

FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN

Designated Recipient:	Southern Gulf Island Tourism Partnership (SGITP)
Designated Accommodation Area:	Electoral Areas F & G of the Capital Regional District
Date Submitted:	March 4, 2024
MRDT Repeal Date:	September 1, 2024
Five Year Period:	2024-2029

FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

Introduction

The Southern Gulf Island Tourism Partnership (SGITP) is the community destination management organization for the Southern Gulf Islands region, which includes Galiano, Mayne, Pender, Saturna, and Salt Spring Islands.

The previous Five-Year Strategic Business Plan, created in 2018, aimed at establishing the SGITP. It prioritized alignment with local, regional, and provincial planning priorities, directing efforts towards strategic marketing and destination development activities.

Five years later, the foundation is set. The SGITP has established an innovative and recognized brand in BC's tourism industry, growing recognition and acceptance by the island communities. The organization has built strong relationships with the local industry, and successfully secured substantial grant funding for cooperative marketing and the initiation of projects such as [Aqualink](#). SGITP has concentrated its efforts on increasing the off-season explorer through creative [campaigns](#) and adopted a regenerative destination management approach, demonstrating dedication to sustainable tourism practices and destination development.

The Next Five Years: 2024-2029

SGITP has updated its Five-Year Strategic Business Plan with a continued focus on promoting a more balanced seasonal traveler, aiming to boost economic activity and diversity among island businesses. Additionally, the SGITP aims for explorers that leaves a net positive benefit on the communities both socially and environmentally, enhancing residents' quality of life and upholding the islands' values.

This strategy will accompany the application for the 2% Municipal and Regional District Tax (MRDT), that provides funding for strategy implementation.

Our Shared Vision for Tourism on the Southern Gulf Islands

To create a visitor economy that works for everyone— an accessible, interconnected archipelago where visitor experiences are in harmony with the environment and local community values to shape the destination better than we found it.

Mission Statement

The Southern Gulf Islands Tourism Partnership (SGITP) develops, promotes, and advocates for regenerative exploration to our region by focusing on seasonal and geographic dispersion, visitor education, workforce housing, and local partnerships. Working in collaboration with local government, First Nations, businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and

residents, SGITP harnesses local talent and leverages creative solutions to improve the quality of life in our region—economically, socially, environmentally, and culturally.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Global Tourism

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, international tourism is expected to recover close to 90% of pre-pandemic levels in 2023. This indicates strong recovery of demand.

International tourism receipts are expected to climb to USD 1.4 trillion in 2023, accounting for about 93% of the USD 1.5 trillion earned in 2019. This recovery is further highlighted by an estimated 1.3 billion international arrivals in 2023, marking a 33% increase over 2022 and representing almost 90% of pre-pandemic levels. Despite ongoing economic challenges and uncertainties arising from geopolitical tensions and conflicts, the international tourism sector appears poised for a full recovery to pre-pandemic levels by 2024.¹

Canada Tourism

According to Destination Canada, the visitor economy in Canada has rebounded well post-pandemic, with tourism businesses recovering to 93% and jobs to 90% of 2019 levels by December 2022.

Contributing nearly \$38 billion to Canada's GDP and generating \$94 billion in revenue for businesses, tourism plays a vital role in the economy. Global projections suggest significant growth, with the potential for tourism's contribution to Canada's GDP to double by 2033, presenting a substantial opportunity. In 2022, the tourism sector supported 1.9 million jobs across Canada. No other sector has an economic impact that reaches every region in the country.² For more information see [The Federal Tourism Growth Strategy](#).

British Columbia Tourism

Tourism in British Columbia is on a strong path to post-pandemic recovery as well and continues to provide great value to the provincial economy. It is one of the largest employers and one of the largest small business generators. The most recent (2021) value of tourism to jobs, business and the economy includes:

- Tourism employs about 84,500 people
- Over 16,650 tourism businesses operate in BC
- In 2021, the tourism industry generated \$13.5 billion in revenue
- The tourism industry contributed nearly \$1.4 billion in provincial taxes in 2021
- Tourism generated a direct contribution to BC's gross domestic product of \$5.0 billion in 2021, above Forestry & Logging (\$1.5 billion), Oil and Gas (\$4.5 billion) and Agriculture and Fishing (\$3.3 billion)³

More recent tourism performance indicators demonstrate that BC's tourism economy saw significant post-pandemic recovery in 2023. Compared to 2022, total overnight international visitor arrivals surged in 2023 by 74.2% (up to October). Year over year, BC's provincial hotel occupancy rates rose by 13%, average daily room rates by 11.8%, and

¹ [World Tourism Barometer and Statistical Annex](#), UNWTO, November 2023

² [Canada 365: Welcoming the World. Every Day. The Federal Tourism Growth Strategy](#), Destination Canada, 2023

³ [Value of Tourism](#), Province of BC, 2021

passenger volume to YVR by 32.2%. These strong year-over-year increases reflect the industry's resilience and positive momentum in 2023.⁴

Table 1: 2023 British Columbia Tourism Indicators

	2023 Performance	% Change over 2022
International Visitor Arrivals (to Oct)	4,162,273	72.2%
US Overnight	2,888,833	70.5%
Total US	5,394,547	79.1%
Asia/Pacific	801,679	146%
Europe	442,702	25.5%
Provincial Hotel Occupancy Rate	69.0%	13.0%
Provincial Average Daily Room Rate	\$236	11.8%
Restaurant Receipts (to Oct)	\$13,574M	11.6%
BC Ferries Passengers (to Sept)	17,726,072	8.5%
Total Passenger Volume to YVR (to Nov)	22,842,528	32.2%

Source: Destination BC Tourism Industry Dashboard

Vancouver Island Tourism

Visitor data and associated spending specific to the Vancouver Island region, including the Southern Gulf Islands, are unavailable. However, the tables below provide accommodation data for municipalities within the Vancouver Island region that participate in the MRDT program. These statistics are exclusively published by the Province for communities involved in this program.

