswap region has enjoyed strong growth for decades. It's unique house boating experience has created a positive reputation as a summer destination.

Over the last number of years, the region has seen a coordinated effort to reap economic opportunities for the benefit of all Shuswap communities. The Community Tourism Foundations® Program Tourism Development Plan was a catalyst for strong collaboration between governments, businesses, First Nations, and non-profit organizations.

The Shuswap brand is strong and it differentiates the region from its neighbours. Whereas many surrounding communities are turning into faster-paced cities and resorts, the Shuswap remains laid-back. It offers everything others offer, but in a relaxed context. After all, visitors will often choose to unwind back at the lake anyways.

With a strong foundation in place, now is the time to start looking toward the future by putting forward an ambitious vision that will grow and sustain a vibrant tourism economy throughout the region.

# PROCESS

Destination Think! was engaged to develop this strategy for Shuswap Tourism. The company is a group of international professionals who work with destinations in Canada, Australia, Europe, Asia and the United States.

William Bakker, an experienced destination marketer, led the process, supported by a team of strategists and researchers. His approach followed the Strategic Planning Process model shown below.

This strategy was developed through a collaborative process because success for Shuswap Tourism is dependent on the success of its stakeholders. Destination Think! sought input through interviews and strategic workshops with numerous stakeholders representing government, industry, communities and other groups.

This strategy is a result of research and analysis, combined with Destination Think!’s domain knowledge and the collective intelligence from the Shuswap Tourism team and its stakeholders. This robust and progressive strategy will grow tourism in a direction that purposefully benefits the Shuswap region’s guests, citizens, industry, and government.



# STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The last fifteen years have been a turbulent time for destination marketers. Like many industries, tourism is impacted by globalization, technology, e-commerce, and social media. As a result, traditional destination marketing strategies have lost their impact. Tourism marketing has always been heavily affected by word-of-mouth, but in a social media-fueled communication environment, word-of-mouth is critical.

The people who share inspiring and motivating stories are central to this process. A strong destination reputation is built from the bottom up by the stories from guests, residents, businesses and others. It's these stories that inspire the next visit through repeat visitation or a referral.

Destinations that understand these implications can level the playing field. The biggest advertising budget no longer wins, the best experience does. Word-of-mouth scales as long as the experience is memorable and sharable. For this reason, a winning strategy for a modern destination marketing organization (DMO) requires an investment in developing experiences, combined with laser-focused promotional activities.

However, a growing tourism market comes with new responsibilities. High-volume tourism locations around the world are dealing with challenges posed by mass tourism. Tourism needs to provide a net benefit to a place, not a burden. Economic benefits cannot come at the expense of the local quality of life.

Destinations around the world, from large to small, are reinventing themselves. These DMOs are developing a winning formula that results in a competitive advantage for their industry and residents alike.



# STRATEGIC APPROACH

The chart below reflects Destination Think!'s model for modern destination marketing. The Shuswap's destination experiences become stories that flow through storytellers. In this model, Shuswap Tourism is situated as one storyteller among many.

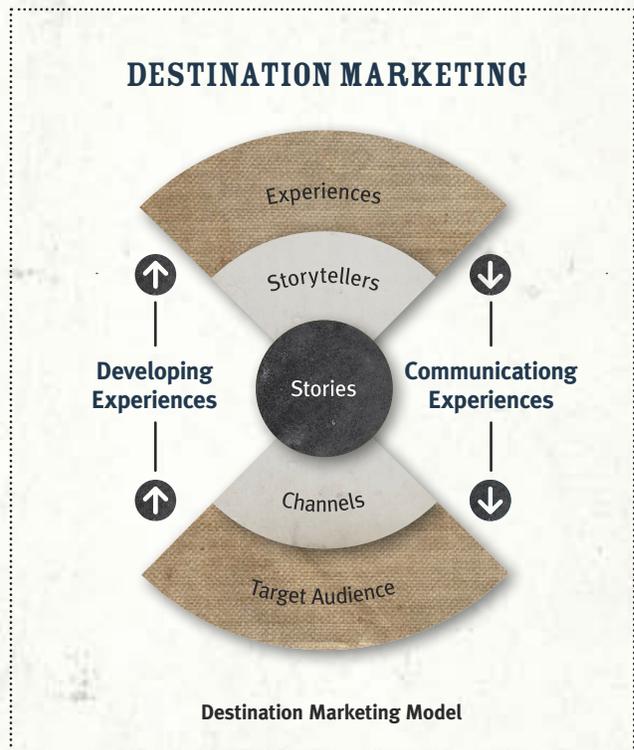
Additional storytellers include the tourism industry, Shuswap residents, visitors and every single person or organization that says anything about the destination. The story these individuals tell is a direct reflection of the experience they've had, seen, perceived, sold or lived in the Shuswap. It does not matter who tells the story as long as it motivates people to action.

