

Niagara-on-the-Lake Tourism Recovery Plan

May 2020

Background

On March 17, the Government of Ontario declared a state of emergency due to the COVID -19 pandemic, an infectious disease causing severe acute respiratory syndrome. The response demanded the closure of indoor recreational programs, public libraries, theatres, cinemas, private schools, public schools, daycares and the prohibition of all public gatherings of more than 50 people. On March 28th, public gatherings were reduced to 5 people. Bars and restaurants remained open for drive-thru takeout and delivery services only. By order of the province, starting March 24, all non-essential businesses were closed and on March 30, a province-wide closure of all outdoor recreational amenities began.

Introduction

From TIAC (Tourism Industry Association of Canada)

“As part of the 2019 federal budget, the visitor economy was recognized as Canada’s number one service export; accounting for one in ten jobs, with government committing to invest in the sector to create middle class jobs, grow Canada’s economy, and bring new opportunities and pride to communities looking for a chance to show the world what they have. As such, as part of the government’s broader innovation strategy, tourism was designated Canada’s 7th Economic Strategy Table.”

One year later, the visitor economy is now facing unprecedented hardship as a result of COVID-19.

Impact

From TIAC (Tourism Industry Association of Canada)

“Despite the fact that some businesses benefited from government supports already in place with many still not qualifying, recent research conducted by McKinsey & Company in collaboration with Destination Canada concludes that without further government investments, 61,000 tourism businesses (57% of total) are projected to fail, and 1.66 million tourism sector employees could be laid off (~83% of total) greatly affecting, women; youth, visible minorities; new Canadians and Indigenous owned businesses and workforces. Pre-COVID-19,



tourism was Canada's 5th-largest sector, responsible for 10% of Canadian jobs and 2% of GDP.”

Based on McKinsey's Sustaining Canada's tourism sector through COVID-19 report findings:

- Canada's visitor economy is unlikely to quickly “bounce back” once the pandemic has ended
- This crisis has struck on the cusp of the busy summer season (June-August) that is responsible for 36% of the tourism sector's annual revenues and the lion's share of most tourism businesses' profits.
- Businesses that survive beyond May will still likely struggle to remain viable over the next 12 to 14 months or until the 2021 summer season begins
- The industry has been supportive of measures taken to mitigate the impact of this pandemic and protect the health and safety of Canadians
- It is imperative to ensure that when tourism businesses gradually re-open and travel restarts, a balanced approach and careful consideration to border openings is in place to accelerate the overall economic recovery of the country
- The importance of the travel economy to Canada's job market also cannot be over-stated since tourism provides one of the most diversified workforces and is a major source of employment for youth as well as several under-represented groups
- Welcoming visitors from safe destinations and re-opening the education and business meeting segments will also be critical to tourism's recovery

NOTL WORKING TOGETHER AND LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

We will get through this pandemic. We will go back to work and gather in restaurants and theaters and events again. But when we do, we will not return to business as usual. Not only does COVID-19 threaten to reappear in subsequent waves if we do not remain vigilant, but there will always be the threat of future pandemics to prepare for as well.

The Lord Mayor, Councillors, The Chamber of Commerce, Tourism NOTL and Community Leaders must do whatever is necessary to get Niagara-on-the-Lake back up and running as soon as we safely can. After that, we will need plans in place to prepare for future pandemics, or other social or economic lockdowns that may need to occur. The federal and provincial governments are doing their part, with unprecedented programs to bolster the economy and support towns and businesses as well as individuals and institutions.

Getting this response right may set Niagara-on-the-Lake in the way of recovery.

PREMISES to keep focused while planning for demand to reboot

- Protect Public Health and Safety
- Protect Infrastructures
- Mitigate Economic and Social Losses

Collaboration with the Provincial Government following in our Recovery Plan the 3 stages of the *Framework for Reopening our Province*

Stage 1

Opening businesses that can immediately meet or modify operations to meet public health advice and workplace safety measures

[Read about Stage 1](#)

[What can reopen in Stage 1](#)

Stage 2

Taking a regional approach to opening more businesses and services, as well as community, recreational and outdoor spaces, while emphasizing public health advice and personal responsibility, including use of various PPE to lower transmission rates.

[Read about Stage 2](#)

[What can reopen in Stage 2](#)

Stage 3

Reopening most remaining workplaces and community spaces, while carefully and gradually lifting restrictions. Public health advice and workplace safety guidance will remain in place and available. Larger public gatherings will continue to be restricted and will need extra attention and safety protocols as they restart.

[Read about Stage 3](#)

[What can reopen in Stage 3](#)

RECOVERY PLAN TO SUPPORT TRADE AND TOURISM

STAGE ONE - Complete

Tourism Niagara-on-the-Lake will show resilience by providing a positive message to the community and local businesses and in particular support businesses with information on delivering essential services in a safe manner, adapting their business to the 'new normal' and financial assistance programs. The Chamber of Commerce will also lobby government on behalf of local businesses to ensure their voice is heard and their particular needs are met.

- a. Provide specific guides and protocols for different sectors and trades through, website, social media, direct member e-communication and sharing of ideas on weekly calls.