Table 2: Number of Accommodation Properties (MRDT Communities)

Municipality	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Campbell River	23	21	22	22	22
Cowichan Valley	66	67	72	73	75
Parksville	36	37	36	38	41
Southern Gulf Islands	82	76	73	73	72
Tofino	82	85	85	84	80
Ucluelet	41	43	43	42	44
Victoria	100	97	93	96	96
Saanich, Oak Bay, Langford	30	33	32	32	31
Central and North Island	160	167	166	200	250

Source: BC Statistics

Further, the following table provides room revenue for the same communities. Overall, room revenue performance appears to have returned to pre-pandemic levels.

⁴ [Tourism Industry Dashboard](#), Destination BC

Table 3: Room Revenue (MRDT Communities) \$000

Municipality	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023*
Campbell River	18,091	10,973	16,646	22,135	21,254
Cowichan Valley	21,337	15,511	26,371	35,214	33,265
Parksville	29,099	22,746	34,944	39,857	39,604
Southern Gulf Islands	3,255	12,183	25,646	33,462	31,383
Tofino	72,609	53,002	73,976	97,905	88,960
Ucluelet	26,372	18,853	29,545	37,320	35,805
Victoria	225,910	76,726	136,098	260,398	272,622
Saanich, Oak Bay, Langford	48,349	20,641	34,857	54,430	50,412
Central and North Island	76,475	54,973	90,819	120,893	126,107

Source: BC Statistics

*2023 includes January to October only

Tourism in the Southern Gulf Islands

The Southern Gulf Islands include hundreds of islands and islets that form part of a larger archipelago that extends into the United States. The islands (Galiano, Salt Spring, Mayne, Pender and Saturna) and surrounding waters are ecologically rich and diverse, including home to the last remaining pockets of Garry oak ecosystems and a unique climate of Mediterranean characteristics. Major destination attractions and activities include:

- Boating, Sailing, Kayaking, Canoeing and Paddle Boarding in the Salish Sea
- Park System (Nation, Provincial, Local) and camping
- Regional Hiking Trails
- Cycling
- Island Lifestyle & Ecology
- Health and Wellness
- Arts & Culture
- Farming & Food
- Retail

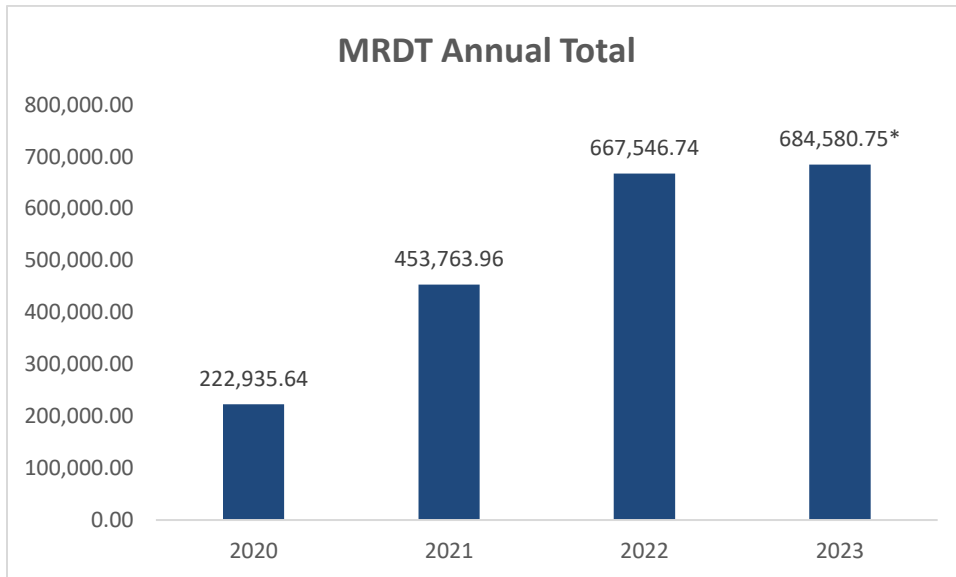
Tourism Indicators

The actual number of visitors and associated spending is not monitored on a regular basis; however, SGITP engaged Align Consulting Group to produce the following indicators for the Southern Gulf Islands to help give a broad-brush sense of how tourism has performed in recent years and where it might be headed in the future.

Municipal & Regional District Tax (MRDT) Figures

The Southern Gulf Island's MRDT collection commenced on September 1, 2019; however, SGITP only began receiving MRDT revenue in January 2020 onward. The graph below illustrates significant MRDT revenue growth over the last three

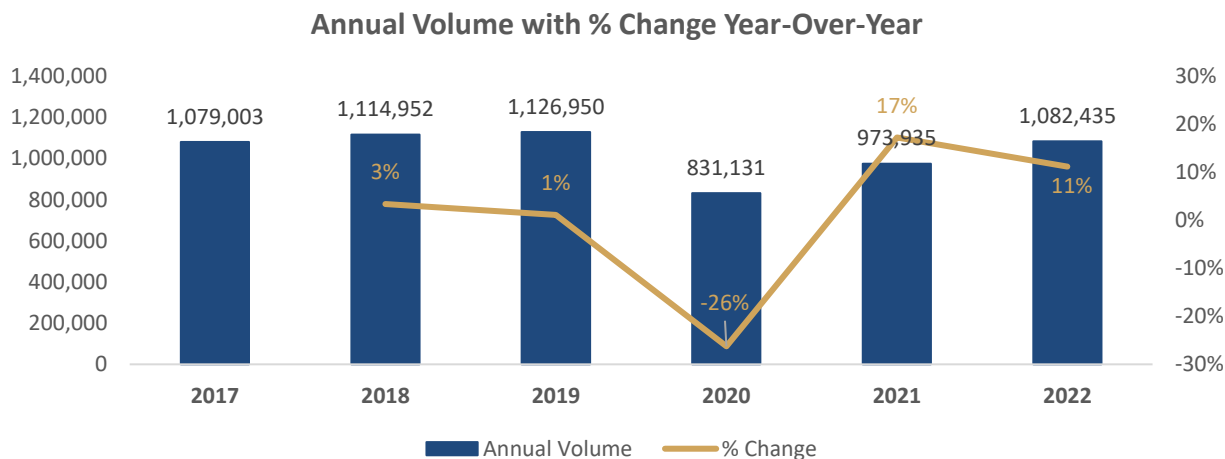
years, reaching a total of \$667,546 for the 12 source months of 2022. This marks a 47.1% increase from 2021 (\$453,763). Revenue collected to date (October 2023) indicate that 2023 is poised to surpass figures from 2022. Notably, the rise in revenue can be attributed in part to increased average daily room rates, reflecting the upward trend in rates.



