



This March edition newsletter, focuses on on how travellers' desire for experiential travel creates a need for new offerings and what local tourism partners can do to meet this demand.

What's Inside

- RTO 9 2024 Tourism Summit dates announced
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Plus opportunities, workforce development, events and media spotlights

SAVE the DATES - RTO 9 Tourism Summit

September 12 & 13 | 2024

SAVE THE DATE

SEe ON
Summit
Envision Tourism Growth

RTO 9 
South
Eastern
ONTARIO

Destination development for South
Eastern Ontario.

INSPIRE. CONNECT. GROW.

 **DoubleTree/Home2Suites by
Hilton, Kingston, ON**

Website & Registration coming soon!

This year's summit will be a two day affair!

Join RTO 9 at the newly renovated DoubleTree by Hilton (formerly the Ambassador Hotel) in Kingston, Ontario for our 2-day SEe ON Summit experience:

- Day One – Annual Tourism Summit: Thursday, September 12, 2024
- Day Two – Sustainable Tourism Summit: Friday, September 13, 2024

Both days will be packed with incredible speakers, forward thinking ideas and inspiration to spark creativity and help *Envision Tourism Growth* in South Eastern Ontario. Join us in the evening of September 12th for a networking

reception for attendees of the SEe ON Summit, generously hosted by Tourism Kingston and the Kingston Accommodation Partners.

Registration links coming soon!

[View highlights for our 2023 Summit.](#)



Experiential Travel is on the Surge

A key trend shaping the future of travel is the burgeoning demand for experiential travel. This shift towards experience-driven travel is characterized by a growing interest in cultural activities, unique adventures, and slow, purposeful travel, reflecting a desire for meaningful engagement rather than mere observation.

The demand for experiential travel is influencing the hospitality sector, with luxury and mid-market hotels alike finding opportunities in offering localized, unique experiences. The trend is particularly pronounced in urban and boutique hotels, which are thriving by embedding local culture into their offerings. Moving forward, partnerships between hotels and experience providers are anticipated to become more prevalent, as travellers prioritize authentic experiences over traditional luxury accommodations, marking a transformative shift in the travel and hospitality landscape.

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Travel Experiences in Demand

A comprehensive survey by [Skyscanner](#) involving 18,000 travellers across 15 markets reveals a significant trend for 2024: the increasing importance of experiences such as culinary exploration, concerts, art, and outdoor activities in shaping travel decisions. This shift emphasizes the need for travel marketing to pivot from traditional product-centric strategies to those highlighting unique experiences.

According to [Skift](#), destinations marketing unique experiences stand to gain substantially in the travel recovery landscape. The overarching message for 2024 is that travel choices are increasingly experience-led, moving away from the "revenge travel" trend to more deliberate, purpose-driven journeys. Whether it's "gig trippers" attending concerts, food enthusiasts delving into local cuisines, or art lovers exploring museums and landmarks, the preference for immersive experiences is clear. This shift challenges marketers to realign their focus toward showcasing the unique experiences that destinations offer, potentially reshaping the travel industry's approach to engaging modern travellers.

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Market Insights



Booking.com's 2024 Travel Predictions

[Booking.com](https://www.booking.com) recently released their 2024 travel predictions (February 15, 2024), drawn from a global study involving 27,000 travellers from 33 countries, reveal a transformative outlook on travel. Here's a summary of the key insights:

- **Transformation Through Travel:** A significant 68% of travellers feel they become their best selves while exploring new places. With the anonymity that travel offers, many enjoy crafting fictional stories or embodying their "main character energy," showing a desire for adventure and self-reinvention.
- **Retreats and Water-centric Getaways:** Over a third of travellers (36%) are drawn to vacations by the water, finding relaxation and solace by the sea or lake. Interest in specialized retreats, including health, psychedelic, and sleep-focused retreats, indicates a growing desire for wellness and self-discovery.
- **Embracing the Unknown:** More than half of the travellers (52%) are intrigued by the idea of mystery trips, where the destination is a surprise. This trend towards spontaneity and adventure is further supported by a preference for off-the-beaten-path experiences and travel without rigid plans.