These stories are told through an increasing and ever-changing number of channels. It is important to recognize that:

- The target audience (the chart to the right) will make decisions based on the sum of all the information they receive from a multitude of sources with varying levels of credibility. Most of these sources will not come from Shuswap Tourism
- The stories people tell are a direct result of the experiences they have. Destinations should not try to hide or spin the truth. Their reputations hinge on the stories others tell about them

Destination marketing has always been about selling the story of the visitor journey. What has changed, however, is that anyone can now tell that story. The internet and social media channels have opened up the podium to anyone with an internet connection.

This provides a big opportunity for Shuswap Tourism because there is a window to level the playing field and gain an advantage. By carving out its niche, delivering the right experience to that niche and activating its storytellers, Shuswap Tourism can build a reputation with a extremely qualified audience that is almost impossible to compete with.



# VISION

The Shuswap's tourism vision has been documented as part of a 2015 strategy update:

*"The Shuswap is a four-season destination where the development of tourism is based on a shared commitment to quality, sustainability, regional collaboration and integrated planning. Its authentic visitor experiences are shaped by its well-managed access to pristine lakes and backcountry, its creative and Aboriginal culture, and its notable sport opportunities."*

- Shuswap Tourism Development Plan 2015

## THE GAP IN DELIVERING ON THE VISION

The Shuswap is not yet a four-season destination.

Over the past decade, the destination has done a lot of work to develop year-round experiences that include salmon runs in the fall and world-class winter experiences - especially snowmobiling, nordic skiing and cat skiing. However, the summer season still dominates, both in visitation and in the mind of the consumer, where a visit to the Shuswap means summer houseboating and relaxation.

Developing the destination's reputation beyond summer is a chicken-and-egg situation where the chicken is visitation and the egg is expanding winter experiences. Improvements to infrastructure are needed for maturing the winter offering, but more visitors are needed to make these investments viable.



# THE FOCUS

IT IS THE SHUSWAP REGION'S AMBITION TO BECOME A **FOUR-SEASON DESTINATION** WITHIN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS. THE FOUNDATION, MOTIVATION AND COLLABORATION ARE IN PLACE. **THE TIME HAS COME** TO FOCUS AND DELIVER ON THE REMAINING ELEMENTS OF THIS VISION.

# FIVE-YEAR MISSION

Grow tourism in  
the Shuswap into  
a four-season  
destination.

## WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

Success can and should be measured in hard numbers. The following key performance indicators (KPIs) will determine success.

### KPIs:

- Overall growth in tourism
- Increased average accommodation occupancy rates in shoulder seasons
- Increased average room rates
- Increased number of year-round tourism businesses
- Increased opening hours for restaurants and pubs
- Increased year-round tourism jobs for the community
- Resident positive attitude towards tourism
- Visitor satisfaction

*Note: No benchmarks currently exist for these KPIs and they will need to be established.*

KPIs are important, but real success comes from the growth of the Shuswap tourism industry in combination with improving the quality of life for residents.

### Action:

- Establish benchmarks, targets and an ongoing measurement framework



# THE FOUNDATION

The Shuswap has a strong foundation to build on. These foundational pillars provide a platform to realize our mission.

## REPUTATION

The Shuswap has a strong tourism reputation in key markets for summer products and experiences. Houseboating is a unique Shuswap experience and many communities in British Columbia would love to have our reputation for tourism. This is a strong competitive advantage to build on.