*2023 MRDT figures available up to October 2023 from Ministry of Finance

BC Ferries Passenger Volumes

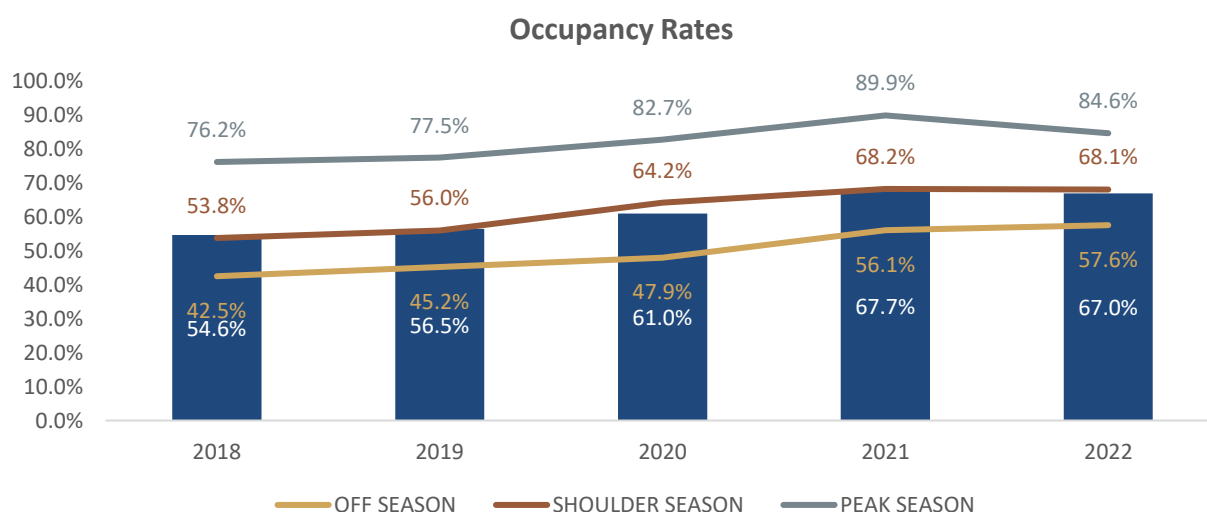
Examining BC Ferries departure volume data to the Southern Gulf Islands, Align Consulting Group focused on the Swartz Bay Terminal for Routes 4 and 5, Crofton Terminal for Route 6, and Tsawwassen Terminal for Route 9. The data indicates that 2019 marked a peak with 1,126,950 passengers, followed by a 26% decrease in 2020 due to the pandemic, bringing the total to 831,131. In the subsequent years, a gradual recovery was observed, reaching 1,082,435, which is approximately on par with the 2017 volume. While year-to-date data for 2023 has returned to pre-pandemic levels, full-year stats are still pending.



Source: Southern Gulf Islands Impact Report

Air DNA Data – Occupancy Rates

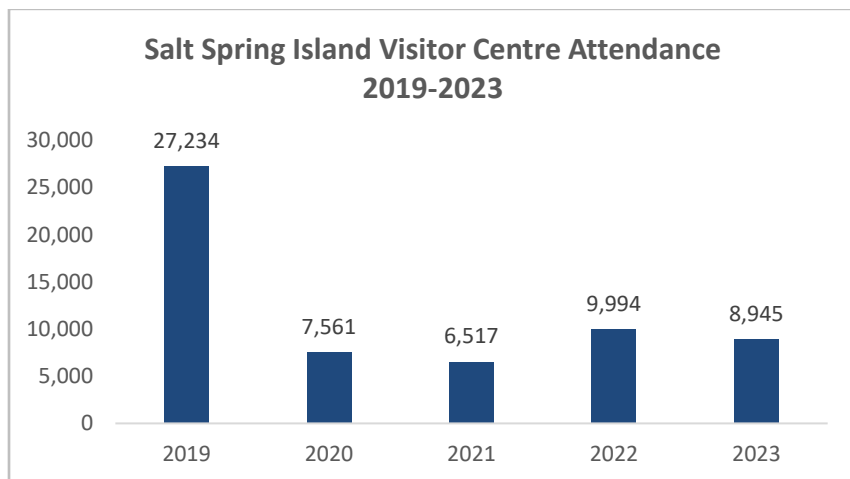
The occupancy rate for Online Accommodation Providers (OAP) in 2022 was 67.0% which is up from 54.6% in 2018 (up 12.4 percentage points) and 56.5% in 2019 (up 10.5 percentage points). Assuming Airbnb data is not just cannibalizing other booking channels, this demonstrates that there are notably more visitors to the Southern Gulf Islands in the past five years. Looking at the seasonality, peak season occupancy rates have grown from 76.2% in 2018 to 84.6% in 2022 – a 7.6 percentage point increase. Shoulder season occupancy has grown dramatically by 14.3 percentage points to 68.1% compared to 2018 (53.8%). In addition, off season occupancy rates increased 15.1 percentage points to 57.6% in 2022 compared to 2018 (42.5%). This indicates that although there is overall growth, there has been substantially more growth in shoulder and off-season months than peak months.



