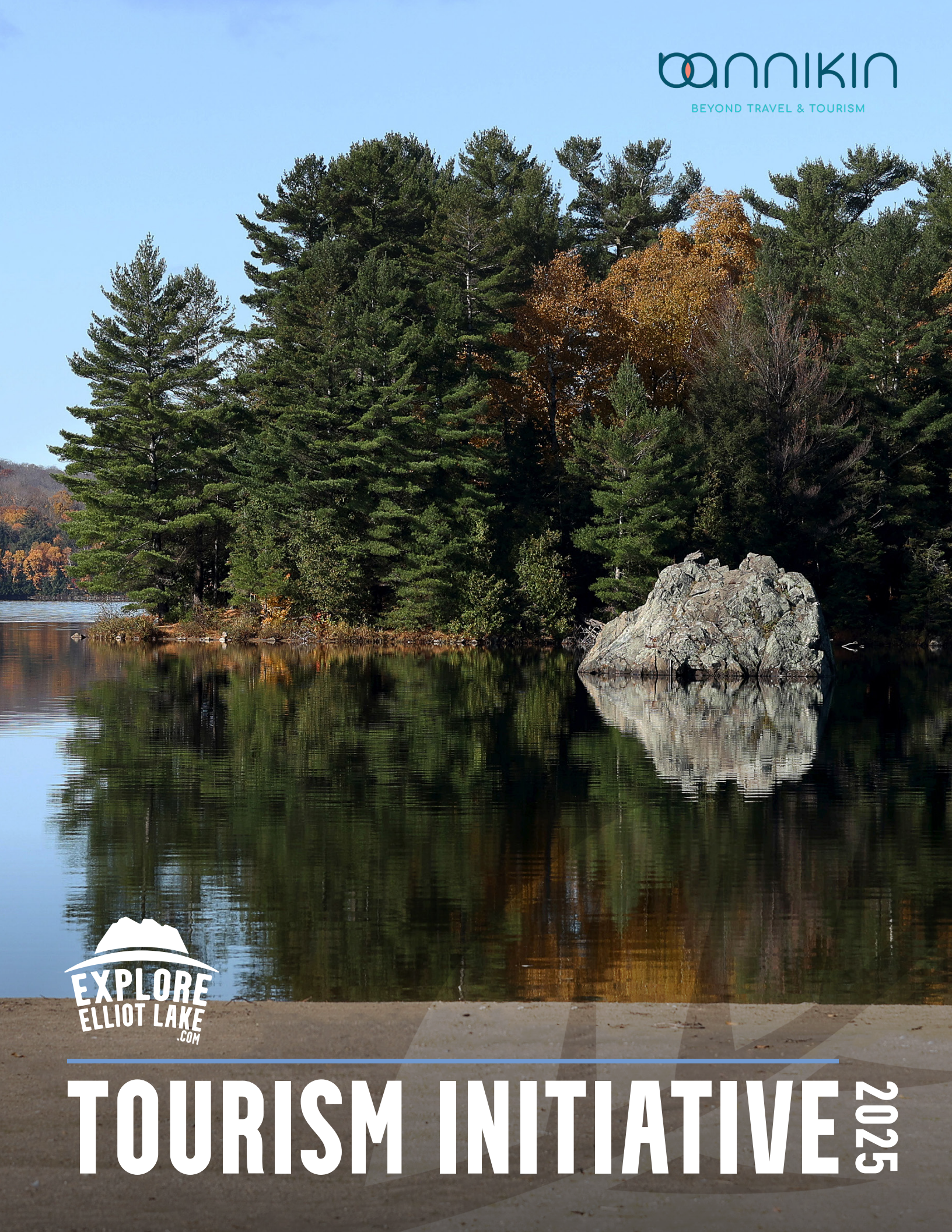


annikin

BEYOND TRAVEL & TOURISM



TOURISM INITIATIVE 2025

Executive Summary

Project Overview

A driver of community development, tourism creates jobs and supports local businesses while contributing to community vitality and incentivizing the protection of natural assets. Considering this and given tourism's potential to build economic resiliency and foster local investment, the City of Elliot Lake commissioned the development of a community-driven, three-year tourism strategy. Through the Explore Elliot Lake Tourism Initiative, this strategy sets a strong foundation for gradual and sustainable tourism growth that prioritizes community wellbeing.

The Explore Elliot Lake Tourism Initiative strategy project was undertaken from December 2024 to July 2025. Bannikin, an Ontario-based tourism consultancy, was engaged to facilitate the process with guidance from Economic Development staff and a Tourism Working Group.

Community engagement was a foundational element of the project methodology. Along with extensive desk research, community engagement activities included a community tourism survey, two industry focus groups, two community open houses, tours of the destination and its tourism assets, seven municipal council interviews, and 24 key informant interviews.

Tourism intersects with other work undertaken by the City of Elliot Lake, necessitating the application of a tourism lens to these initiatives, one which considers the needs of both visitors and residents. Alignments with parallel City work such as ongoing efforts related to updating the City's accessibility plan and developing a trails master plan inform this tourism strategy. Other alignments considered in developing the tourism strategy include the City's *Official Plan* (2018, amended in 2022), the *Elliot Lake Economic Development & Diversification Strategy: Elliot Lake! Practical Solutions for Practical Realities* (2013), the *City of Elliot Lake Strategic Plan 2023* (2003), the *City's Community Improvement Plan – 2024 Update City of Elliot Lake*, the *Age-Friendly Elliot Lake: Final Report & Action Plan* (2017) and the *2020-2025 City of Elliot Lake Multi-Year Accessibility Plan* (2020).

Key Findings

Tourism is a key sector of Elliot Lake that is made up of over 10% of all businesses, and over 8% of all jobs in the community. It is home to a variety of outdoor-based, food and beverage, culture and entertainment, and retail assets, which make it unique in the region as a hub of services, amenities, and recreational opportunities.

Elliot Lake is well-positioned to grow as a four-season outdoor destination by continuing to attract visitors in the summer months and growing visitation across the rest of the year, especially visitors travelling by car from Northern and Southern Ontario. This strategy identifies seven visitor personas to focus on, including:

1. Visiting friends and relatives,
2. Soft outdoor enthusiasts,
3. ATV and snowmobile fans,

4. Regional festival/cultural enthusiasts,
5. Avid accessibility travellers,
6. Digital nomads and home swappers, and
7. Skip-gen and multigenerational travellers.

Elliot Lake has an opportunity to fill tourism product gaps by growing its arts and cultural heritage tourism offerings, encouraging the procurement and integration of regional food and beverage into the visitor experience, and developing purchasable tourism experiences, especially guided outdoor experiences.

The City of Elliot Lake's Economic Development staff have played a lead role in developing tourism in the community. However, to grow the tourism sector, additional resources are needed, including a dedicated tourism coordinator to implement this tourism strategy and support the tourism industry. Also needed is funding to invest in tourism infrastructure and services to ensure a positive visitor experience, effective marketing, and a sustainable approach to tourism development. This includes but is not limited to exploring grants, funding streams, and tools like the municipal accommodation tax.

In addition to this, partnerships and collaborations with Serpent River First Nation, Mississaugi First Nation, neighbouring municipalities, tourism organizations, community groups, and the tourism industry, will be essential to ensuring a vibrant future for tourism

Vision

In alignment with City plans and reflecting feedback received from the community, an aspirational yet achievable tourism vision was developed:

Tourism in Elliot Lake is a source of community building, pride, and prosperity across the year. Everyone is welcomed and able to participate in vibrant outdoor and cultural offerings that showcase the resiliency, innovation, and connections among our people, histories, and natural environment.

Guiding Principles

Six principles guide the tourism strategy and its implementation. These are:

1. Placemaking and Community Building
2. Resident Inclusion
3. Sustainability and Resilience
4. Accessibility
5. Welcoming
6. Collaboration

Strategy Framework

Five pillars are at the foundation of Elliot Lake's tourism strategy. Across the pillars are seven overarching initiatives and 26 actions.

Pillar A is about organizational capacity and relationships by fostering consideration of and connection to tourism across all City departments and initiatives, securing resources to support tourism development, management and marketing, and establishing Elliot Lake as a regional tourism leader and collaborator.

Pillar B focuses on community building and engagement through involving residents, industry and community organizations in tourism.

Pillar C looks at the visitor experience through ensuring excellence in access and service.

Pillar D is about improving Elliot Lake's tourism products and experiences through encouraging and supporting tourism businesses and groups to develop and enhance experiences to fill gaps.

Pillar E focuses on tourism marketing through developing and sharing targeted marketing and promotional materials.

Sommaire

Aperçu du projet

Moteur de développement économique, le tourisme crée des emplois et soutient les entreprises locales. Il contribue à la vitalité des communautés tout en encourageant la protection des attraits naturels. Cela en tête, et étant donné que le tourisme a le potentiel d'accroître la résilience économique et de promouvoir l'investissement local, la Ville d'Elliot Lake a commandé une stratégie touristique de trois ans, guidée par la communauté. Fruit de l'initiative touristique « *Explore Elliot Lake* », cette stratégie établit une fondation solide visant une croissance touristique progressive et durable, qui accorde la priorité au bien-être de la communauté.

Le projet « *Explore Elliot Lake Tourism Initiative* » s'est déroulé de décembre 2024 à juillet 2025. Bannikin, une entreprise ontarienne spécialisée en tourisme a été retenue pour faciliter les démarches. Bannikin a travaillé avec l'équipe de développement économique et un groupe de travail.

En plus d'une recherche documentaire approfondie, l'engagement communautaire a été un élément méthodologique fondamental. Dans cette optique, diverses mesures ont eu prises : un sondage communautaire sur le tourisme, deux groupes témoins de l'industrie, deux portes ouvertes communautaires, des visites de la destination et de ses attraits touristiques, sept entrevues au conseil municipal et 24 entrevues avec des informateurs, informatrices clés.