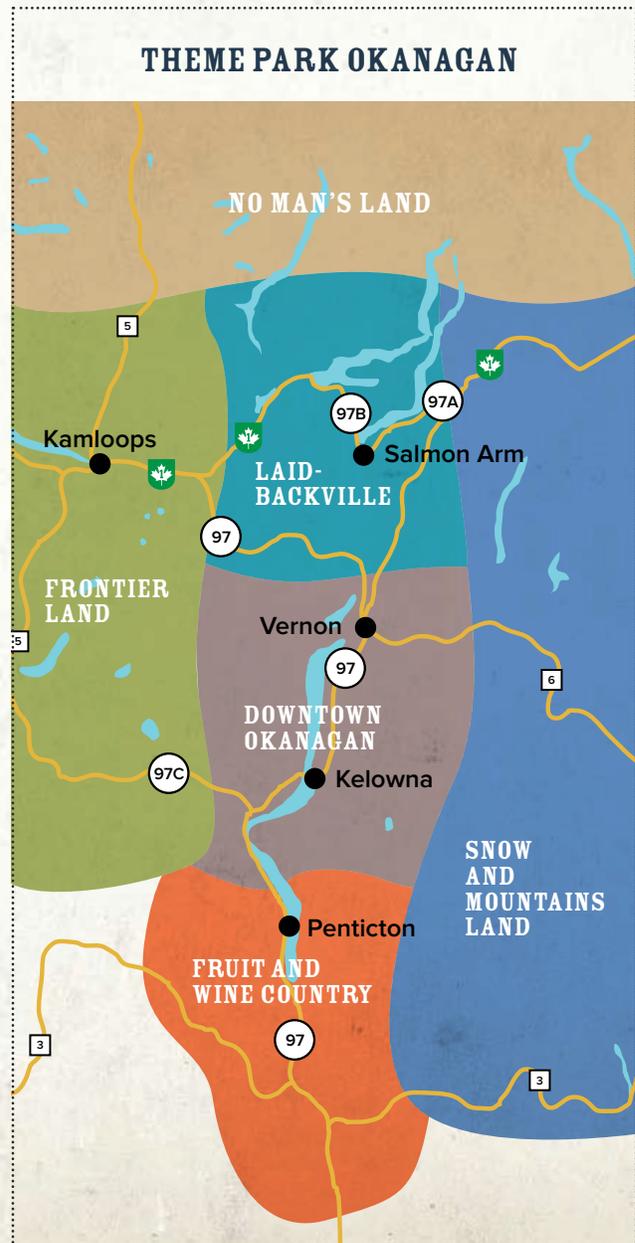
## POSITIONING

The Shuswap is beautiful, casual and down to earth. While neighbouring areas seem to want to speed up, the pace of life in the Shuswap is a little slower. The Shuswap is a place to relax, recharge and reconnect. As a part of “Theme Park Okanagan”, the Shuswap region is “Laid-backville”.

This doesn’t mean the region is lazy. As a workshop participant said, “You can be active in many ways. But at the end of the day, you’ll probably end up at the lake.” The slower pace of life is the reason why people live in the Shuswap and it’s also the reason people visit.

People visit the Shuswap in the summer to slow down. The same approach offers the best opportunity for the winter season. Winter resorts throughout British Columbia are getting bigger and are becoming small cities. In the Shuswap, people can stay active through a variety of winter experiences, some of which are world-class.

Visitors don’t have to do anything if they don’t want to. The Shuswap is the perfect place to slow down, recharge and reconnect in every season.





## BRAND

The Shuswap Tourism brand is strong. Overall, stakeholders speak very positively about the brand. It resonates with consumers and it aligns with the true Shuswap experience. It communicates the region's unique positioning well, and differentiates it from its neighbours and competition.

## COLLABORATION

The regional partnerships and collaboration between various municipalities, BC Parks, First Nations, tourism operators, nonprofits and other third-party stakeholders have resulted in many positive developments. These partnerships are already bearing fruit through the Shuswap Trail Alliance, for example. This network will be of absolute importance in executing this strategy.

# STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



LEVERAGE  
LEAD  
LEAP



VISION

FOCUS



DESIGN  
DEVELOP  
DELIVER



SUSTAIN  
STIMULATE  
SURGE

# OBJECTIVE 1: DESIGNING, DEVELOPING AND DELIVERING THE FOUR-SEASON SHUSWAP EXPERIENCE.

## STRATEGY: DESIGN A YEAR-ROUND CAPACITY AND DEMAND PLAN

Some tourism products are available year-round, while others are seasonal and some are planned for a specific date and time (the Roots and Blues Festival, for example). Each product is a driver for demand. Understanding the opportunities for demand will help Shuswap Tourism identify where products and experiences need to be developed, and where the focus of promotional activities need to take place.

Shuswap Tourism will develop a year-round calendar of available experiences in order to develop plans to quantify the potential for demand based on the available experiences and identify seasonal gaps. Based on this calendar, plans will be created to fill specific gaps.

### Action:

- Establish benchmarks, targets and an ongoing measurement framework

## STRATEGY: DEVELOP EXPERIENCES TO FILL GAPS

Where the availability of experiences doesn't result in the desired visitation, Shuswap Tourism will work with partners to fill these gaps using the following strategies.

### GROW AND MATURE EXPERIENCES AND SUPPORTING SERVICES

In some cases, opportunities aren't fully realized because the experiences are not fully matured. There are often specific gaps in the experiences. Sometimes these gaps are related to the core product; other times, they are related to supporting services such as the availability of snowmobile rentals.

Developing experiences while supporting products, services and infrastructure is a **game of chicken and egg**. Without visitors, entrepreneurs won't step into a marketplace and without compelling products, people won't visit.

Shuswap Tourism will continue to build demand by increasing the availability and maturity of products and services. To accomplish this, the organization will work closely with industry and other stakeholders (such as Shuswap Economic Development) in order to fill gaps in supporting services.

### Actions:

- Identify gaps in specific, high-priority experiences
- Collaborate with industry and other stakeholders to foster development in order to fill gaps in products and services

### WINTERIZE SUMMER EXPERIENCES

Visitors don't just visit the Shuswap for its lake, mountains or farms. They visit to disconnect from everyday life, connect with loved ones and recharge. The tourism products and experiences in the region are ways to achieve this.

Recharging isn't reserved for the summer; people need this in the winter as well. Often, only the context of the experience needs to change. For example, there are many people who love winter camping. An arts crawl or a music festival can also happen in the winter. A stay in a lakeside cabin can be satisfying when you're able to build a snowman, strap on skates, make a fire and play games.

Shuswap Tourism will lead the effort to identify the right opportunities to extend summer experiences into winter and support the development and availability of these experiences.

### Actions:

- Identify the right experiences to extend from summer to other seasons
- Support the development of these experiences and lead the promotional efforts

Lindsay's note:  
New metaphor

## STRATEGY: DELIVER THE SHUSWAP STORY

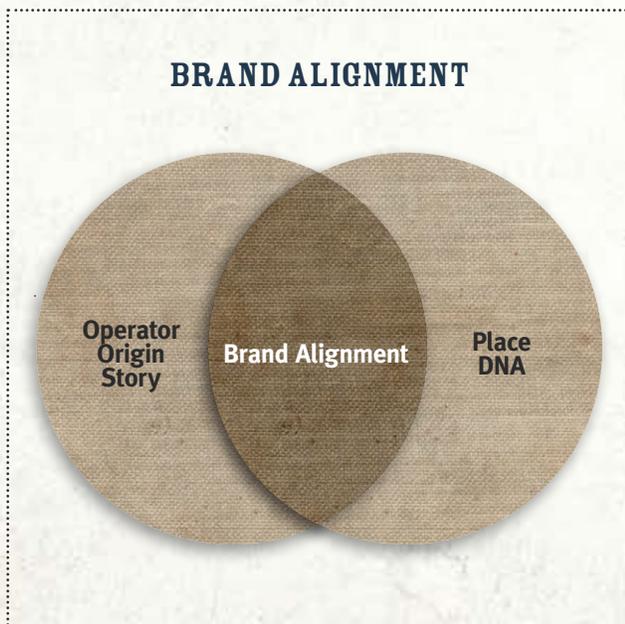
### ALIGN EXPERIENCES WITH PLACE DNA

A destination is the sum of its parts, a stage where storytelling takes place. Operators in the destination need to play their parts in order to create the story that meets the brand promise.