Source: Southern Gulf Islands Impact Report

Salt Spring Island Visitor Centre

The Southern Gulf Islands has one official Visitor Centre, located on Salt Spring Island, while the other islands have visitor booths where statistics are not tracked. The Salt Spring Visitor Centre has seen a significant decrease since 2020, attributed to factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic, reduced staff and operating hours, and the growing impact of technology offering easy access to digital visitor information. Despite these challenges, the second graph below indicates that, like other destinations in British Columbia, Salt Spring Island experiences its peak season from May to September. While Visitor Centre statistics offer valuable insights into year-over-year trends, it's important to note that not all visitors may stop at these centers, and thus, the statistics do not fully represent all visitors to and through the area.



Source: [Destination BC](#)



Source: [Destination BC](#)

Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results

Strengths

Destination:

- Scenic natural beauty
- Mediterranean microclimate
- Biodiverse landscapes offering rich wildlife viewing and ecological explorations
- Vibrant arts communities, festivals, events and markets that showcase the unique character and spirit of each Island
- A peaceful retreat away from the hustle and bustle of urban areas
- Health and wellness offerings

Opportunities

Destination:

- Continued off-season growth
- Improved inter-island visitor services
- Improved festivals and event coordination
- Attract visitors who are seeking trends such as remote working holidays, slow tourism, and local foods, health, and wellness
- Develop more 'active transportation' options such as advocating for safe bike and walking trails providing sustainable and scenic options to

• Hyper local food and beverage offerings • Strong agritourism offering diverse farm experiences and connections with local food and rural life • Abundance of outdoor recreation activities (hiking, cycling, paddling, wildlife viewing, camping, etc.) • Communities prioritize sustainable practises through eco-friendly initiatives and conservation • Rich cultural history, including Indigenous heritage • Despite the remoteness, the islands are accessible via a variety of transportation forms (ferries, float planes, private boats) <u>Organization (SGITP):</u> • Proven track record of delivering on organizational mandate, marketing activities, etc. during pandemic and recovery • Strong recognizable brand • Engaged board of directors and staff • Successful project grant applications and implementation (i.e, Aqualink)	explore our Islands; explore the possibility of creating car-free opportunities • Explore ‘DIY’ culinary options: take advantage of the wide variety of foods (land, sea, and lake) and beverages produced on our Islands. Encourage visitors to embark on a culinary adventure by ‘hunting and gathering’ ingredients, enabling visitors to produce their own gourmet meals • Explore opportunities for educational experiences schools and retreats: Develop specialized programs in art, health/wellbeing, and culinary, offering a welcoming environment for learning and personal growth <u>Organization (SGITP):</u> • Assisting businesses to connect with training, resources to ensure changes in technology and the way visitors seek travel information can be incorporated into their businesses • Sharing resources with tourism business partners about trends, opportunities related to accessibility, inclusion, etc. • Conduct research to measure value of tourism economy
Aspirations <u>Destination:</u> • Balanced seasonal dispersion of visitors year-round • Businesses thrive consistently, ensuring year-round operation and economic growth • Longer-term local employment, and increased year-round community services for locals • Adequate supply of housing for workforce • Maintain and safeguard the islands' unique natural resources, preventing forest fires, reducing waste, and ensuring biodiversity and sufficient water resources for future generations • Thriving local farming and agritourism offerings • Year round diverse hyper-local culinary experiences • Resilient communities that can adapt to challenges, including economic shifts and environmental changes • Increased interconnectedness, collaboration, and transportation access between the islands (Aqualink sustainability)	Results • Visitor volume in the off-season • Average daily room rate • Marketing campaign measures • Survey results • Annual funding from Capital Regional District • Sufficient board nominations received for AGM • Revenue generation (MRDT, Grants, etc.) • Successful MRDT reporting and renewal • Partner engagement and participation in program opportunities

• New/unique product/experience offerings by tourism providers that can be shared via SGITP marketing channels • Immersive canoe trips and culinary experiences around the Islands, in collaboration with First Nation, fostering interconnectedness and cultural exchange • A destination known for its warm welcome and exceptional visitor experiences • A destination that provides ample opportunities for visitors of all abilities to enjoy the islands Organization (SGITP): • Gather stats/information needed to inform tactics and measure impact • Resident support for tourism and SGITP goals • Continued engagement by volunteer board and committee members, representative of diversity in tourism industry • Produce engaging marketing campaigns that encourage values-aligned explorer • Successful destination management project implementation • Meaningful engagement, relationship building with local First Nations	
--	--

Trends

SGITP continuously tracks industry trends, enabling it to advise partners on upcoming developments. While the tourism sector has always been subject to change, the pace of change has accelerated. The following chart, adapted from Destination Canada, presents numerous trends that the SGITP team is observing and adjusting to, in collaboration with our local, regional, provincial, and national tourism partners.