L'initiative recoupe d'autres projets entrepris par la Ville d'Elliot Lake. Il faut poser un regard touristique sur ceux-ci, et tenir compte à la fois des besoins des touristes et de la population locale. Cette stratégie touristique s'aligne avec d'autres chantiers de la Ville, par exemple, la mise à jour continue du plan d'accessibilité municipal et le développement d'un plan général des sentiers. D'autres documents ont été pris en compte dans l'exercice : le plan officiel de la Ville (2018, modifié en 2022), la stratégie de développement et de diversification économique « *Elliot Lake! Practical Solutions for Practical Realities* » (2013), le plan stratégique de la Ville d'Elliot Lake (2023), le plan d'amélioration communautaire d'Elliot Lake (mis à jour en 2024), le rapport et plan d'action « *Age-Friendly Elliot Lake* » (2017) et le plan d'accessibilité pluriannuel 2020-2025 (2020).

Principales conclusions

Le tourisme représente un secteur clé pour Elliot Lake; il englobe 10 % des entreprises et plus de 8 % des emplois de la communauté. Elliot Lake compte une diversité d'atouts, comme le plein air, l'alimentation, la culture, le divertissement et la vente au détail. Ceux-ci font d'Elliot Lake un endroit unique dans la région. C'est un centre de services et de commodités, plein de possibilités récréatives.

Elliot Lake est bien placée pour devenir une destination de plein air quatre saisons, en continuant d'attirer des touristes l'été et en faisant croître l'affluence le reste de l'année, en particulier en attirant des touristes du Nord et du Sud de l'Ontario qui se déplacent

en voiture. La présente stratégie définit sept profils de touristes sur lesquels se concentrer :

1. Les personnes qui visitent des ami-e-s et des proches,
2. Les adeptes d'activités de plein air douces,
3. Les adeptes de VTT et de motoneige,
4. Les adeptes des festivals et des manifestations culturelles de la région,
5. Les touristes à la recherche d'installations et d'expériences accessibles,
6. Les nomades numériques et les personnes échangeant de maison
7. Les groupes de touristes intergénérationnels (les grands-parents avec leurs petits-enfants) et multigénérationnels.

Elliot Lake a la possibilité de combler ses lacunes touristiques en assurant la croissance de son offre touristique artistique et culturelle, en encourageant l'intégration des produits gastronomiques régionaux dans les expériences touristiques, en développant des expériences touristiques achetables — en particulier des activités de plein air guidées.

Jusqu'à présent, le personnel responsable du développement économique de la Ville d'Elliot Lake a joué un rôle de leader dans le développement du tourisme dans la communauté. Cependant, des ressources additionnelles sont requises pour assurer la croissance du tourisme, comme un coordonnateur ou une coordonnatrice attiré-e au tourisme qui assurerait la mise en œuvre de la présente stratégie touristique et qui appuierait l'industrie touristique. Il faut aussi du financement pour investir dans l'infrastructure et les services touristiques et ainsi assurer une expérience positive pour les touristes, du marketing efficace et une approche durable pour le développement touristique. Tout cela inclut, sans s'y limiter, la recherche de subventions et de sources de financement et des outils comme la taxe municipale sur l'hébergement.

De plus, des partenariats et des collaborations avec la Première Nation Serpent River, la Première Nation Mississaugi, les municipalités environnantes, les organisations touristiques, les groupes communautaires et l'industrie touristique seront indispensables pour assurer un avenir dynamique au tourisme.

Vision

Conformément aux plans municipaux et en tenant compte des commentaires formulés par la communauté, une vision touristique à la fois ambitieuse et réalisable a été élaborée :

Le tourisme est une source de développement, de fierté et de prospérité pour la communauté d'Elliot Lake, et ce, tout au long de l'année. Chaque personne est la bienvenue et peut participer à des activités de plein air et à des activités culturelles qui mettent en valeur la résilience, l'innovation et les liens entre notre population, nos histoires et l'environnement naturel.

Principes directeurs

Six principes orientent la stratégie touristique et sa mise en œuvre :

1. Utilisation des espaces et développement communautaire
2. Inclusion des résidentes et résidents
3. Durabilité et résilience
4. Accessibilité
5. Accueil
6. Collaboration

Cadre stratégique

La stratégie touristique d'Elliot Lake repose sur cinq piliers. Ceux-ci englobent sept initiatives et 26 mesures.

Le **pilier A** porte sur la capacité organisationnelle et les relations. Il encourage la prise en compte du tourisme et les liens avec le tourisme dans tous les services et les initiatives de la Ville. Il est garant des ressources pour soutenir le développement, la gestion et le marketing touristique. Il fait d'Elliot Lake un leader et un collaborateur touristique régional.

Le **pilier B** porte sur le développement et l'engagement communautaires. Il incite la population locale, l'industrie et les organisations communautaires à participer au tourisme.

Le **pilier C** porte sur l'expérience touristique. Il assure l'excellence d'accès et du service.

Le **pilier D** porte sur l'amélioration des produits et des expériences touristiques d'Elliot Lake. Il invite les entreprises et les groupes touristiques à concevoir et à améliorer des expériences touristiques pour combler des lacunes. Aussi, il soutient ces entreprises et groupes.

Le **pilier E** porte sur le marketing touristique, par le développement et le partage de supports marketing et promotionnels ciblés.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 8

Introduction..... 9

 Project Overview 9

 What is Tourism? 11

 Glossary 13

Tourism in Elliot Lake 15

 Tourism Roles 15

 Economic, Social, and Environmental Impacts 16

 Destination Positioning 17

 The Market..... 22

Community Aspirations for Tourism 30

 Tourism Vision 30

 Guiding principles 30

The Path Forward 33

 Strategy Framework 33

 Implementation..... 36



Acknowledgements

The City of Elliot Lake gratefully recognizes that the lands, waters, and living things known as Mooshgodne'gaming, "the lake is full" in Ojibwe, and the City of Elliot Lake, are the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, specifically Serpent River First Nation and Mississaugi First Nation. This land is part of the Treaty 61: Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850 signed by 21 First Nations and the Crown in Sault Ste. Marie.

The City of Elliot Lake looks forward to continuing to the deepen relationships with Serpent River First Nation and Mississaugi First Nation through tourism development, management, and marketing in the spirit of reconciliation, including collaboratively exploring opportunities for true partnership.

The City would like to extend a big thank you to everyone who participated in the engagement activities that helped to inform this tourism strategy, including residents, the tourism industry, and representatives from partner organizations. Your input was invaluable to setting a strong vision and direction for the future of tourism in Elliot Lake.

Heartfelt thanks are also due to the Tourism Working Group made up of Dave Brunet, Jack Peterson, Laurie Blake, and Marielle Brown. By offering their time, energy, and ideas they helped to guide this strategy development process.

Finally, the City would also like to thank internal project team members Steve Antunes, Economic Development Manager and Marcus Heard, Digital/Media Co-ordinator for leading the tourism strategy research and development process.

The City of Elliot Lake would like to thank FedNor for their generous financial support of the Explore Elliot Lake Tourism Initiative Strategy.



Federal Economic Development
Agency for Northern Ontario

Agence fédérale de développement
économique pour le Nord de l'Ontario

The development of the *Explore Elliot Lake Tourism Strategy* was facilitated by Bannikin, a tourism research, strategy, and development consultancy. The Bannikin team included Caroline Morrow, Pat Forrest, James Arteaga, and Camilo Montoya-Guevara.

Introduction

Project Overview

Background

When done right, tourism development is community development.

It provides jobs and supports local businesses while contributing to community vitality and incentivizing the protection of natural assets.

The City of Elliot Lake sees the potential for tourism to build economic resiliency and foster investment in local business and key infrastructure. To capitalize on this opportunity, a clear plan informed by community feedback is essential, one that ensures tourism growth happens in a way that makes sense for Elliot Lake and its residents.

The City of Elliot Lake is committed to focusing strategically on destination development, management, and marketing. This means setting a strong foundation for gradual and sustainable tourism growth through the Explore Elliot Lake Tourism Initiative. The result of this work is a three-year tourism strategy for the community as outlined in this report.

Methodology

The Explore Elliot Lake Tourism Initiative strategy project began in December 2024 and ran through July 2025. The City of Elliot engaged Bannikin, an Ontario-based tourism consultancy to lead the development of the strategy and related research. The project was supported by a Working Group established by the City to guide the project.

At the onset of this project, a Research, Engagement, and Communications (REC) Plan was developed to confirm primary and secondary research questions. The REC Plan outlined how data from different research techniques would be triangulated across desk research and community engagement activities.

Overall, a defining element of this project methodology was prioritizing engagement by offering multiple ways for community members to provide feedback, whether through a broader activity like the community survey or through in-person activations targeting specific interest groups, like the sessions that took place with tourism industry members. Research activities that set the foundation for this tourism strategy include:

Desk Research

- Background document review
- Tourism asset review
- Tourism services and partnerships review
- Digital presence and marketing review
- Tourism trends review
- Tourism economic impact assessment

Community Engagement Activities

- Community tourism survey (383 complete responses)
 - Targeted Elliot Lake residents, tourism industry members (including specific questions for accommodation providers)
- Industry focus groups (x2)
- Community open houses (x2)
- In-destination tour (including conversations with business owners and staff)
- Municipal Council interviews (x7)
- Key informant interviews (x24)
 - Partner organization representatives with a specific area of expertise (e.g. tourism marketing, cycling tourism, etc.)

Where does this project fit in with other work?