- **Culinary Adventures:** A strong majority (78%) of travellers seek fresh culinary experiences, with half planning trips around specific dining spots. The integration of technology and innovative plant-based dining options highlights a futuristic approach to food tourism.
- **Deepening Connections:** Travel in 2024 aims to enhance relationships, with solo travel and matchmaking trips gaining popularity. This reflects a broader trend towards personal growth, healing, and the exploration of new connections.
- **Affordable Luxury:** Travellers are finding creative ways to enjoy luxury experiences without overspending, such as traveling during off-peak times, borrowing designer items, and prioritizing spending on accommodations and transport upgrades.
- **Sustainability and Authenticity:** Over half of the travellers seek sustainable accommodation options, emphasizing the importance of eco-friendly practices and authentic local experiences in less-traveled areas.

[READ Travel Predictions 2024](#)



Leger

**TOURISM HR CANADA
Business Intelligence Survey**

Labour Market Information

Wave 4: August - September 2023

Tourism HR
Canada



RH Tourisme
Canada

Published January 2024

Business Intelligence Survey Report

[Tourism HR Canada](#) released its latest Business Intelligence Survey Report (January 2024). In total, 300 businesses were interviewed by telephone survey. Here are some key highlights:

- Of those interviewed, 38% of businesses represent the Accommodations industry, 35% Recreation and Entertainment, 9% the Transportation industry, 9% Travel Services, and 7% Food and Beverage Services. The majority (83%) of businesses are open with no limitations or restrictions.
- Less than a quarter of the businesses (9%) did not have paid employees, while more than half had a small staff of 1 to 19 employees (57%). Most businesses operated throughout the year, with a preference for seasonal operation in the summer months.
- Close to thirds (62%) are owner-operator businesses, and 70% report being in operation for over 20 years. 53% of businesses indicate having an annual gross revenue of less than \$500,000. One-third (32%) indicate they operate in a small population center, and 29% indicate operating in a rural or remote region.
- Just over two in five (41%) businesses interviewed currently have job vacancies.
- Most businesses (59%) reported difficulties in recruiting qualified and reliable employees, with the effect being strongest in transportation, accommodations, and food and beverage services. Difficulties with retention were less pronounced, with only 38% of businesses noting this as an operational and staffing concern.
- Improved compensation packages (57%) were the most commonly reported retention strategy, followed by increased flexibility offered to workers (26%) and creating a healthier culture of work-life balance (22%).

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Skift Megatrends 2024

Leading travel news site [Skift](#) has recently released their annual tourism Megatrends – this being their 12th edition. The report offers a wide-ranging set of topics hoping to guide tourism businesses in smarter ways for 2024 and beyond. These are the 15 trends to watch out:

1. **The Ozempic Era Will Force the Travel Industry to Adapt:** If travel companies are not thinking about the impact of GLP-1s on their bottom line yet – in 2024 they will.
2. **Your IV Is Ready, Sir:** Gone are the days when luxury meant high-end lotions and beauty treatments. Hotels are embracing “extreme wellness,” which marries sleep, performance, and nutrition.
3. **Executives, Meet Your New Intern: Artificial Intelligence:** Organizational shifts prompted by AI are already happening. It’s only a matter of time before it leads to job cuts.
4. **‘Made In Dubai’ is the Next Global Brand:** Dubai has tried and failed to set up its darling hotels in global hubs. But things are different now: The city has boomed since the pandemic, and investors overseas are now reading its success story. Introducing “Brand Dubai,” coming to a city near you.

5. **Is the World Ready to Meet the Indian Middle Class?:** India's middle class is a powerhouse in the travel game. Young, cash in hand, and with a taste for diverse experiences, they're shaping the future of travel.

6. **There Will be a Short Term Rental Boom in the Middle East:** The Middle East's lofty tourism goals mean a re-think in accommodations. Luxury hotels won't be enough.

7. **Junk Fees Get Tossed:** Consumer advocates have pressured the travel industry over junk fees for years. But new rules and laws make this time feel different.

8. **Humanity's Faustian Climate Bargain Comes Due:** Traditional travel seasons are changing faster than a melting snowcap, and tour operators are leading the way in adapting to extreme weather.

9. **How Hotels Will Seduce the Middle Class Traveler:** Luxury is fun, and lifestyle properties are hip. Yet mid-market brands that serve middle-class travelers, a rising group, are the biggest opportunity for major hotel groups.

10. **Supply Chain Nightmares Will Haunt the Airlines:** Planes, engines, pilots: There's a shortage of just about everything and it's going to hold back the aviation industry.