Table 4: Tourism Industry Trends

MACRO TRENDS

Climate Change Growing global urgency to adopt sustainable and competitive business practices. Travel and tourism contribute approximately about 8% of global climate emissions.⁵	Economic Challenges The economic fallout of COVID-19 had a profound impact on the global tourism industry, leaving businesses with depleted reserves, limited capital access, and liquidity challenges.	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Equal opportunity and participation for all - regardless of age, ability, gender, or culture, is key to fostering an equitable and representative society – vital for the future of the tourism industry.
---	--	---

INDUSTRY TRENDS

Destination Management	Labour and Skills Shortage	Higher Costs
-------------------------------	-----------------------------------	---------------------

⁵ Tourism's Big Shift: Key Trends Shaping the Future of Canada's Tourism Industry, [Destination Canada](#), November 2021

Shift from marketing to comprehensive management – aim to balance the needs of residents, visitors, and the environment.	Worker shortages will persist, straining Canada's tourism and hospitality sectors and leading to service limitations and reduced experience quality.	Supply chain shortages, rising material costs, and increased demand have led to higher expenses for airfare, fuel, food, hotel stays, and travel experiences.
--	--	---

MARKET TRENDS

Regenerative Tourism Increasing desire to connect in meaningful ways with places visited by actively contributing to the well-being and restoration of the local destination.	Off-Peak Travel Gaining popularity due to increasing costs and temperatures. It's also more feasible now due to remote or flexible work arrangements.	Coolcationing With the intense, record-breaking temperatures of recent years, many are considering booking 'coolcations' in more temperate destinations further north.	Generative AI Artificial Intelligence is dramatically altering the consumer and marketing landscape. Travelers will increasingly use generative AI (i.e. ChatGPT) to help plan their trips.	Connection with Nature The pandemic fueled the desire for wild spaces and outdoor recreation to support positive mental and emotional wellbeing – hiking, mountain biking, road cycling, paddling are travel motivators.
Health and Wellness Journeys From cold water plunges to silent retreats and digital detoxes, travelers are seeking journeys that rejuvenate both the body and mind.	Wellness in Offbeat Locations The pursuit of well-being extends to unconventional locations, blending nature with curated wellness experiences for rejuvenation.	Indigenous Experiences Continued interest in authentic Indigenous experiences – reflects increasing recognition of the significance of meaningful reconciliation.	Accessibility It's not only about human rights, but it's a business opportunity for destinations and businesses to ensure tourism products and services are accessible to all.	Bleisure More professionals can work remotely now and are seeking destinations, with inspiring environments for work, exploration, and rest.
Slow Travel & Local Immersion Sustainable tourism practice involving longer stays with less travel in a single place, fostering a more profound connection with local cultures and environments.	Active Transportation Climate change and wellness have accelerated need for more active transportation choices in communities.	Pet Friendly Travel The pandemic fueled rapid pet adoption, making destinations with pet-friendly initiatives highly sought-after by those seeking seamless travel with their beloved animals.	Local Gastronomy The significance of food sustainability, food security, and awareness of food sources is on the rise. Travelers are increasingly drawn to hyper-local and foraged foods.	Community Pride We love where we live and want to benefit from tourism but minimize negative impacts.

Key Findings

- Despite ongoing economic challenges and uncertainties arising from geopolitical tensions and conflicts, the international and domestic tourism sector appears poised for a full recovery to pre-pandemic levels by 2024.
- Visitor numbers to the Southern Gulf Islands have notably increased over the past 5 years, with significant growth observed during shoulder and off-season months compared to peak months. There remains opportunity to continue to grow the off-season through compelling marketing and promotions that attract values aligned travellers.
- The travel landscape is evolving in 2024, driven by technological advancements in AI, shifting consumer values, a growing interest in off-season travel, and an increasing desire for wellness and sustainable adventures embracing nature healing..

- Technology is changing how visitors gather travel information; mobile visitor servicing is a way to address the decrease in travelers going to existing visitor centres, while providing more opportunities to engage with visitors, providing an island welcome and encouraging visitor dispersion and responsible visitor behaviour.

There are more opportunities and trends than a small Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) can actively engage in; sharing resources with businesses via newsletter is a tool for keeping partners informed (e.g. training opportunities, business grants, etc.)

OVERALL GOALS, OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

Goal	Objective	Target	Comments
Increase Revenues	Increased overnight stays	2% increase annually	This continued expansion will occur in the shoulder and off-peak seasons
Seasonal and Geographic Dispersion	Disperse visitors across Islands seasonally and geographically, optimizing attraction usage and mitigating overcrowding issues	5% increase annually	Prioritizing strategic visitor dispersion aims to balance tourism impact, ensuring both overcrowded and underutilized Islands benefit, enhancing the overall visitor experience.
Enhance coordination of events across Islands	Improve the coordination and timing of events on each Island to disperse visitors strategically and provide a more enriching experience	Event coordination in place by 2025	Strategically coordinating the timing of events prevents clustering, encourages dispersion, and enhances the overall appeal of our islands. Our aim is that visitors will be encouraged to explore more SGI islands, extending their journey beyond their initial destination.
Visitor Services	Increase outreach to visitors on all islands encouraging visitor dispersion and regenerative visitor behaviour	Mobile satellite VC by 2026	Improving inter island connectivity, engagement and on island visitor experience with technology and innovation is needed especially for outlying areas.
Resident Sentiment	Increase community support for tourism	3% increase by 2029	Measuring community support for tourism is

			crucial for sustainable development, enabling alignment with local values and needs.
Partner Engagement	Increase partner engagement in SGITP programs and services	2% increase annually	Measuring SGITP partner engagement is key for evaluating program effectiveness and ensuring sustainability.
Increase Visitor Participation in Destination Protection	Reduce water use by visitors and support water conservation efforts by government and NPO's	2% decrease in water consumption annually	Goal to decrease impacts of visitors

STRATEGIC AREAS OF FOCUS

Strategic Area of Focus 1 | Destination Marketing

Create compelling marketing and promotions that raise awareness about the values important to our communities, inspiring like-minded people to visit our islands responsibly.