Tourism intersects with many other fields of work undertaken by the City of Elliot Lake. Therefore, in tourism development, management, and marketing, it is essential to consider other City initiatives and plans that impact tourism, whether directly or indirectly. Importantly, this tourism strategy points to work related to transportation, wayfinding, economic development, etc. The intention is for these recommendations to integrate with established City initiatives and policies while bringing a unique tourism lens that considers the needs of both residents and visitors.

The City's *Official Plan* (2018, amended in 2022), focuses on land use designations, densities and land division policies, policies to support economic development and quality of life, protecting cultural heritage, natural environment, etc. The plan specifically points to the importance of developing the tourism sector on a four-season basis. The plan is complemented by enabling implementation tools such as zoning bylaws, site plan, etc.

The City's most recent economic development strategy, *Elliot Lake Economic Development & Diversification Strategy: Elliot Lake! Practical Solutions for Practical Realities* (2013) notes cultural heritage and tourism as one of four strategic pillars, and recognizes that, "Tourism...is more than likely to sustain the existing retail base of Elliot Lake and create opportunities in spin off sectors such as hospitality, recreation and leisure. The City of Elliot Lake has a well-established tourism base and could leverage some of the potential to make the area more attractive to visitors."

More recently, the *City of Elliot Lake Strategic Plan 2023* (2023) identifies specific actions related to tourism, including marketing and communications, business retention and expansion, business attraction, volunteerism, reconciliation, stewardship, transportation, accessibility, and parks and recreation. All of these are important to community building and setting a strong foundation upon which to grow tourism.

The City's *Community Improvement Plan - 2024 Update City of Elliot Lake* (2024) specifically mentions a Tourism Activation Grant with the purpose of encouraging investment in tourism in the city. The grant is available to property owners and operators for up to 50% of costs to a maximum of \$7,500 for new and existing development, including several examples that overlap with tourism, such as:

- recreational experience development;

- new tourist attraction;
- improved water access facilities (i.e., boat launch, marina);
- expansion of tourism accommodations (i.e., campground, hotel, motel);
- public visitor services (i.e., public restrooms, accessibility improvements);
- digital adaptation (i.e., website development, app development, online booking platforms); and
- event infrastructure.

The *Age-Friendly Elliot Lake: Final Report & Action Plan* (2017) does not directly identify tourism as a consideration; however, some of its actions impact the tourism sector, such as respect and social inclusion, transportation, outdoor spaces and buildings, and civic participation and employment. Similarly, the *2020-2025 City of Elliot Lake Multi-Year Accessibility Plan* (2020) is important because an accessible community is an accessible destination for visitors.

At present, the City of Elliot Lake is updating its accessibility plan and developing a new Trails Master Plan. Beyond these City plans, there are other organizations and groups contributing directly and indirectly to tourism in Elliot Lake through their mandates.

What is Tourism?

Tourism is defined by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming (MTCG) as “the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for no more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes.” It is recognized as one of Canada’s key economic sectors, sustaining one-in- ten Canadian jobs, and is a tool to protect the natural environment and build community. This happens, more specifically, by helping to sustain amenities that improve resident wellbeing and quality of life, such as transportation connectivity, festivals, museums, trails, recreational facilities, arts, culture, restaurants, pubs, etc. Additionally, tourism is a tool for sharing authentic Canadian and Northern Ontario experiences and stories with visitors. It strengthens shared identities while appreciating diversity and supports a path to reconciliation and truthful storytelling.

Setting a strong foundation

Tourism takes place in **destinations**. These are places visitors intentionally travel to or places on a trip where a visitor spends most of their time. Elliot Lake is an example of a tourism destination. Further, tourism relies on three main areas of work to support the destination. These areas of work include **destination development**, which is the concerted effort to evolve and develop tourism products and services that meet the needs and expectations of visitors; **destination management**, which is the coordinated management and maintenance of all the elements that make up a tourism destination; and **destination marketing**, which is the strategic promotion, marketing, and positioning of a place as a destination. Destination development and management must take place before focusing on destination marketing to ensure that the destination is moving forward in a respectful, responsible, and sustainable manner that considers community concerns and limitations of the natural environment.

Tourism ecosystem

The tourism ecosystem is made up of a variety of **tourism ecosystem actors** (or interest groups), which are the various public, private, and civic actors connected and engaged, either indirectly or directly to tourism. These government bodies, businesses, not-for-profit and community-led groups, local organizations, and initiatives may focus on different aspects of tourism, such as destination marketing, industry capacity-building, research or funding. Collaboration with these other tourism ecosystem actors is key to the resiliency and success of any destination. Some important tourism ecosystem actors to keep in mind at the national level include the Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC), and Destination Canada; at the provincial level, the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO), Destination Ontario, and Indigenous Tourism Ontario; and at the regional and local levels Destination Northern Ontario and the Algoma-Kinniwabi Travel Association.

Looking more closely, Destination Northern Ontario, also known as Regional Tourism Organization 13 (RTO 13), is a not-for-profit organization funded by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming. The organization focuses on coordinating, aligning, and investing in sub-regional programs while leading pan-northern management functions. Their efforts include product development, marketing, workforce development, and investment attraction to grow tourism in Northern Ontario. Destination Northern Ontario is subdivided into three sub-regional destination marketing organizations, which are RTO 13A: Northeastern Ontario, RTO13 B: Algoma, and RTO 13C: Northwestern Ontario. For Elliot Lake, RTO13B: Sault Ste. Algoma, also known as Algoma-Kinniwabi Travel Association (Algoma Country), is the relevant regional destination marketing organization that promotes the region, including Elliot Lake, to potential visitors. It is important to note that the City of Elliot Lake also conducts destination marketing of the community in collaboration with these and other partners.

Other key organizations to consider for collaboration and support include Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario, Ontario Trails, Great Lakes Waterfront Trail, Trans Canada Trail, Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario (FedNor), Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC), and Huron North Community Economic Alliance (HNCEA), to name a few.

Tourism context

Many factors have impacted the tourism sector over the last few years including the COVID-19 pandemic, the introduction and use of artificial intelligence and smart technology, and most recently the tariffs between Canada and the United States. A key opportunity that emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic and the tariffs is the growth of domestic travel, which continues to be a strong market for the Canadian tourism sector, including for Elliot Lake. Regarding artificial intelligence and smart technology, its use is increasing as travellers use related services and tools for itinerary development, customer service, wayfinding, language translations, and booking platforms to create a more seamless travel experience.

Another notable direction taking shape in the tourism sector is the focus on **sustainable tourism development**, which according to UN Tourism is, "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities." This focus is

essential for the future of tourism in Elliot Lake to ensure it is positively impacting the community. In relation to this, throughout Ontario and Canada, destinations see a need to strategically invest in tourism to become a more sustainable destination. Many have leveraged funding tools like municipal accommodation taxes (MAT) to generate funds from overnight visitors staying at local accommodations to reinvest in the tourism sector. As of early 2025, over 50 municipalities in Ontario have implemented a MAT to generate funding for the tourism sector. In Northern Ontario, at least ten (10) municipalities have implemented a MAT, including Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, Timmins, North Bay, Thunder Bay, Blind River, Terrace Bay, Nipigon, Marathon, and Wawa, with many others exploring the possibility of implementation.

Glossary

Destinations: places visitors intentionally travel to or places on a trip where a visitor spends most of their time. Elliot Lake is an example of a tourism destination.

- **Destination Development:** the concerted effort to evolve and develop the tourism products and services of a destination so that they meet the needs and expectations of visitors
- **Destination Management:** the coordinated management and maintenance of all the elements that make up a tourism destination
- **Destination Marketing:** the strategic promotion, marketing, and positioning of a place as a destination

Tourism: defined by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming (MTCG) as “the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for no more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes.”

- **Sustainable Tourism:** according to UN Tourism, “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.”

Tourism Asset is an individual visitor-facing business (e.g., accommodations, restaurants, retail, etc.), attraction (e.g., museums, galleries, parks, etc.), festival/event, or infrastructure (e.g., visitor centres, boat launches, airports, transportation stations, etc.) that is managed, operated, or marketed as a unique asset for tourism purposes.

Tourism Ecosystem Actors (or interest groups): include the various public, private, and civic actors connected and engaged, either indirectly or directly to tourism

Visitor: Someone who takes an overnight out-of-town trip, or who takes an out-of-town same-day trip of 40 kilometres or more away from their home.

Acronyms

DMO/DMMO: Destination Marketing Organization/Destination Management and Marketing Organization

DNO: Destination Northern Ontario

2SLGBTQIA+: Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and other identities

RTO: Regional Tourism Organization

VFR: Visiting Friends and Relatives (travel market) also called Visiting Friends and Family

Tourism in Elliot Lake

Tourism Roles

The City of Elliot Lake is a municipality that is involved in leading and supporting tourism development and marketing. This work is undertaken by the Economic Development department, however, there is no staff position dedicated to the tourism portfolio. One key area of work is leading the Explore Elliot Lake Tourism initiative, through which this strategy has been developed. Short of having its own tourism marketing team, the City has nonetheless invested heavily in tourism marketing, showcasing the destination to prospective visitors, online and in-person. This includes managing the Explore Elliot Lake website and the Driftscape app, engaging niche tourism influencers, designing and providing maps and guides for visitors like the *Elliot Lake Tourism Map* or the *Eat, Play, Visit* guide. The City also owns and manages several key assets such as the two visitor information centres including the Trailhead Rest Area on the turn off for Highway 108 and in City Hall. Through the delivery of these diverse virtual and in-person visitor information spaces Elliot Lake stands out from other municipalities of similar size.

Beyond visitor-facing marketing, promotion and information-sharing, the Departments of Economic Development and Recreation and Culture offer crucial tourism-related services that include but are not limited to business supports and grants; emergency and safety services; site booking and maintenance; and transportation and mobility. Further tourism marketing as well as advocacy and representation for Elliot Lake's tourism businesses are areas of opportunity. Since the closure of the Chamber of Commerce, there is room for closer collaboration and stronger ties with local, regional, and provincial advocacy organizations like the Algoma Kinniwabi Tourism Association, the Northern Ontario Tourist Outfitters Association, and the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario.