Resources and Reopening and Recovery pages:

<https://www.niagaraonthelake.com/covid-19resources>

<https://www.niagaraonthelake.com/reopening-and-recovery-planguide>

- b. Attend webinars and participate on virtual calls to stay up to date on policy and programs that might affect or provide support to local businesses. Keep open lines of communication with all level of government and other lobby organizations such as TIAC, TIAO, The Canadian Chamber of Commerce and The Retail Council of Canada.
- c. Encourage businesses to pivot and embrace data and digital marketing technologies. Provide information on programs, training and funding available to pivot to online.
- d. Create a marketing committee that includes marketing experts from local businesses and is representative of all sectors of tourism sector to advise Tourism Niagara-on-the-Lake on their strategies and opportunities.

STAGE TWO - In progress

Tourism Niagara-on-the-Lake will seek to bring the business community together, in particular the tourism sector, as it is harder hit and most impacted by the pandemic, to develop a post-pandemic marketing plan. The marketing plan will focus on encouraging locals to explore their own backyard as well as domestic travellers seeking luxury experiences and support local businesses in pivoting their offerings.

- a. Consider timing of major events and adaptation of those events to Provincial Guidelines for public gatherings, which will not be allowed to occur until stage 3 or later.
- b. Assist in the preparation of tourism based large-scale civic assets for re-opening such as The Shaw Festival's Festival Theatre Campus and Royal George Theatre, The Outlets Shopping Mall, Niagara College and The Airport. The sooner such large-scale civic infrastructure can be safely reopened, the faster our economy will be able to rebound in the aftermath of the pandemic - but it must be done safely.
- c. Assist in modification of accommodations assets by providing up to date information to local businesses on best practices and protocols. Encourage local accommodators to share information and follow guidelines provided by the Province and Regional Health.



- d. Protect and promote the arts and creative economy: art galleries, museums, theaters, festivals and music venues—along with supporting the artists, musicians, and actors who fuel them—as they are at dire risk. NOTL must partner with other levels of government, the private sector, and philanthropies to marshal the funding and expertise needed to keep their cultural scenes alive. Tourism NOTL will also play a key role connecting institutions (ex: The Pump House) with other stakeholders and create packages for promotion as well as ensuring they have best safety practices in place.
- e. Work collaboratively with Wineries of Niagara-on-the-Lake marketing collective to ensure their member needs are being met and they are included in broad marketing initiatives.

STAGE THREE - In progress

Niagara-on-the-Lake Chamber of Commerce will seek to bring the business community together, to identify ways the local municipality can assist in the recovery of local businesses. Convene our advisory committees & other community leader's representative of our key tourism sectors. Items for consideration:

- a. Special consideration for survival of Main Streets Businesses. The restaurants, bars, specialty shops, hardware stores, and other “mom and pop” shops that create jobs and lend unique character to our town are at severe economic risk right now. Some provincial projections suggest that as many as 75% of them may not survive the current crisis. The loss of our Main Streets (Queen and Virgil) businesses would be irreparable, and not just for the people whose livelihoods depend on them, but for visitors and the community as a whole. International studies predict that the places that have protected their Main Streets will have a decisive competitive advantage as we return to normalcy. Loan programs from government, foundations, and the private sector as well as support from other small business and technical organizations will be essential for ensuring these businesses survive. The town and the Chamber of Commerce need to provide advice and support to these vital small businesses so they can safely reopen and weather the storm of potential

future lockdowns, especially while the larger tourism drivers like the Shaw and Wineries are also under restriction around opening.

- b. Elimination of red tape to facilitate investment and development: The construction and development industry need support to reopen Niagara-on-the-Lake. As a Mature Destination NOTL needs to secure healthy new investment to keep growing at a sustainable way. Municipalities can settle lawsuits/appeals expeditiously and this can send a powerful message to investors and developers that NOTL is open for business. The Town's should reduce application, licensing and other approval fees as well as return/reduce developers' security (LC and cash deposits) as soon as possible. Initiatives as minimizing engineering peer reviews under strict cost control measures, delay payments of Development Charges (DC) to occupancy and doing everything possible to expedite development applications and building permits, would help bring back investment to NOTL. Economic inclusion and more equitable development are critical factors for the health, safety, and economic competitiveness of NOTL.
- c. Consider modifying vital urban ways and transportation: for example, consideration of pedestrianizing Queen Street totally or partially to promote social distancing during COVID-19 may be inevitable. Other aspects for consideration include extended patios and curbside terraces, a street-based food court, expansion of bike lanes, reconfiguration of Fort George parking lot and new buses services to bring visitors to NOTL (Hop on Hop off, on Park Way and York Road up to Glendale).
- d. Seek new ways for The Town, The Chamber of Commerce and local leaders to work with federal and provincial agencies, community development organizations and local foundations to target needed funds, support services and technical assistance to key sectors and areas of our economy.

There is light at the end of the tunnel. In the not-too-distant future, the pandemic will become manageable and our Town will return to something that feels more 'normal'. What we do over the next 12 to 18 months can ensure that Destination NOTL gets up and running again in the best way, while protecting ourselves and our neighbours against similar emergencies in the future.

This is a time when our Town and its leaders can and must show the way forward.