- ✓ Continue to focus on the Cozy Season (October through April) travel to the Southern Gulf Islands by creating and sharing compelling campaigns and content through various media.
- ✓ Continue to share educational messages to encourage regenerative visitor behaviour, aligning visitors with island values and mitigating the adverse impacts of the visitor economy.
- ✓ Enhance website with ongoing improvements for increased engagement, compelling content, and improved usability. Focus on evolving travel itineraries, integrate Google Maps, and diverse stories (from all islands and different island voices) for easy social media amplification.
- ✓ Engage an active and growing digital community via social media with a focus on brand-aligned photography, user-generated content (UGC), with a goal of “killer content.”
- ✓ Attend values-aligned consumer shows to engage potential travellers in our primary markets through an additional, impactful channel.
- ✓ Create and distribute a family of brand-aligned travel guide resources for the Southern Gulf Islands that serves as the ‘quilt’ that knits the islands together. The guide will be updated by theme and island with overarching messages focusing on the off-season—nature, art, and food.
- ✓ Support unique and targeted opportunities to support travel media on the islands in partnership with Destination BC and 4VI that includes off-season content, value-aligned stories, and regenerative travel.
- ✓ Develop several series of short-form videos for each island focusing on itineraries, events, the arts, island life, regenerative travel, and Cozy Season travel.
- ✓ Leverage marketing partnerships with sector organizations, including Paddle BC, BC Bird Trail, BC Ale Trail, Flavour Trail, Marine Trail, and Wellness Travel BC to promote Southern Gulf Islands experiences

What will we measure

- ✓ Visitor volume in the off-season
- ✓ Average daily room rate
- ✓ Marketing campaign measures

Strategic Area of Focus 2 | Regenerative Destination Development

SGITP's role goes beyond promotion – it is committed to regenerative destination management. Helping to create conditions for positive experiences by emphasizing sustainability and community engagement, ensuring the Southern Gulf Islands thrive for both residents and visitors.

Stewardship in Action

- ✓ Advocate for and support regenerative destination management in the Southern Gulf Islands.
- ✓ Continue to advance sustainability planning, crisis communication planning, inclusivity, accessibility, and other industry training to provide leadership and best practices to our visitor-focussed businesses.
- ✓ Continue to invest in research to understand the market conditions and inform decision making.
- ✓ Conduct resident sentiment surveys to gauge support for tourism. Address residents needs and concerns related to tourism.
- ✓ Explore conducting a value of tourism study.
- ✓ Support government and NPO's water conservation initiatives

Events

- ✓ Continue to promote events with an increased focus on values alignment.
- ✓ Create a regional arts and entertainment calendar to consolidate events in a central location.
- ✓ Conduct coordinated programming to eliminate inter-island competition for event visitors.
- ✓ Advocate for and support formalized, digitally ready offerings that meet the needs of visitors.
- ✓ Advocate for and support region-wide festivals and event initiatives such as the Tour des Isles.
- ✓ Establish a network of partnerships with arts organizations and event providers across the region.

Product Experience Development

- ✓ Support the implementation of the Southern Gulf Islands Local Area Food and Agricultural Plan, including working with restaurants and the Culinary Tourism Alliance to develop and promote culinary tourism during the shoulder and winter season.
- ✓ Support the development of wellness offerings, working with experience and service providers to promote wellness activities in the shoulder and winter season.
- ✓ Continue to develop relationships with conservancies to bridge the gap between visitors and environmental regeneration and create offerings for visitors to give back to the islands.
- ✓ Advocate for and support initiatives and providers that facilitate active and car-free travel.
- ✓ Support the development of agritourism offerings, working with farms, accommodations, and service providers to expand and promote agricultural-based experiences.
- ✓ Share education and training opportunities from Destination Canada and Destination BC as applicable (e.g. SPARK program, webinars, etc.) with industry partners.

Visitor Services

- ✓ Continue the exploration of a multi-island visitor services program in two phases:
 - Phase 1 involves creating and communicating a viable business case for mobile visitor services (i.e., mobile visitor centre vehicle) capable of servicing the five-island region and taking our 'islands' on the road to targeted events or consumer shows.

- Phase 2, the implementation phase, the focus shifts to acquiring and equipping the mobile visitor centre vehicle. We'll then launch mobile visitor centre in strategic locations across the five-islands and at target events. The aim is to provide visitor information while also encouraging visitor dispersion and promoting regenerative visitor behavior.
- Note: SGITP is actively seeking grant funding for this initiative and will aim to use a combination of MRDT and grant funding.
- ✓ Create a Southern Gulf Island Visitor App to enhance the overall visitor experience by providing convenient access to relevant information, services, and interactive features.
- ✓ Continue the exploration of the wayfinding program in two phases: In Phase 1, build relationships with local First Nations to lead or co-lead the initiative, focusing on naming places and sharing stories of the land. Phase 2, the implementation phase, includes completing wayfinding assessments, signage development, and installation. We will seek grant and partnership funding for the signage and installation costs of this initiative.
- ✓ Continue to develop and stabilize AquaLink to serve two purposes: 1) move walkers/hikers, cyclists, kayakers around our Islands, and 2) link our Island communities for services, housing, and work. MRDT will not be used to fund this initiative.
- ✓ Continue to work with BC Ferries and transportation service providers to enhance inter-island mobility and advocate for active transportation trails.

What will we measure

- ✓ Resident support for the tourism economy
- ✓ Project continuity and implementation (e.g. Aqualink, Mobile Visitor Centre, Event Coordination)
- ✓ Grant application success

Strategic Area of Focus 3 | Community and Industry Outreach & Partnerships

Local, regional, and provincial partnerships are vital for establishing a strong foundation and fostering inter-island cooperation, contributing to a sustainable and resilient tourism sector.

Local Partner Engagement

- ✓ Provide regular updates to partners via the SGITP e-newsletter – upcoming events and marketing campaigns, cooperative marketing opportunities, training workshop opportunities from Destination BC or 4VI, new funding announcements, etc.
- ✓ Maintain corporate section of the SGITP's website – providing key information for partners.
- ✓ Visit tourism partner businesses for one-on-one conversations to share opportunities and challenges and inform advocacy efforts.
- ✓ Host annual community engagement session to showcase the past year's activities and preview upcoming activities/gather input for the new year.
- ✓ Convene regular meetings with City staff and elected officials to provide update on SGITP activities, discuss opportunities to collaborate and advocate on issues that impact tourism.
- ✓ Educate residents, elected leaders and City staff about the value of tourism on the Southern Gulf Islands.
- ✓ Continue to build relationships with local Indigenous partners regarding tourism opportunities.
- ✓ Attend meetings and engage with local chamber of commerce, conservancies, arts organizations, and other non-profits; share SGITP's activities and discuss opportunities to collaborate.