Residents and industry see a strong, leadership role for the City in driving tourism, development, management and marketing. Areas of work tourism and community members see for the City include:

- planning and funding events
- improving the visitor experience
- growing awareness of what is going on in the community
- tourism marketing

Visitor-facing businesses are at the heart of tourism in Elliot Lake. They are the lead hosts and communicators, and at the forefront of service delivery. Whether serving food and drink, providing overnight accommodation, or delivering guided excursions, businesses are key to the service promise and delivery for unique tourism experiences in Elliot Lake. Business involvement is particularly important considering that City resources are limited. So, although the City currently supports tourism development and marketing, there is a parallel need for continued and increased leadership from the business community. When businesses are directly involved in tourism development and marketing in close collaboration with each other and supporting players like the City, they are likely to benefit more from the economic and social opportunities created by tourism.

Elliot Lake is home to a range of activity, service, and social clubs whose work promotes, supports, or upkeeps key infrastructure for tourism, such as trails. Several of these also offer guided experiences or opportunities for visitors to join their group activities and provide valuable information on the activities and spaces available for outdoor activities around Elliot Lake.

Several organizations offer resources, financing, mentorship, and training to help businesses grow and succeed, while pushing innovation and development. Examples include the East Algoma Community Futures Development Corporation and the Elliot Lake & North Shore Corporation for Business Development.

Economic, Social, and Environmental Impacts

Tourism is an important job creator for the local economy and provides employment opportunities for residents particularly youth, Indigenous Peoples and immigrants. The City of Elliot Lake has around 57 tourism businesses, accounting for about 11% of the businesses in the municipality (n=512) and 9% of the municipality's employment, meaning that tourism activity is connected to about 255 jobs in Elliot Lake.

Insights from Destination Canada, Destination Northern Ontario, and Algoma-Kinniwabi Travel Association

- Visitor spending in RTO 13, which includes Elliot Lake, reached \$1.2 billion between January and July 2024 with international spending growth outpacing domestic spending.
- Ontarians are the most important market to the region, responsible for most visits and related tourism revenue.
- USA is the second most important visitor market, particularly border states.
- Transportation and food & beverage are the top areas of spending for visitors, followed by accommodations, and recreation and entertainment.
- Highest spending months are August, followed by July and September while January and February are the lowest spending months.

Elliot Lake residents recognize both positive and possible negative impacts that come from tourism, influencing the community's economic, social, and environmental wellbeing. Some of the main impacts noted during community engagement activities include:

Perceived Positive Impacts:

- Bringing money into the community, supporting local businesses,
- Attracting new businesses
- Creating new business opportunities
- Attracting new residents
- Supporting job creation
- Enhancing the quality of life for both residents and visitors
- Improving and maintaining key infrastructure like roads, parks, and recreational facilities

Perceived Negative Impacts:

- Creating pollution, littering, and damage to natural resources
- Changing character of the community
- Overcrowding during peak tourist seasons,
- Increasing living costs affecting their quality of life
- Straining local infrastructure and services
- Increasing the demand on healthcare services

Destination Positioning

Elliot Lake has a lot to offer visitors, and it is clear that community members are proud of their home. Across the engagements, residents and business owners spoke fondly of Elliot Lake’s connection to nature as a defining element of the city. From the community survey, residents noted the main draws to Elliot Lake as being 1) lakes and water activities, 2) nature and scenery, and 3) fishing.

“...biggest selling point is the easy accessibility to the outdoors (waters, trails, etc.), can do many outdoor activities within a short distance...” – Tourism industry member

Destination positioning influences whether someone selects a destination for their trip and how long they stay. Therefore, when planning for tourism, it is important to take stock of how a destination is positioned to prospective visitors to confirm if adjustments would improve the chances that destination marketing resonates with target markets.

Today, Elliot Lake’s overarching positioning is as a four-season outdoor destination that caters to visitors experienced with the outdoors. This reflects frequent references to:

- Crown land
- Lakes, beaches, paddling, fishing
- Snowmobiling and ATViing
- Skiing and snowboarding
- Golfing
- Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing
- Compact full-service community

The City also has a unique geographical layout allowing it to serve as a compact full-service hub surrounded by acres of wilderness and outdoor amenities. Of course, Elliot Lake also offers a distinctive geological heritage, networks of trails, arts and cultural heritage offerings, festivals and events, and accessible tourism assets, to name a few. There is an opportunity to better promote these elements to prospective visitors via storytelling and tourism product development. Doing so is strategic as these secondary positioning elements can be powerful tools in differentiating Elliot Lake from other Northern Ontario communities that also have high-quality outdoor assets.

Residents see the potential for an expanded destination positioning, noting that some of what makes Elliot Lake a great place to visit includes:

Small-town community: Elliot Lake is a welcoming and tight-knit community, with peaceful surroundings that appeal to those seeking tranquillity. The people in the community also add to the visitor experience.

History and culture: Elliot Lake has a rich history and offers opportunities to learn about the community through a limited number of tours and educational experiences.

Recreation and entertainment: Elliot Lake offers diverse recreational options ranging from golfing and skiing to exploring local arts and shopping.

The culinary experiences on offer in Elliot Lake and advertised online do not currently make up a strong part of the destination's value proposition. Offering Northern Ontario products and ingredients, and celebrating this online with memorable stories and anecdotes, would make it possible for food and drink to become a bigger, more compelling aspect of Elliot Lake's destination positioning.

Tourism Assets

Elliot Lake is an emerging four-season destination with around 110 tourism assets clustered in the downtown and along Highway 108. A **tourism asset** is defined as an individual visitor-facing business (e.g., accommodations, restaurants, retail, etc.), attraction (e.g., museums, galleries, parks, etc.), festival/event, or infrastructure (e.g., visitor centres, boat launches, airports, transportation stations, etc.) that is managed, operated, or marketed as a unique asset for tourism purposes.

Looking at the breakdown by number, tourism assets in Elliot Lake are primarily outdoor-based assets, food and beverage assets, culture and entertainment assets, and general retail assets. This breadth and diversity of assets means visitors to Elliot Lake can enjoy a variety of outdoor activities across the year, including stand up paddling, kayaking, canoeing, fishing, lake and pool swimming, camping, golfing, hiking, walking, snowshoeing, bouldering, bikepacking, mountain, road, and fat biking; ATVing, snowmobiling, downhill and cross-country skiing, basketball, tennis, pump track, and splash pad, photography, and public art walks.

Elliot Lake is a services and amenities hub with the essentials easily accessible, including food and beverage, health and safety, outdoor recreation, transportation, and accommodations, etc. The destination is home to several sports and recreational facilities, including the golf course, ski hill, swimming pool, pump track, walking and mountain bike trails, hockey arena, and other sports fields and diamonds. Elliot Lake also has the Arts and Heritage Centre, which houses arts clubs that produce ceramics, paintings, model trains, etc. Local art pieces are sold at the centre that can be purchased by visitors.

Elliot Lake also has several tourism products and experiences focused on the outdoors, or on culture and entertainment. A tourism product is a branded itinerary or route that is not guided, and a tourism experience is a guided tour, walk, or workshop. In the list below "(P)" indicates a tourism product, and "(E)" indicates a tourism experience.

- **Discover Huron North Geocache Tour** by several municipalities in Algoma District, including the City of Elliot Lake (P)
- **Deer Trail Tour** by City of Elliot Lake (P)

- **Rock the Holidays Driving Tour** by City of Elliot Lake (P)
- **Spooktacular Halloween Decorating Contest Map** by City of Elliot Lake (P)
- **Decommissioned Mine Tour** by City of Elliot Lake Nuclear and Mining Museum (E)
- **Geology Tour** by City of Elliot Lake Nuclear and Mining Museum (E)
- **Public Art Walking Tour** by City of Elliot Lake Nuclear and Mining Museum (E)
- **Scenic Flights over Elliot Lake** by Glassy Bay Outfitters (E)

Elliot Lake stands out from neighbouring destinations because of its focus on outdoor power sports activities like ATVing and snowmobiling, which is less emphasized in some neighbouring destinations. At the same time, there are gaps in Elliot Lake's tourism offering, as identified below:

- **Arts and cultural heritage:** Despite there being several assets in culture and entertainment, many of these are either closed or only seasonally available. There is an opportunity to invest in existing and new arts and cultural heritage offerings that further tell the stories of Elliot Lake. This includes storytelling in collaboration with Serpent River First Nation and Mississauga First Nation.
- **Purchasable tourism experiences:** Of the four tourism experiences identified, they are for the most part seasonally available and free of charge. There is an opportunity to invest in existing tourism experiences and charge visitors to participate. There is also an opportunity to develop new tourism experiences so that visitors can experience the Elliot Lake's outdoor assets through guided tours.
- **Local and regional food and beverage options:** Despite having a variety of food and beverage establishments (i.e., mix of chains, local restaurants, and food retailers), how these are experienced by the visitor can be improved. There is an opportunity to support existing food and beverage assets in telling the story behind local and regional ingredients on offer, as well as integrating more Northern Ontario food and drink into their offerings.

When asked what activities they wished they could do with visiting friends and family, industry and residents mentioned water-based activities like renting a houseboat on Elliot Lake, guided historical tours, tourism focussed on traditional knowledge, dog-friendly spaces, and food and drink options with longer hours of operation.