11. **Robotics vs. Demographics:** The Big Battle To Come: As the world ages more, the travel industry will be forced to adopt AI tech in their operations.

12. **How Travel Can Fix the World's Loneliness Crisis:** Amid the loneliness crisis, people are looking to the travel industry to help them meet new people and build lasting connections.

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Tourism SkillsNet Ontario: Workforce Issues, Opportunities & Impact: January 2024

[TIAO](#) and [OTEC](#)'s recent inaugural "Tourism SkillsNet Ontario: Workforce Issues, Opportunities & Impact" report, published January 2024, outlines the state and future projections of Ontario's tourism and hospitality industry. Key insights include:

- Tourism contributes significantly to Ontario's economy, with revenues expected to surpass pre-pandemic levels and reach over \$92 billion by 2025.
- Employment in the sector is projected to grow to over 742,000 jobs by 2025.
- Challenges such as inflation, rising business costs, and staffing gaps impact the industry's ability to offer competitive wages and attract talent.
- The report emphasizes the importance of addressing labor shortages through enhanced coordination and innovative workforce solutions.
- Strategic efforts and policy recommendations focus on supporting the industry's recovery and growth, including optimizing the Skills Development Fund and introducing portable benefits programs.

[Read the Report](#)



Success Stories

RTO 9 provided the opportunity for training and wage subsidies for eligible businesses in South Eastern Ontario's Tourism and Hospitality sectors through the Tourism SkillsNet 9 (TSN9) program. TSN9 was a collaborative initiative comprising Destination Northern Ontario, Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario, Ontario Tourism Education Corporation, RTO 7, and Ontario Employment Service Providers. The TSN9 program addressed specific workforce labour gaps in the Tourism and Hospitality sector by successfully training 91 employees representing 17 employers eligible for wage subsidies within South Eastern Ontario's Tourism and Hospitality sector.

[9 Success Stories](#)

Opportunities



Ontario Transportation Expo

The [Ontario Transportation Expo Conference and Trade Show](#) is an event organized collaboratively by the [Ontario Motor Coach Association](#) (OMCA), the [Ontario Public Transit Association](#) (OPTA), and [School Bus Ontario](#) (SBO). The event is designed as a meeting ground for a variety of stakeholders within the passenger transportation sector, including operators, manufacturers, suppliers, and others with vested interests in these industries. The Expo serves as an incubator for innovation, networking, and strategy development, aiming to enhance the delivery of transportation services to customers.

Date: April 14, 2024 at 10:00am EDT – April 17, 2024 at 5:00pm EDT

Location: [655 Dixon Rd, Etobicoke, ON M9W 1J3, Canada](#)

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2024 Ontario Craft Wine Conference

“Roots to Resilience & Success for Ontario’s Wine Industry”

Niagara Falls Convention Center
April 23, 2024



2024 Ontario Craft Wine Conference

The sixth annual [Ontario Craft Wine Conference & Trade Show](#) is a unique event tailored specifically to the province's VQA wine and grape industry. As Ontario's premier conference dedicated to the business aspects of wine, it attracts over 400 attendees, including winery owners, producers, connoisseurs, industry suppliers, investors, and influential figures from government and industry circles.

The conference offers a packed schedule of educational seminars led by international experts, opportunities for professional networking, and sessions aimed at business development. Those involved in the craft wine sector are encouraged to register and seize the opportunity to be part of the year's most significant industry gathering.

Date: April 23, 2024 at 8:00am-6:00pm EDT

Location: Niagara Falls Convention Center

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Workforce Development



Employer Survey: Disability Inclusion Awareness and Practices

[Tourism HR Canada](#) is inviting tourism operators to participate in a brief survey aimed at understanding current HR engagement in areas like disability inclusion, recruitment, and mental health. Insights will aid in developing the Belong project's tools and training to address recruitment challenges and promote disability employment within the tourism sector. The survey, taking about 15 minutes, seeks nationwide responses to shape this three-year initiative.

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[SURVEY](#)



New Two-Year Limit on International Student Permits Announced by Federal Government

Starting January 22, 2024, the federal government will enforce a two-year cap on international student permits, limiting them to around 360,000—a 35% cut from last year, with distribution based on provincial/territorial population. This decision necessitates an attestation letter from the respective region by March 31, 2024. Changes also affect the Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) eligibility, particularly impacting private college students from September 1, 2024, but extend work permit duration for certain graduates. The [Tourism Industry Association of Ontario](#) (TIAO) is evaluating the impact and encourages affected parties to reach out.