Each operator also has its own brand. In a small business, the owner's personal history, values and passions are often represented in that brand. This is called the operator's origin story. Finding the alignment between these origin stories and our Place DNA will strengthen the consistency of the destination's story as a whole.

#### Action:

- Develop an industry alignment tool and/or program to strengthen the Shuswap experience in alignment with its brand story



## DELIVER REMARKABLE EXPERIENCES

If a tree falls in the forest and no one posts about it using social media, did it really fall? In today's marketing environment, an experience that isn't shared might as well be invisible. A remarkable experience is an experience that is worth being shared through word-of-mouth, often through social media.

Tourism operators need to understand the importance of creating remarkable experiences that people will rate and share. Building a strong reputation can only happen when others share their experiences and give them favourable ratings on review sites like TripAdvisor.

#### Action:

- Develop or leverage an industry development program to increase the number of remarkable experiences that people share using social media

## FLAVOUR THE SHUSWAP EXPERIENCE WITH LIVING AND BREATHING FIRST NATIONS CULTURE.

The First Nations community is alive in the Shuswap and it makes an important contribution to tourism. Guests interact with and make personal connections to First Nations experiences, which are much more than merely products to observe or to seek for entertainment. In addition, when and where it is appropriate, and with the leadership of the First Nations community, the Shuswap region has the opportunity to "flavour" the destination with First Nations experiences. As Frank Antoine, Cultural Liaison at Quaaout Lodge describes it, this follows the mantra within the Knuwewtwe'cw language, which means, "helping each other".

#### Action:

- Collaborate with our First Nations communities to incorporate authentic aboriginal experiences throughout the destination

## MEASURING THE DESTINATION EXPERIENCE

Net Promoter Score (NPS) is one of the most well-known customer or visitor loyalty metrics that has been adopted by DMOs around the globe, including Destination British Columbia. It is an index that measures the willingness of visitors to recommend a destination's products or services to others. It is used as a proxy for gauging a visitor's overall satisfaction with a destination's product or service and the customer's loyalty to the brand.

#### Action:

- Establish an ongoing program to measure the destination's NPS

## OBJECTIVE 2: SUSTAIN, STIMULATE AND SURGE TOWARD A FOUR-SEASON DESTINATION.

### STRATEGY: SUSTAIN THE CORE SUMMER BUSINESS

A focus on growing off-season visitation cannot come at the expense of summer business. Shuswap Tourism will continue to support summer experiences through its owned and earned media channels. The destination will deprioritize paid channels for the summer season and instead focus on delivering a high-quality experience that leads to word-of-mouth recommendations instead.

Should anything change that poses a risk to the summer season, such as the economic climate or a change in USD currency rates, Shuswap Tourism will make the necessary adjustments to protect its bread-and-butter business and readjust growth rates for the off-season.

#### Action:

- Develop a framework to measure and forecast year-round business

### STRATEGY: STIMULATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A FOUR-SEASON REPUTATION THROUGH ADVOCACY

Where the availability of experiences doesn't result in the desired visitation, Shuswap Tourism will work with partners to fill these gaps using the following strategies.

#### HARNESSING ADVOCACY

Research has repeatedly shown that word-of-mouth is the strongest and most compelling influencer of travel behaviour. In a world in which every consumer is armed with a smartphone, each one becomes a travel journalist to their own group of friends.

In addition to consumers, Shuswap residents, businesses, media and others also tell their distinct Shuswap stories. Shuswap Tourism needs to fuel and direct this advocacy to further develop its reputation within its core audiences. It can do this by enabling and encouraging people to share their experiences, curating the best stories and then amplifying them.