Community members also noted the following as gaps in the tourism offering:

- **Food and beverage** (breakfast options, outdoor dining, demonstrations like maple syrup making)
- **Experiences** (wildlife identification and interpretation experiences)
- **Arts and cultural heritage** (free music events in the parks)
- **Sports** (public skiing paths, rinks on lakes)
- **Family-friendly options**
- **Event spaces**
- **Affordable accommodations**

Note: several gaps noted by community members such as park-based music events and public skiing paths already exist. This points to a need for better communication with residents about the experiences and assets available in the community.

Storytelling

Storytelling is an important way of leveraging tourism for community development and growing pride-of-place. Elliot Lakers are proud of their community's history and heritage, and there are some recurring storytelling themes that they want to share with visitors.

First is the story of community resilience. Residents are proud of the grit and determination that their community has shown while reinventing itself in response to hard times. They see this strength as a defining characteristic of the city and its people. Residents want to share the story of the community's mining heritage and see reclamation efforts as a good news story that showcases "adaptability and environmental focus". Some other specific community comments around stories to share with visitors, include:

- "The central role of mining in shaping the region's identity."
- "Historical pride and a lack of fear about the region's nuclear past."
- "The region's history of booms and busts, reflecting cycles of hardship and recovery."
- "Stories of resilience in the face of significant challenges like the collapse of key infrastructures."

Other storytelling themes that residents want to share with visitors are multiculturalism (e.g., celebrating First Nation heritage, francophone identity, etc.), connections to the land, and contemporary stories that and embrace new realities and opportunities today. Residents want to share stories about their community through the museum and other platforms.

Visitor Experience

The visitor experience starts the moment a prospective visitor learns about a potential trip destination and extends through the research, booking, in-person visit, and after via follow-ups, reminiscences and ideally rebooking for a return visit. Destination managers strive to make trip commitment easy and seamless by anticipating and reducing barriers to booking. When it comes to the in-person and post-trip visitor experience, visitor segments will have different preferences; however, there are some general ways the visitor experience in Elliot Lake can be enhanced. Across Elliot Lake's visitor journey, several themes stand out.

Information sharing (online and in-person)

Online information sharing is essential to a smooth trip planning process. Overall, developing an itinerary for a trip to Elliot Lake is simpler for those travelling for a specific purpose (e.g. camping trip, snowmobile trip, fishing trip). Without an activity-focus, visitors may find it difficult to fill a multi-day itinerary. There are also opportunities to improve communications around where/how to access equipment rentals such as snowshoes and ensure that business owners are equipped to share this information as well.

For in person information sharing, Elliot Lake has two visitor information centres, one at the Trailhead, located at the corner of Highway 108 (seasonal July to September), and the Trans-Canada Highway, and one at City Hall. Through the focus groups, tourism industry members saw a need to relocate the Visitor Information Centre in town to somewhere more visible and welcoming.

There is a mix of visitor information available at local businesses and tourism assets. Some businesses have a display area with brochures and flyers about activities and events happening in the city. At the same time, there is an opportunity to better equip frontline staff with information so that they can provide tailored recommendations to visitors about what to do in the area, including championing other local businesses. There is also an opportunity to improve the visitor welcome, especially for diverse visitors, through customer service training and businesses indicating that they welcome 2SGLBTQ+ customers by adding a welcome sticker.

It is equally important that residents know what is happening in Elliot Lake so that they can be proud ambassadors for the community, making recommendations to visitors, including encouraging their friends and family to visit.

Placemaking

There are a variety of outdoor public murals spread throughout the downtown, as well as public art pieces in public buildings like W.H. Collins Hall, City Hall, Elliot Lake Public Library, and the Ruben Yli-Juuti Centre. At the same time, there are opportunities to enhance the visitor experience through pedestrian-friendly placemaking initiatives in Elliot Lake's downtown that invite residents and visitors alike to slow down and linger across all times of day, week, and year.

Throughout Elliot Lake, there are limited indications of whose traditional territories visitors are on, or that Serpent River First Nation and Mississaugi First Nation are close neighbours to the city. There may be opportunities for storytelling and related placemaking initiatives in collaboration with the two First Nations. During the focus groups, industry also stressed the importance of investing in trail infrastructure and signage to improve the visitor experience.

Another aspect of placemaking is celebrating local, regional, and northern food. From a visitor perspective, there is little mention on local menus of food coming from Northern Ontario. Celebrating craft beer and the procurement of meats from Algoma, for example, are easy ways to enhance a visitor's experience of a meal, making it more memorable and tied to place. There are similar opportunities with renaming menu items (e.g. miner's special) or adding décor elements to restaurants and other visitor-facing businesses that showcase the history and heritage of the area.

Connecting to history and culture

Although there are various culture and entertainment tourism assets in Elliot Lake, there is a limited cohesive narrative about Elliot Lake's history. As a visitor, it is interesting to learn about the mining and uranium heritage of the community via signage, memorials, and public sculptures/art, yet there are few places to learn more about this unique history. A big challenge is the lack of a physical space for the Elliot Lake Museum. While the museum is closed, there is an opportunity to improve the visitor experience by connecting travellers to history and culture through creative solutions such as storytelling and offering bookable walking tours.

The Market

Visitor Demand Trends

Destination development, management, and marketing is stronger when it truly reflects the destination. This means leaning into innate points of differentiation rather than attempting to replicate the offerings of other destinations. At the same time, visitor behaviours, preferences, and travel trends shift. Staying on top of what visitors are looking for can help with strategic planning and product development. It is possible to respond to trends without becoming trendy. Below is a list of some travel trends that are relevant to Elliot Lake.

Experiential and purpose-driven travel: There is a strong interest in travel opportunities that go beyond sightseeing and focus on engaging with destination communities meaningfully by connecting with locals and the local culture, developing new skills, and supporting community-led projects.

Prioritizing sustainable tourism: Visitors want to prioritize sustainability in their travels. They are looking for eco-friendly options when selecting accommodations and other travel needs. At the same time, they are looking for sustainable travel to be easy and affordable.

Cost-conscious travel: With economic uncertainty and increased costs due to inflation, travellers are prioritizing value and affordability. Visitors are looking for shorter trips and budget-friendly destinations.

Dark sky and silent travel: The need to unplug is on the rise. Visitors want to connect with the great beyond. Natural phenomena, like the total solar eclipse of 2024 are pulling people away from their desks, homes, and cities, and centring them in landscapes offering peace, quiet, and perspective. At the same time, wellness travel is expanding to include silent experiences, ranging from quiet travel and silent retreats to silent walks, tours, and dedicated spaces free of noise pollution.

Shoulder season and coolcation travel: The idea of travelling to a crowded destination at the height of summer is losing its appeal. Visitors are travelling when temperatures are more bearable and they can have more meaningful experiences, even if this means taking their children out of school for a little while and/or adding a few days on either side of a vacation. Others are actively choosing to visit more temperate destinations.

Soft travel: Part of wellness tourism, soft travel offers a getaway for self-discovery or mental health. Soft travellers seek destinations that encourage simplicity or spontaneity, as well as getaways from everyday life where they can explore a destination at their own pace. This can include avoiding pre-planning of the trip, disconnecting from personal phones, and letting the travel journey flow at its pace. Examples of related tourism products and experiences include meditation classes, relaxing sunset serenades, etc.

Skip-gen and multigenerational travel: The global ratio of living grandparents to grandchildren is at its highest, owing to an increase in life expectancy and the fact that people are having fewer children. Building off the post-pandemic desire to cultivate meaningful connections with loved ones, older retired generations are looking to create shared memories with their grandchildren while providing their own children with the gift

of childcare, allowing them to have their own vacation or simply take a break. At the same time, multi-generational and group-based travel is also on the rise, with families and friends seeking to strengthen bonds and/or reconnect through sharing experiences.

Other visitor-demand trends to note include, digital nomadism, home swapping, bleisure (business-leisure travel), solo travel, gaming and esports travel. (See Visitor Personas section for more information on some of these visitor demand trends).

Visitors

To confirm the visitor markets of Elliot Lake, it is important to consider existing tourism assets in the destination, who is already visiting, and what tourism trends align with the value proposition of the destination. Below is information on current visitors to Elliot Lake, prospective visitor markets based on Destination Canada and Destination Northern Ontario's research, and visitor personas informed by current and prospective visitors, as well as the value proposition of the community.

Current Visitors

Although there is no visitor data available for Elliot Lake specifically, insights gathered from the tourism industry and community members indicate that the destination attracts visiting friends and relatives (VFR), power sports enthusiasts, and outdoor adventurers. Friends and relatives travel because of their desire to reconnect with loved ones, power sports enthusiasts travel to ride their sports vehicles like ATVs and snowmobiles, and outdoor adventurers travel to be immersed in the natural environment. Additionally, based on visitor data for Algoma Country and Northern Ontario, the following are characteristics of visitors travelling to the wider region.

- **Origin:** In Northern Ontario, Ontarians account for 72% of tourism spending, followed by Americans (especially from Michigan) at 14%, and Manitoba, Quebec, and Alberta at 3% each.
- **Transportation mode:** 71% of visitors report travelling in a car, followed by 16% travelling in an RV.
- **Party size:** Specifically in Algoma Country, 63% of visitors travel in parties of two, followed by 14% in parties of four. 42% of visitors report travelling as a couple, with 24% reporting travelling with family members, including children.
- **Purpose of travel:** 67% of visitors report travelling for pleasure/vacation, followed by 24% just passing through, 19% visiting family and friends, 14% for other reasons, and 1% for business and/or meetings/conventions. The top three activities visitors plan to do in the region include tourism by car, RV, or motorcycle; hiking trails and visiting provincial parks; camping; and arts and cultural activities related to the history and heritage of the region.
- **Overnight stays:** 45% of visitors note staying 1-2 nights in the region, followed by 15% staying 3-6 nights.
- **Preferred accommodation types:** 32% of visitors prefer staying at a hotel or motel, followed by 27% camping, 11% staying with family and friends, and 9% in RV paid sites. (Note: Data on short-term rentals was not available from either Algoma County or Destination Canada's TourismScope.)
- On average, visitors to Algoma Country spend per day:
 - \$101-150 (26%)

- \$75-\$100 (25%)
- \$51-\$74 (20%)
- \$0-\$50 (14%)

Prospective Visitor Markets

Based on Destination Canada's Travel Segmentation Program, Elliot Lake is matched to attract Outdoor Explorers due to its year-round offerings and outdoor assets. This visitor segment accounts for 3.4 million people in Canada. They enjoy adventure travel, especially visiting lesser-known destinations, because they can grow, learn new skills, and establish personal traditions. They seek an adrenaline rush through physical activities, engaging with locals, and ensuring a positive impact on the host community. They participate in short getaways and longer holidays and look for nature experiences. Their top travel activities include adventure, novel and authentic experiences, sense of accomplishment, nature experiences, water-based sports, and high-intensity sports.