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Featured Destinations



Ottawa to Host the NTA Travel Exchange in 2025

[Ottawa Tourism](#) has announced that the [National Tour Association's](#) (NTA) 2025 Travel Exchange convention will be held in Ottawa. This significant event gathers global travel professionals to network, share ideas, and form partnerships that shape multi-day travel itineraries. Featuring sought-after experiences from across North America and over 30 countries, along with an educational program, the Travel Exchange aims to enhance industry skills.

Hosting this event in Canada's capital presents a prime opportunity to highlight Ottawa's cultural, outdoor, and urban attractions to international travel experts, potentially driving future tourism growth and fostering industry innovation.

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Media Spotlight



World's Safest Countries and Cities Announced: Canada Ranked Safest Country

In 2024, Canada has been named the safest country in the world for travellers, according to an annual report by [Berkshire Hathaway Travel Protection](#) (BHTP). This accolade highlights Canada's strengths in diversity, inclusivity, and its notably low crime rate. Montreal, in particular, has been recognized as the second safest city.

The rankings were derived from a combination of a survey conducted with 1,702 travellers between August 24 and September 13, 2023, and data from third-party sources. Additionally, Canada's status as the 11th most peaceful country in the world, as per the 2023 Global Peace Index, contributes to its reputation as a prime travel destination. This recognition not only celebrates Canada's social and cultural environment but also complements its wide array of travel experiences, ranging from vibrant multicultural urban centers like Toronto and Vancouver to the stunning natural landscapes of its national parks such as Jasper and Banff.

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The Rise of Indigenous Ecotourism: Self-Sustaining Growth

The Indigenous ecotourism industry in Canada is making strides towards growth and self-sufficiency. Despite historical marginalization and funding challenges due to The Indian Act, Indigenous-owned businesses are making significant contributions to local communities and conservation efforts. These businesses not only boost the economy, with the Indigenous tourism industry aiming to increase its GDP contribution to \$6-billion by 2030, but also emphasize the inseparable link between Indigenous tourism, ecotourism, and environmental stewardship.

The sector faces challenges, particularly in securing sustainable funding. Initiatives like the [Indigenous Tourism Destination Fund](#) (ITDF), developed by the [Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada](#) (ITAC), seek to address these issues by partnering with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses to invest in critical areas such as infrastructure development and workforce building. Moreover, ITAC's [Original Original program](#) combats the issue of non-Indigenous businesses impersonating Indigenous entities by providing accreditation to authentically Indigenous-owned businesses.

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Canada Invests \$5.4 Million in Indigenous-led Organizations for Economic Development in Southern Ontario

The Government of Canada has allocated over \$5.4 million to bolster Indigenous economic development in southern Ontario. This funding supports five Indigenous-led organizations ([Curve Lake First Nation](#), [Indigenous Experiences Mādahòkì Farm](#), [Tecumseh Community Development Corporation](#), [Two Rivers Community Development Centre](#), and [Grand River Modular](#)), aiming to enhance food security, housing accessibility, youth skills development, and Indigenous tourism, and is expected to create over 130 jobs.

Announced by Bryan May, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business and to the Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario ([FedDev Ontario](#)), this initiative reflects Canada's commitment to economic reconciliation and fostering opportunities for Indigenous communities and entrepreneurs to grow and prosper. These efforts are part of a broader strategy to ensure inclusive economic growth across the region.

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Ontario Government Freezes Beer Tax

The Ontario government announced a significant decision to halt the automatic annual increase of the beer basic tax for two years, a move slated to start from March 1, 2024, through to March 1, 2026. This decision comes in response to advocacy efforts from the [Tourism Industry Association of Ontario](#) (TIAO) and the [Ontario Restaurant Hotel and Motel Association](#) (ORHMA), aiming to alleviate the financial pressures on the tourism and hospitality sectors amidst escalating commercial costs.

The freeze is particularly noteworthy given the context of the tax, which has seen deferrals for six consecutive years and was set for a 4.6 percent increase in 2024 due to its indexation to inflation.

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If there are any topics you want to read about in a future newsletter, please email Lesley McDougall lmcdougall@region9tourism.ca with your ideas.

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