Provincial/Regional Partner Engagement

- ✓ Continued participation in industry and sector organizations, including BC Destination Marketing Association and the Tourism Industry Association of BC.
- ✓ Attend provincial and regional meetings and conferences and engage in training opportunities.

What will we measure

- ✓ Partner engagement in SGITP communications (newsletter open rate, etc.)
- ✓ Partner participation in program opportunities, engagement sessions, etc.
- ✓ Number of one-on-one business meetings/site visits
- ✓ Community feedback

Strategic Area of Focus 4 | Organizational Excellence

Effective DMO management is essential for ensuring the organization's financial sustainability and long-term industry and community support and engagement.

- ✓ Secure annual partnership funding agreement with the Capital Regional District.
- ✓ Conduct monthly board and committee meetings as required.
- ✓ Explore updating board governance bylaws for improved organizational effectiveness.
- ✓ Implement sound financial management practices to ensure the SGITP's financial stability, and ease of annual reporting
- ✓ Seek grant opportunities as available that align with Five-Year Strategic Plan and One-Year Tactical Plans.
- ✓ Complete required bi-annual MRDT planning and reporting (November & May).

What will we measure

- ✓ Annual funding from Capital Regional District
- ✓ Sufficient board nominations received for Annual General Meeting (AGM)
- ✓ Number of successfully secured grants
- ✓ Successful MRDT reporting and renewal

BRAND POSITIONING

As the Southern Gulf Islands' Community Destination Management Organization (CDMO), the SGITP's primary role is to create compelling marketing and promotions that raise awareness of what is important to our communities and encourage people who share our values to visit our islands responsibly.

SGITP's thorough understanding of and appreciation for our communities have helped it to create an innovative, engaging brand identity that has garnered recognition across the BC tourism industry—a free-spirited, unorthodox, creative collection of communities passionate about art, nature, local food, wellness and sustainability.

The brand sets the tone for all SGITP's marketing and communications activities and combined with data-driven insights and recognition of visitor interests and travel trends, increases our region's visibility and reputation.

SGITP strives to encourage local partners to position and align their products and services within our community tourism brand to promote the Southern Gulf Islands as a destination for exploring. For more information on the brand see [brand guidelines](#).

Brand Model



TARGET MARKETS

SGITP's primary markets are British Columbia, Alberta, and Washington State and Ontario. As a community-level organization, SGITP resources are best focused on the close-in geographical markets. SGITP works closely with our regional partner 4VI and our provincial partner Destination BC to promote to international markets.

Cozy Season – October to April

Markets

- BC (Lower Mainland, Southern Vancouver Island)
- Alberta (Calgary)
- Ontario (Toronto)
- Washington State

Value Aligned Target Audience

- **Snowbird:** Mature travellers looking for somewhere to replace their winter vacation south. They value the relative peace of off-season travel, the quieter roads and accommodation. They're likely to discover the sticker shock of travelling to the United States. With the US/Canadian dollar disparity, snowbirds are looking for US vacation alternatives.
- **Young Professionals:** City dwellers that are looking to get away from their day-to-day life and connect with the island life. They enjoy the hustle and bustle of the city but look for sustainable city break getaways with close friends and family. The islands are appealing to them because they can enjoy quieter moments and recharge.

The Gulf Islands could also offer an opportunity for remote work as more people are provided with hybrid work opportunities post-pandemic.

Regenerative Travel – May to September

- SGITP does not actively promote travel to the Southern Gulf Islands during the high season, instead it uses its channels to educate and emphasize the awareness strategy, Better Than You Found It, highlighting six priority areas for improved impact in the visitor economy: fire safety, water conservation, proper waste disposal, proper road use, respectful wildlife encounters, and supporting local businesses.

Specific activity segments are as follows:

- Health and wellness travel
- Outdoor recreation
- Arts and culture
- Agritourism and culinary

MANAGEMENT, GOVERNANCE & ADMINISTRATION

SGITP is the sole designated recipient of the 2% MRDT and is responsible for implementing the proposed activities in the Five-Year Strategic Business Plan and corresponding tactical plans and reporting.

SGIPT is a registered non-profit society under the BC Societies Act, officially incorporated in 2019 and run by a volunteer board who are nominated and elected by the SGITP membership. SGITP maintains compliance with the Societies Act and Societies Regulation through the filing of Annual Reports and maintenance of all legal records and financial statements

The Board includes up to nine directors, passionate local leaders representing each of the five island communities that meet on a regular basis (minimum six times per year) and provide oversight on strategic planning and funding. A full board includes the following:

- Four directors from the accommodation sector for both electoral areas (Hotels, Resorts, B&B's)
- One director representing food & beverage (restaurants, wineries, etc.),
- One director from health-wellness,
- One director from recreation/outdoors,
- One director from agriculture
- One director from arts, education & culture.

SGITP has an established Marketing Committee committed to increasing communications between the organization and its members on marketing initiatives. SGITP seeks to establish additional committees within the next five years, including those focused on Transportation, Finance, and Regenerative Destination Development, to provide valuable guidance to both management and the board of directors.

Implementation of the strategic plan will be led by the SGITP team, including the Executive Director, Communications and Marketing Manager, Destination Development Project Manager, and Administration.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

In addition to the MRDT, additional partnership funds include the Destination BC Cooperative Marketing Program, membership dues, grants, and the two electoral areas.