Looking at Northern Ontario, Destination Northern Ontario focuses on several visitor markets and offers support to develop tourism products that cater to these markets. For Elliot Lake, the areas of focus that are the most relevant include 2SLGBTQIA+ travellers, people with different abilities, responsible/sustainable travellers, nature and wildlife travellers, and trail-using travellers.

2SLGBTQIA+ travellers: Canada is one of the top destinations for 2SLGBTQIA+ travellers in the world, having been rated first in the Gay Travel Index in 2025 and Destination Northern Ontario recognizes the value of attracting 2SLGBTQIA+ visitors. 2SLGBTQIA+ travellers visit places with a reputation for diversity and that are recommended by friends and family, home to friends and relatives, near their home, and with 2SLGBTQIA+ culture and/or history. They choose a destination where they can rest, relax, shop, feel safe, have access to attractions, that are cost-effective and have an appealing climate, outdoor activities, and culinary options. They are also interested in beach activities, lesbian/gay bars and nightlife, gay/lesbian specific events, Pride events, hiking, mainstream events and festivals, camping, film festivals, educational opportunities, cycling, and casinos. To grow this market, Elliot Lake with Destination Northern Ontario and the Canada Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, can support community development initiatives that are focused on supporting the local 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and that could attract travellers in the future, such as the following:

- 2SLGBTQIA+ festivals and events (Pride, ski and snowboard, culinary, film festivals, etc.)
- 2SLGBTQIA+-focused experiences with local and authentic storytellers
- 2SLGBTQIA+-focused group tours (walking, cycling, boat, bus, or wine tours, etc.)
- 2SLGBTQIA+-focused outdoor adventures (group kayaking, stand-up paddling, ziplining, glamping, etc.)
- Mainstream festivals, events or experiences that offer 2SLGBTQIA+-targeted programming (such as 2SLGBTQIA+ tours and packages)

People with different abilities: Northern Ontario has an opportunity to focus on accessible tourism to attract a portion of the 2.6 million people living with a disability in Ontario. The Open Doors Organization in the United States estimates that adults with disabilities contribute \$17 billion annually to the travel sector. Interestingly, about 1/3 of

the 2SLGBTQ+ market in Canada identify as having a disability, which presents a unique opportunity to attract both 2SLGBTQIA+ travellers and people with different abilities. To grow this market, Elliot Lake can work with Destination Northern Ontario to increase the region's attractiveness as an accessible destination by:

- Supporting infrastructure investments for features at beaches, accessible national/provincial parks (barrier-free), and barrier-free festivals and events
- Supporting accessible tourism product development (e.g., boating tours, multi-day trips, etc.)
- Supporting the development of inclusive bars, restaurants, and activities
- Improving accessible travel planning and information sharing
- Revolutionizing transportation in the community
- Facilitating increased availability of accessible accommodations

Responsible/sustainable travellers: Northern Ontario is known for its natural areas that offer visitors a less-crowded destination where they can experience forests, waterways, and wildlife. Responsible/sustainable travellers are looking to do activities like canoeing and kayaking and winter sports (skating, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing); stay in eco-friendly accommodations; experience local cuisine; camping and glamping; connect to culture; hiking and cycling; experience ecotourism (birdwatching and geocaching); and take in Indigenous cultural experiences. To grow this market, Elliot Lake can work with Algoma Kinniwabi Travel Association and Destination Northern Ontario to increase the region's attractiveness by investing in responsible/sustainable tourism products like:

- Culinary food events featuring Northern Ontario producers and ingredients
- Hiking, camping, glamping
- Bird and wildlife viewing
- Walking tours (e.g., murals/public art tours, educational tours, food tours)
- Locally guided fishing and sailing trips
- Festivals and events that highlight local cultures
- Rural and agricultural events (e.g., farmers' markets, agricultural fairs, etc.)

Nature and wildlife travellers: Like responsible/sustainable travellers, nature and wildlife travellers are interested in Northern Ontario's natural assets, but their main interest in travelling is to observe wildlife in their natural habitats. For Elliot Lake and Destination Northern Ontario to grow this market, the following interests should be considered:

- Structured tourism experiences in national and provincial parks, especially for visitors on self-drive touring itineraries.
- Programs or packages that help facilitate experiencing and learning about natural phenomena like the Aurora Borealis or observing wildlife.
- Guided experiences that integrate nature and wildlife with Indigenous cultural experiences.

Although nature and wildlife travellers may not be interested in traditional hunting and fishing lodge operators, they are interested in staying in lodges if they provide an opportunity to observe nature and wildlife (e.g., eco-tourism lodge with outdoor learning experiences, etc.).

Trail-users: Destination Northern Ontario recognizes the importance and value that trails bring to the region and recognizes there are different types of trail users, such as hikers/eco-tourists, mountain bikers, canoe/kayakers, long-distance cyclists, etc. Each of these trail user groups looks for different things when determining which trails to explore; however, there are four overarching priorities that Elliot Lake should consider to grow this market:

- Support the development of maps, signs, information kiosks, apps, and other visual cues that allow users to relax and enjoy the trails with a sense of security.
- Foster a welcoming environment as trail-using travellers like to participate in community activities and immerse themselves in local culture.
- Support the development of unique opportunities along trails, such as setting up a photo opportunity and integrating public art or sculptures, etc. Offer equipment to support the trail experience such as tandem cycles, recumbent trikes, and walking poles.
- Encourage the development of rental options near trail access points, attractions, and/or town centres. These rentals should be available for 1-2-hour periods on short notice as well as for longer full-day and multi-day trips. Have information about the rentals online including a booking system.

Considering the data from Destination Canada, Destination Northern Ontario, and the existing asset base in Elliot Lake, another important segment for the destination is the **outdoors light** market. As a services hub, Elliot Lake makes an ideal basecamp for travellers looking to connect with nature without all the skills and gear of other outdoor-focused markets. More information about this traveller segment is provided below in the “soft outdoor enthusiast” persona.

Personas

To support targeted marketing efforts, seven visitor personas for Elliot Lake have been developed. However, there are some overarching recommendations to consider:

- **Origin:** Focus on attracting Ontarians, including Northern Ontarians and Southern Ontarians, especially from the Greater Toronto Area. As a secondary option, focus on attracting US travellers, a key market for Northern Ontario.
- **Age Demographics:** Focus on attracting visitors that are Generation X (approximately early-40s to early-60s) and younger.
- **Transportation Mode:** Focus on attracting visitors travelling by land (road trippers), including those using personal vehicle and RVs.
- **Season:** Continue to focus on attracting visitors in the summer (May – September), while increasing focus on the winter (December – February), especially during the December holiday season, and February over the Family Day long weekend.
- **Storytelling & Communications:** When sharing stories about the destination and communicating with visitors through different platforms, use a first-person approach. This means produce content that comes directly from the person experiencing the destination, such as first-person blogs, marketing videos, and influencer content.
- **Communication Platforms:** Ensure the destination’s website is up to date, as this will be where visitors look for relevant information related to their travel to the destination. It is also where Generative AI programs will pull content from. Other

key platforms to attract visitors include social media, such as Instagram, TikTok, and possibly YouTube. This could be through growing Explore Elliot Lake's social media presence by posting new content on a regular basis, and/or through paid media/advertising on these platforms.

Visiting friends and relatives (VFR): these travellers have a pre-existing relationship with someone living in Elliot Lake (a host) and are influenced by the host to travel to Elliot Lake. Hosts may be friends or family members that recently moved to Elliot Lake to retire or for job/entrepreneurial opportunities, as well as residents that have lived in the area for many years. Most of the information VFRs receive about the Elliot Lake is shared by their host, since they see them as a local expert. These visitors range in age from children to seniors. Importantly, VFRs are interested in spending time with their host and may be looking for indoor and/or outdoor activities to do together. This could include attending an arts and crafts workshop or a local performance, shopping, going to the beach, skiing, golfing, hiking, paddling, etc. VFRs may stay with their host or look for their own accommodations nearby. VFRs may come as individuals, couples, or intergenerational groups (i.e., a mix of adults and children), meaning the activities they seek to do with their host may differ. As a result, it is important to share information about the diversity of activities and events happening in the community with residents so they can share this with their visitors.

Soft outdoor enthusiasts: These travellers are primarily from urban centres and want to experience the outdoors, but may be new to outdoor activities, especially in Northern Ontario. They come to Elliot Lake because it is a hub with a variety of services and amenities, as well as a destination that facilitates outdoor experiences in an easy and safe way. They range in age from Generation Y to seniors. They are looking for pre-set itineraries, outdoor tips, and guided experiences to facilitate their connection to the outdoors, while learning how to do these activities on their own. Some might be interested in camping, while others may look to mix outdoor activities with the comfort of a roofed accommodation. As a result, it is important to share pre-planned soft outdoor itineraries on Explore Elliot Lake's website, as well as tip sheets that allow these travellers to come equipped with the right clothing, equipment, and tools, while noting there are retailers that provide this equipment in the destination.