#### Actions:

- Enable and encourage storytellers to share their Shuswap stories
- Curate the stories shared in order to:
  - Amplify the best stories
  - Mitigate the negative stories
  - Learn from the experiences people share

## NICHE MARKET SEGMENTATION

Developing a positive reputation in front of a broad audience is difficult, especially on a limited budget. Building a reputation with a small, well-connected group of people is easier. Word-of-mouth is powerful and it spreads easily among those who are like-minded.

So far, Shuswap Tourism's collaboration has built consumer segmentation based on geographic and psychographic qualities (using the Explorer Quotient). Refining these segments further will drive efficiency and effectiveness in targeting potential visitors.

To build the Shuswap region's reputation, this strategy will leverage groups of like-minded people who share a common passion. These passion groups are connected online in dedicated spaces. Each group has celebrities called influencers and has distinct paths of influence.

### Actions:

- Identify and prioritize passion groups.
- Gain key insights into these passion groups.
- Create and execute plans to build a reputation within them.

## STRATEGY: SHIFT PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES TO MODERN, DIGITAL-FIRST TACTICS

In order to make Shuswap Tourism's promotion more effective and efficient, this strategy leads a transition toward a focus on primarily digital and social media activities. Destination marketing is storytelling and the people who experience the Shuswap region have stories to tell. Shuswap Tourism will tell the story of its four-season destination by creating its own stories, curating the stories others are telling and amplifying the best.

Potential visitors may feel overwhelmed as they try to understand everything the Shuswap region offers, given the large number of possible experiences and stories they may encounter. For this reason, effective storytelling told through online content must serve a specific purpose that matches a specific place and time along the path to purchase. The purpose of all marketing activities must be defined and focused on a particular market segment in this way.

### Actions:

- Review and adjust all marketing tactics to follow contemporary best practices. This will include website, email marketing, social media, print collateral and traditional advertising tactics.
- Reducing or eliminating tactics that are no longer effective or do not support this strategy.
- Creating, raising or adjusting tactics that deliver maximum value for money.
- Create purpose-driven, inspirational and/or useful content to provide value to specific audiences.
- Integrate our marketing with local industry partners, regional and provincial DMOs and others for maximum alignment.

## OBJECTIVE 3:

### MAINTAIN DMO EFFECTIVENESS THROUGH LEAP, LEAD AND LEVERAGING STAKEHOLDERS, CAPABILITIES AND MARKETING METHODS

#### STRATEGY: LEAP FORWARD WITH PROGRESSIVE MARKETING METHODS

The marketing landscape has changed, and Shuswap Tourism can help its destination leap forward by collectively embracing a modern approach. The DMO will lead by example and encourage its network to do the same. Progressive marketing will be an absolute requirement in achieving this mission's objectives.

**Action:**

- Invest in the right capabilities and agency partners to modernize Shuswap Tourism's marketing activities.
- Enable industry stakeholders to successfully uncover and implement digital marketing opportunities.

#### STRATEGY: LEVERAGE THE COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT BETWEEN GOVERNMENT, PRIVATE SECTOR AND FIRST NATIONS

Implementing the vision to become a four-season destination is not something one entity can accomplish alone. The scope and speed to deliver on this mission will depend on multiple factors including increased funding, political will, industry support and third-party collaboration. It requires a collective and consolidated effort, which Shuswap Tourism is motivated to lead.

**Actions:**

- Seek continued alignment, consultation, collaboration and delegation from third parties to deliver on the mission.
- Seek increased budget and diversify revenue streams for Shuswap Tourism in order to implement this strategy to the fullest.

#### STRATEGY: LEAD THE INDUSTRY TOWARD MATURITY AS A DESTINATION

In order to become a viable, four-season destination, the Shuswap region needs to mature further, following many of the specifics documented earlier in this strategy. Shuswap Tourism will lead by bringing modern tourism marketing principles to the tourism industry in order to ensure the most effective delivery and promotion of the Shuswap tourism experience.

**Action:**

- Lead the industry by bringing knowledge, tools and experience to the table in order to deliver and promote the Shuswap experience.

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DESTINATION

**Think!**