Note: Both Electoral Areas (F & G) have passed motions, each committing \$10,000 through a fee-for-service arrangement to provide funding to SGIPT for Destination Management and Marketing. The contributions come from the Community Economic Sustainability Commission in the Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Area and the Local Community Commission in the Salt Spring Island Electoral Area, totaling \$20,000.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The Southern Gulf Islands comprised of Galiano Island, Mayne Island, Pender Island, Saturna Island, and Salt Spring Island are governed under two Capital Regional District Electoral Areas (F & G) with land use oversight by the Islands Trust.

When the Southern Gulf Islands Tourism Partnership (SGITP) was formed a key challenge all the stakeholders in the organization noted was the lack of affordable workforce housing availability. There was concern for the seasonal housing needs for employees that come for the peak tourism season, but more concerning was the need for stable housing to attract key employees for the longer term.

Five years in to SGITP's first term our Islands are still experiencing severe affordable housing shortages with many long-time residents unable to secure suitable rental properties. This issue has been consistently identified in local and regional planning documents, going back at least the last fifteen years. Housing shortages have maintained a very high profile within our communities. Our local governments are searching for solutions mostly surrounding new developments.

There are many reasons for the shortage of rental housing properties in our region. Among some of the reasons the local real-estate experts point to is the continued expansion of short-term vacation rentals. The migration of some city dwellers to more rural areas during and post COVID period has taken out some housing that had been available for rentals. Similarly, all the Islands have seen a significant increase in new home building which has attracted more trades to the Islands. These individuals and families are competing for the same housing as hospitality workers.

When SGITP became the DMO for the region in 2019, the collection of MRDT from Online Accommodation Platforms (OAP) had just started. The collection of OAP MRDT in the beginning was very modest due to the introduction of the program and COVID in 2020. The flow of OAP MRDT became significant in 2022 and 2023.

It is noted that many tourism operators continue to experience difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified personnel due to the workforce housing shortage, and SGITP is very motivated to try and find solutions with as immediate an impact as possible.

The term "workforce housing" refers to housing that is affordable for households whose income is sufficient to secure quality housing within a reasonable proximity to a workplace. These are households of the gainfully employed who are unable to find appropriate housing for their needs. This is a group of people who are not typically thought of as the focus of affordable housing. Many of those affected by the lack of 'affordable housing' in the Southern Gulf Island (SGI) Region include those who work in the service and tourism industry, which is one of the Region's largest employers.

The SGI Region's recommendation is for MRDT OAP monies to be used to seek out solutions towards securing workforce housing. Therefore, the SGI Tourism Partnership will devote the full amount of Online Accommodation Platform (OAP) MRDT revenues to affordable housing initiatives, except for an instance when there was a severe unanticipated decline in other MRDT revenue or a significant change in programs that the SGI Tourism Partnership is

supporting, to the extent that it could compromise the SGI Tourism Partnerships ability to deliver its core marketing programs. Affordable housing conditions have continued to evolve over the last 5 years. Going forward into the next 5 years SGI Tourism Partnership intends to prioritize the following areas and programs, or similar.

All housing initiatives must consider available services, infrastructure, and resources. In the Gulf Islands water is a key driver especially for any new housing solutions. SGITP will work with the CRD and Island Trust to address water availability and sustainability.

Immediate Impact: Housing NOW

The SGI Community Resource Centre implemented the Housing NOW project in 2023. Housing NOW has built a database of potential residences and workers in the SGI region connecting people and available accommodations. They match the workforce population needing housing to underutilized homes in Southern Gulf Island communities. By facilitating home sharing opportunities with island community members, Housing NOW is attempting to bridge the gap between the much-needed workforce population and the increasing lack of affordable and allowable accommodations. The organization started in 2023 and next steps are the inclusion of Salt Spring in 2024 with an island liaison and data security provisions. As a start-up social enterprise, Housing NOW requires additional support to broadly establish the program. We are expecting this initiative will grow over the next 5-years with the goal to house as many of the seasonal workers coming to our Islands during the peak visitor season.

Mid-Term Impact: CRD Rural Housing Program

The Capital Regional District (CRD) adopted the Southern Gulf Islands Housing Strategy in 2022. The strategy emphasizes that housing solutions on the rural islands requires different assumptions than those used for conventional housing interventions in growing urban regions. CRD is now advancing a Rural Housing Program, which will deliver housing solutions at scales more appropriate to the island context. CRD staff are now in discussions about how to roll out the new program, including discussions about a potential partnership with SGITP to access MRDT (OAP) funding partnerships. SGITP will enter into an MOU with the CRD respecting the MRDT (OAP) funding to ensure the funding, administered solely through the CRD, directly benefits the five Southern Gulf Islands with increased housing supply which may include: incentives for development of accessory dwelling units, support for pre-development funding for non-market housing to the non-profit sector.

Long-term Impact: SGI Tourism Partnership Capital Reserve Fund for Housing

The SGITP initial Five-Year Strategy anticipated the need for workforce housing as a priority. The plan directed that MRDT (OAP) monies, should they be realized, “should be used to seek out solutions towards securing workforce housing in the following areas: long-term housing supply, purpose-built housing of 3-units or more, housing subsidies, and down payment loans.” Post start-up and post-COVID, the SGITP is finally in a position to commit a portion of MRDT (OAP) revenue to a housing capital reserve fund for consideration of these larger and longer-term housing investments in partnership with local employers and government.

The strategy as we look forward to in the next 5-year mandate is to have flexibility to utilize the OAP funds proactively for good, solid, sustainable solutions to our chronic housing shortage. In this way we may be able to react to ever changing market conditions and pursue innovative solutions.

This will be achieved by continued collaboration and consultation with the broad base of stakeholders including Destination BC and any provincial agency involved with Housing. We will continue to work with local governments including our two CRD Electoral Areas and the Islands Trust. We will also continue to meet the needs of our stakeholders involved in our visitor economy. This will be achieved through the annual Tactical Plan process which will involve consultation each year and annual reporting on results.