ATV and snowmobile fans: These visitors travel in small groups of friends or family, or as club members, and are interested in multi-day overnight trips. They want to ride their sports equipment while enjoying the outdoors, including observing wildlife and fishing. They look for destinations with well-maintained and well-marked trails, especially trails that offer scenic loops. Importantly, they select trails that have services and amenities welcoming to ATVers and snowmobilers along the trail or nearby. Some examples of services and amenities they look for include secure access and parking for trailers and sports vehicles, accommodations, fueling stations, equipment rentals/repair, and food and beverage providers. They prefer to stay in lodges, motels, or cabins, but will sometimes camp. If a destination provides a positive experience to ATV and snowmobile fans, they are likely to return in the future and recommend the destination to others.

Regional festival/cultural enthusiasts: These travellers live within a 1-3-hour drive of Elliot Lake, and they are interested in visiting to participate in cultural and community events and festivals. They learn about these through local platforms like the radio, online community groups, print media, or word of mouth. They may have visited Elliot Lake

before but are interested in visiting again while something special is taking place. They may come in pairs or as a multigenerational group. If their group has diverse interests, they may split up at points across their visit. For example, some might be interested in the entertainment, while others may be interested in checking out local shops and vendors. They are likely to share a meal together during their visit. If presented with itinerary options before their trip, they may spend extra time in the destination.

Avid accessibility travellers: These travellers, who range in age from children to seniors, are interested in experiencing different things in Elliot Lake, but they require information about accessibility before determining if, when, and how long to visit. One of the first things they may do is research recommendations provided by other travellers and influencers with different abilities. Having that first-hand experience will provide an added sense of trust and security that Elliot Lake is a place that welcomes visitors with different abilities. Trip planning is key, especially to determine if there is an accessible accommodation available in Elliot Lake. Many travellers will develop their itineraries beforehand to confirm that activities and attractions are accessible for their needs. This means if information is not updated and easily available on municipal, organizational, or business websites, travellers will be less likely to participate or visit Elliot Lake at all.

Digital nomads and home swappers: Although these travellers are different, they both mix travel and work. They are interested in travelling to Elliot Lake for one of two things, to spend time with friends and family by mixing travel with work, or to spend time outdoors in between work in a place with services and amenities. Importantly, digital nomads are interested in travelling to Elliot Lake because of its easy access to the outdoors and good access to the internet, which they need to be able to work during their stay. Home swappers are interested in Elliot Lake for the same reason but swap homes as a more budget-friendly travel option. Home swappers may travel in pairs or as families with children. They are likely to spend at local attractions, camps, and shops. Both groups are interested in a mix of restaurants and shops, paddling, skiing, golfing, hiking, snowmobiling, ATVing, etc. Although they are visitors, they are interested in experiencing Elliot Lake as a local and want access to information what is happening in the community. Sharing information community events with the homeowners and local accommodations used by digital nomads facilitates a positive experience.

Skip-gen and multigenerational travellers: These travellers are made up of groups that include a mix of grandchildren, parents, and grandparents travelling together. They are interested in travelling to Elliot Lake to spend time with friends and family in the area, or to spend time with their travelling family in a destination that offers a mix of activities and attractions that appeal to multiple age groups. They are interested in knowing about the different activities, facilities, and events taking place that everyone can enjoy during the day, including local parks, sporting facilities, etc. Ideally, they build a family-friendly itinerary of things to do in Elliot Lake at different times of the year, and are aware of the different restaurants and shops available in the area.

Other visitor personas to consider in the future include soft travellers who visit places and see where the day takes them and dark sky travellers who visit places to experience the dark sky via stargazing and nocturnal nature walks, etc. However, dark sky travellers require specific tourism products and experiences that facilitate these kinds of activities. Another market to look at in the future is bleisure travellers who visit a place because of a business meeting, event, conference, or convention taking place in the area. They may

stay beyond the business activity to visit local attractions and participate in activities. However, they would only come if the capacity to host regional events, conferences, or conventions is available in Elliot Lake or nearby. Lastly, there is a growing community of boulderers in Elliot Lake. These climbers may camp or use fixed roof accommodations, eat at local restaurants, and visit retail stores that support their hobby. Elliot Lake's unique landscape provides opportunities for this growing market, but infrastructure and information-sharing would be needed to tap into it more fully.

Community Aspirations for Tourism

"I want tourism to be the heartbeat of Elliot Lake. It can be something that we can hang our hat on that can be done all year round" – Resident at Open House

Sustainable Tourism as Community Development

When planned strategically, tourism development can be a form of community development. Such links are recognized by the City through the Elliot Lake Strategic Plan (2023) and its *Community Improvement Plan* (2024).

To build and maintain a strong and resilient tourism destination, it is strategic to first establish a strong sense of community, key infrastructures, vibrant resident life, and engaged businesses. Although these things can be built in parallel to tourism, in the long-term they contribute to the resilience of the destination.

In the end, great places to live make great places to visit.

Innately, community members sense this. Across engagements for this project, residents and industry alike vocalized a desire to invest in and foster greater vibrancy and pride-of-place in the community. Some ways of achieving this go beyond tourism but are clearly connected, such as business and resident attraction.

Residents and industry see the potential for investing in tourism to the benefit of the community. For example, when asked how tourism can help to make Elliot Lake a better place to live, community open house attendees' top responses included 1) providing more retail options and new businesses, 2) growing recreation and leisure opportunities, 3) driving higher revenues into local businesses, and 4) celebrating heritage and culture.

At the same time, establishing a strong foundation based on community pride of place, industry collaboration, and placemaking, was seen as a priority.

Tourism Vision

In alignment with other foundational City plans and reflecting feedback received from the community across this project, a tourism vision for Elliot Lake has been developed. The vision has been designed to be both aspirational yet achievable.

Tourism in Elliot Lake is a source of community building, pride, and prosperity across the year. Everyone is welcomed and able to participate in vibrant outdoor and cultural offerings that showcase the resiliency, innovation, and connections among our people, histories, and natural environment.

Guiding principles

At the foundation of this tourism strategy are six guiding principles that can and should be read into all the initiatives and associated actions. These principles are woven into the

implementation approach for bringing to life each action and will guide the recommendations of the newly formed Tourism Advisory Committee (as recommended in this tourism strategy) and the decision-making Council.

Placemaking and Community Building

Placemaking and community building are at the foundation of the City of Elliot Lake's approach to tourism development, management and marketing. Residents see an opportunity for tourism to contribute to community wellbeing through investments in infrastructure and maintenance while developing activities that everyone can participate in. In the end, great places to live make great places to visit. The City is committed to prioritizing community needs while exploring how this improves the visitor experience.

Resident Inclusion

Elliot Lakers have stories to share and are natural ambassadors for their home community. Through the research, it is clear that residents want to be involved in welcoming visitors, especially through the community's many activity groups and clubs. Creating opportunities for interpersonal exchanges makes tourism more meaningful to visitors and provides agency to residents around the direction of tourism. At the same time, tourism development brings new opportunities for resident engagement and recreation. Ensuring that tourism products, experiences, and services are also available to residents means that residents can enjoy and participate in tourism activities.

Sustainability and Resilience

The City of Elliot Lake is committed to growing tourism sustainably so that it contributes community resiliency. This means considering the economic, social, and environmental implications of tourism in decision-making and adjusting course when potential negative impacts arise. The City understands that what attracts visitors to the community are its natural and cultural assets. Protecting these not only reflects the priorities of residents but is strategic to the long-term economic potential of tourism.

Accessibility

Something that sets Elliot Lake apart from other communities is its commitment to accessibility. Investments have been made in recent years to ensure that people of diverse ages and abilities can access the community's outdoor assets. This commitment aligns with the community's values and comes with an opportunity for differentiation by making tourism more accessible to visitors and residents alike.

Welcoming

Being a welcoming community for diverse people is something the City of Elliot Lake and residents are proud to stand behind. At the same time, it is important to recognize that the community can continue to improve the welcome they offer through training and knowledge-sharing.

Collaboration

Across this tourism strategy collaboration is prioritized. This means that through its development and across its implementation, processes will be streamlined to avoid the

duplication of efforts. Sometimes, this will include strategic collaborations with partner organizations doing similar work, other times, it will include applying a tourism lens to other City projects. Continuing to work closely with First Nation partners and using tourism development, management, and marketing as pathways to reconciliation is something the City is proud to commit to.

Residents see collaboration as essential for tourism to successfully support businesses, strengthen special-interest clubs, contribute to community projects, and foster pride-of-place.

The Path Forward

As Elliot Lake charts its path forward, a bold community-informed vision for tourism has emerged. Building on the destination’s natural richness and passionate community, the strategic actions that follow are crafted to ensure that tourism not only thrives but does so in harmony with the community’s values and priorities. By safeguarding what makes Elliot Lake unique and investing in inclusive experiences, there is potential to strengthen tourism’s role and resiliency as a sector that benefits residents and visitors alike. The strategic direction set forth below is designed to inspire momentum, encourage collective action, and position Elliot Lake as a local and regional leader in sustainable and inclusive tourism.

Strategy Framework

Five pillars are at the foundation of Elliot Lake’s tourism strategy. They correspond to broad areas of opportunity and indicate key areas of work over the next three years. The pillars reflect the needs and opportunities identified through the research and development of this tourism strategy. Across the pillars there are seven overarching initiatives and 26 actions.

The Strategy Framework outlined below is accompanied by an Implementation Plan, please see Appendix A for more details around the actions, including proposed tactics for bringing these to life.

Pillar A: Organizational Capacity and Relationships

Pillar A is about organizational capacity and relationships. It focuses on building the City’s capacity as a leader, supporter, and partner in tourism development, management, and marketing. As a result of the work outlined in this pillar, the City will ensure that tourism is better understood and systematically accounted for as part of municipal planning and decision-making, that there is clear understanding, pursuit, and formalization of tourism resources within the municipality, and that Elliot Lake is established and appreciated as a regional tourism leader and collaborator.

There are three initiatives, and eight actions associated with Pillar A.

Initiatives	Actions
1) Foster consideration of and connect tourism across all City departments and initiatives	1.1 Represent and account for the tourism perspective in the planning, decision-making, and reporting related to municipal initiatives.
	1.2 Collect and update baseline tourism data for Elliot Lake on a regular basis.
	1.3 Work with other City departments on placemaking and beautification initiatives downtown

2) Secure resources to support tourism development, management, and marketing	2.1 Undertake required research, industry engagement, and legislation/policy scoping processes to assess the viability of the implementation of a Municipal Accommodation Tax.
	2.2 Confirm a dedicated municipal staff person to lead and track tourism strategy implementation.
	2.3 Seek additional funding for tourism strategy implementation (i.e., FedNor, NOHFC, DNO, Ministry of Rural Affairs etc.).
3) Establish Elliot Lake as a regional tourism leader and collaborator	3.1 Grow collaborative relationship with Serpent River First Nation and Mississaugi First Nation.
	3.2 Deepen relationships and explore opportunities for regional tourism development and marketing with neighbouring municipalities and organizational partners.

Pillar B: Community Building and Engagement

Pillar B is about community building and engagement. It focuses on initiatives and actions that set the City up to leverage tourism development and management as community building opportunities. Through the strategic actions scoped out in this pillar, the City of will strengthen communications and engagement with key audiences including residents, industry members, and partner organizations who will be engaged and empowered as tourism ambassadors, collaborators, and implementation partners.

There is one initiative and five actions associated with Pillar B.

Initiatives	Actions
4) Involve residents, industry, and community organizations in tourism	4.1 Form a Tourism Advisory Committee to inform the implementation of the Tourism Strategy.
	4.2 Gather local activity club leaders for strategic alignment identification and exploration of collaboration opportunities.
	4.3 Develop and provide information and materials to encourage participation and pride in tourism among residents.
	4.4 Host Town Hall sessions to showcase tourism as a contributor to the local economy, social fabric, and environment to residents and industry.
	4.5 Conduct a regular tourism resident-sentiment survey.

Pillar C: Visitor Experience

Pillar C focuses on the visitor experience. It enhances Elliot Lake's sense of place so that visitors know what makes Elliot Lake a unique place to visit and so that the destination exceeds expectations. As a result of the work outlined in this pillar, visitors will experience a seamless and welcoming arrival and meaningful experience. This pillar connects to efforts to make tourism in Elliot Lake more inclusive and accessible while exceeding visitor expectations.

There is one initiative and five actions associated with Pillar C.

Initiatives	Actions
5) Ensure excellence in access and service	5.1 Map out visitors' journey from highway to city and assess key spots for welcome infrastructure, activations, and information sharing.
	5.2 Refresh destination wayfinding and interpretive signs to showcase consistent brand, regional connections, First Nation histories, mining heritage, and resilience.
	5.3 Further develop light-adventure and limited-mobility accessible outdoor assets.
	5.4 Offer or connect tourism industry to customer-service excellence and storytelling trainings.
	5.5 Encourage tourism industry to adopt new digital tools as well as traditional print material to cross promote, and showcase offerings, including online booking platforms.

Pillar D: Tourism Products and Experiences

Pillar D focuses on tourism products and experiences by encouraging and supporting tourism businesses and activity groups to develop and enhance experiences to fill tourism product gaps. Through implementation of the actions, Elliot Lake will be set up to offer diverse and place-based tourism experiences and products that have been co-developed with local partners and designed to appeal to target markets.

There is one initiative and five actions associated with Pillar D.

Initiatives	Actions
6) Enhance tourism product	6.1 Work with local tourism partners, including industry and activity clubs, to expand tourism product offering, access, and positioning.
	6.2 Encourage industry to procure and offer Northern Ontario consumable and purchasable goods, including food and beverage, and arts and crafts to grow the

	availability of unique products across the visitor experience.
	6.3 Identify existing and high-potential community events and initiatives to develop and position as part of Elliot Lake's tourism offering
	6.4 Assess the feasibility of making better use of the airport.
	6.5 Update Cultural Plan and Economic Development Plan.

Pillar E: Marketing

Pillar E focuses on tourism marketing. It connects to the previous four pillars as marketing depends on a strong and portfolio of tourism product, and an engaged local community of hosts. With these elements in line Elliot Lake will be positioned to boost interest and commitment to visit through strategic marketing and storytelling.

There is one initiative and three actions associated with Pillar D.

Initiatives	Actions
7) Develop and share targeted marketing and promotional materials	7.1 Develop and share resources for key visitor markets, including light-adventure resources like itineraries, how-to guides, and destination maps, as well as road trip resources for key markets.
	7.2 Support the development of collective marketing campaigns and initiatives that highlight expanded tourism offering.
	7.3 Pursue collaborations with regional tourism organizations to ensure strategic exposure for Elliot Lake as a destination.

Implementation

An implementation plan has been developed to support the development of the Explore Elliot Lake Tourism Initiative Strategy (see Appendix A). The implementation plan includes additional details associated with each action, including roles, responsibilities, and collaborations; indicators of completion; key performance indicators; timeline, etc.

Proposed tactics: Non-prescriptive examples of how the actions may be brought to life. Exact details will be confirmed through work planning process across the implementation period.

Roles, responsibilities, and collaboration: Identifies which department is responsible for leading the implementation of the action and notes other City departments and organizations that could support based on their knowledge, expertise, and resources.

Indicators of completion and key performance indicators: The indicators of completion identify when an action is complete by providing the ideal outcome for the action. In alignment with this, the key performance indicators offer specific measurements to track implementation progress. Both types of information will support the City in reporting back implementation progress.

Timeline: This information provides the year in which the action is recommended to start place, specifically, 2025 (Q3, Q4), 2026, 2027, or 2028 (Q1, Q2). Importantly, certain actions need to be implemented first before others can proceed. For example, actions focused on securing resources to support tourism development, management, and marketing need to come first to secure human and financial resources to implement other actions. However, it is important to note that the timeline may evolve as new opportunities for implementation present themselves.

Partnerships

Continuing with the active role it currently plays, The City of Elliot Lake is committed to leading the implementation of this 3-year tourism strategy from late-2025 to late-2028. That said, collaboration with diverse partners at the local, regional, and provincial levels will be essential to successful strategy implementation. Working with neighbouring municipalities, Serpent River First Nation, and Mississaugi First Nation and groups such as the Huron North Community Economic Alliance (HNCEA) will be important as well as with partner organizations such as Algoma Kinniwabi Travel Association, Destination Northern Ontario, Indigenous Tourism Ontario, Destination Ontario, etc. Growing tourism in Elliot Lake will benefit from maintaining strong relationships with these and other organizations.

Successful tourism development, management, and marketing means keeping the community informed and involved, including the tourism industry and residents. This aligns with the City's commitment to use tourism as a tool for community building. As such, a foundational partnership will be established through the development of a Tourism Advisory Committee to support and guide the implementation of this strategy.

Through the strategy implementation plan (see Appendix A), several opportunities for collaboration have been identified. When it comes to tourism development and management, examples include working with Destination Northern Ontario on visitor data collection and product development opportunities, as well as plugging into the organization's training and capacity development resources. When it comes to marketing and storytelling, partnerships could include collaborating with Algoma Kinniwabi Tourism Association to invite niche influencers and participate in FAM tours. Another example is working with Serpent River First Nation, and Mississaugi First Nation around storytelling opportunities.

Resourcing Tourism

A key factor to consider for implementation is the need for a new dedicated municipal staff person. Without the additional human resources, the timeline for implementation of strategy would likely be affected.

Moreover, financial resources to support tourism development, management, and marketing will be essential to implementing the strategy. There are a range of funding tools available to support tourism. Funding resources span municipal revenue channels like the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) to business grants and supports like the Tourism Activation grants. Organizations like Destination Northern Ontario, FedNor, the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation, the East Algoma Community Futures Development Corporation and the Elliot Lake & North Shore Corporation for Business Development among others offer opportunities to partner on funding and resourcing tourism initiatives. To identify, pursue, and secure potential resources for tourism it is crucial to have a tourism coordinator pursuing these opportunities for the destination.

Next Steps

Recognizing that tourism development is community development, Elliot Lake has a real opportunity to set a strong foundation over the next three years through placemaking and community engagement in collaboration with industry and partners. Ultimately, this work will support new and enhanced tourism products and experiences that benefit residents and visitors alike along with strategic marketing initiatives to attract target markets.

With this tourism strategy in place, Elliot Lake is well positioned to sustainably grow tourism in the years to come and work towards the inspiring future vision set by the community's residents, industry members, and partners.

The City of Elliot Lake is committed to playing its part to bring this vision to fruition by moving through the implementation plan that supports this strategy.

If you see an opportunity for collaboration and want to get involved in supporting Elliot Lake's tourism development, management, or marketing, please don't hesitate to reach out to Steve Antunes, Economic Development Manager at santunes@city.elliottlake.on.ca.



The City of Elliot Lake would like to thank everyone involved with the creation of this new Tourism Initiative including the 300+ community members that took the time to give their insights and ideas to help make Elliot Lake a leader in Northern Ontario Tourism.



Federal Economic Development
Agency for Northern Ontario

Agence fédérale de développement
économique pour le Nord de l'Ontario



City of Elliot Lake

45 Hillside Dr. N.

Elliot Lake, ON

P5A 1X5



Photography Provided by
Northern Exposures Photography