

A photograph of a man and a woman walking away from the camera on a dirt path through a forest. The man is on the left, wearing a dark sweater and jeans, holding a leash for a black dog. The woman is on the right, wearing a brown leather jacket and jeans, holding the man's hand. The trees are in full autumn foliage, with shades of yellow, orange, and red. The sky is blue and clear. The path is covered with fallen leaves and shadows from the trees.

EMBRACE THE SEASONS

A Seasonal Expansion Strategy
for Tourism on PEI

Foreword

In the spring of 2021, Prince Edward Island (“PEI”) adopted an all-of-industry tourism strategy – *Charting the Course of Tourism in PEI for the Next Two Years* (the “strategy”). This strategy focused on driving recovery from COVID-19 while at the same time using the disruption of the pandemic to drive systemic change to how tourism is developed and delivered in PEI. The adoption of the strategy formalized a commitment to a four-season approach focused on driving tourism value and its contribution to the prosperity of all Islanders. Initiative 6.3 of the strategy outlined Tourism PEI working closely with PEI’s regional tourism associations (“RTAs”) and destination management organizations (“DMOs”) to drive winter and shoulder season tourism development.

PEI benefits from a strong network of tourism-focused organizations and stakeholders that have embraced a collaborative approach to facilitating tourism development and are helping to reshape the tourism landscape in PEI, together. The development of this tourism seasonal expansion strategy (the “strategy”) was led by the following working group:

- Amanda Barlow – North Cape Coastal Drive Tourism Partnership
- Alison MacDougall – Tourism PEI
- Bradford Rooney – Tourism PEI
- Brodie O’Keefe – Tourism PEI
- Corryn Clemence – Tourism Industry Association of PEI (“TIAPEI”)
- Darcy Butler – Tourism Cavendish Beach
- Darren MacAleer – Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (Observer)
- Lori MacGregor – Points East Coastal Drive Tourism Partnership
- Heidi Zinn – Discover Charlottetown
- Jennifer Bernard – Tourism PEI
- Jill O’Halloran – Central Coastal Tourism Area Partnership
- Keith Hansen – Tourism PEI
- Rose Dennis – Explore Summerside
- Trent Birt – Tourism PEI

Together, the Working Group carried out research, engaged and consulted with their respective organizational networks and stakeholders, and developed an overarching framework to help facilitate the seasonal expansion of tourism in PEI. Following this, the Working Group carried out a public request for proposals process and engaged Bannikin Travel & Tourism Inc. to conduct additional research, facilitate stakeholder consultations, and develop an action plan to guide the implementation of the vision.

The Working Group and Bannikin Travel and Tourism Consulting gathered considerable stakeholder input to inform the development of the Action Plan, including:

- A presentation and Q&A during PEI's Tourism Industry Day Conference, held on March 8, 2023, at the Trailside Music Hall (173 attendees).
- Key informant interviews with 20 industry stakeholders.
- An organizational partner's focus group session (13 organizations represented).
- Five industry table talks in PEI's tourism regions with 49 tourism businesses represented.

Introduction

PEI has many competitive advantages that have resulted in it becoming a well-established destination. A beautiful coastline, beaches, and natural environment combined with high-quality culinary ingredients (e.g., seafood, beef, potatoes, etc.), a first-class golf offering, and a welcoming culture result in a competitive and attractive offering.

While this has benefited PEI, it has also led to the concentration of visitor activity during July and August. This high degree of seasonality has resulted in capacity challenges during the summer months and has contributed to operational and labour-related challenges for tourism operators. As a result, the seasonal dispersion of visitor activity is a key strategic objective within PEI's tourism strategy.

This strategy is an overarching guide for facilitating the growth of tourism activity in PEI between November and April over the long term. It is meant to facilitate strategic alignment between and among all tourism industry stakeholders in PEI and to provide a focus for detailed annual planning aimed at realizing this vision.

PEI's tourism organizations will strategically design, develop, and invest in tourism offerings that embrace our seasonal climate and collectively aim to build a more competitive year-round offering that commands higher revenues in all seasons.

Positioning

As a destination brand and tourism offering, PEI is well suited to own a position themed around restorative travel that contributes to one's wellness. In a world that is becoming increasingly congested, filled with negative messaging and ever more frequent crises, PEI provides a sanctuary that enables you to reconnect with nature, enjoy exceptional food ingredients from the land and sea, and experience an authentic way of life that revitalizes the soul.

VISION

Prince Edward Island is a four-season destination, where Islanders welcome guests to experience a breathtaking environment, exceptional food, and an authentic way of life that enriches and revitalizes the soul.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Strategic Collaboration

Take advantage of our size to achieve a level of engagement and cooperation that drives destination development at an unmatched pace in Canada.

Community Engagement

Put residents at the forefront of tourism development, using tourism to enhance prosperity and quality of life, while creating ambassadors for year-round tourism.

Leadership

Be a leader in using evidence to advance year-round tourism offerings that render PEI more competitive while commanding higher revenues.

Unique Delivery

Deliver products and experiences that rise above other destinations by leveraging the Island's existing competitive advantages.

Experience Pillars

This strategy will be realized by supporting and developing a foundation of offerings categorized within the following themes:

Personal Enrichment Experiences

Personal enrichment experiences are centred around providing guests with uplifting and unique offerings that contribute to their wellness. Depending on the individual, this may include visiting a spa or eco-retreat, watching a theatrical performance, participating in a ski tour, craft fair, snow yoga, Indigenous or unique ice fishing experience, or perhaps taking a horse-drawn sleigh ride. Whatever is chosen, this product pillar is about providing an opportunity for individuals to connect with themselves, family and friends, our culture, and/or nature in a way that is rejuvenating and authentically PEI.



Canada's Food Island Experiences

PEI is Canada's Food Island, where rich iron-red farmland, pristine bays, and passionate people come together to sustainably grow world-class ingredients including lobster, oysters, mussels, beef, and potatoes. On PEI you get to see where your food comes from and connect with the people who grow and harvest it. Canada's Food Island experiences are centred around providing guests with fresh culinary offerings with an authentic PEI delivery.



First-Class Trails

Few things can recharge your well-being like experiencing and reconnecting with nature. While PEI does not have mountains, it does have a stunning landscape that lends itself well to trail-based activities. Whether hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, motorized trekking, or nature photography, a first-class trail offering is a key driver of visitation and facilitates participation in popular visitor activities.



Objectives

The development of individual initiatives and associated key performance indicators will contribute to one or more of the following objectives:

1. Reduce Seasonality

Reduce the seasonality of PEI's tourism industry by growing tourism activity in the November to April period without cannibalizing our peak season's performance.

2. Curate Competitive Products

Create an environment that supports and contributes to the establishment of a tourism product offering that renders PEI a competitive and appealing destination to visit throughout the November to April period.

3. Increase Awareness

Engage in activities and initiatives that contribute to building awareness amongst target markets that PEI is an attractive and compelling destination to visit during the November to April period.

4. Cultivate Community Champions

Grow resident engagement in and advocacy for tourism activity during the November to April period. Increase the authenticity of products, generation of tourism ambassadors, and reduce the leakage of resident tourism spending.

Action Plan

A. CREATE A SYSTEM TO REDUCE SEASONALITY

Reduce tourism seasonality without cannibalizing peak season performance in PEI by setting the foundation for growing visitation in the November to April period.

A1. Evolve the Working Group

Evolve the November to April tourism working group into a strategy implementation committee with terms of reference for each member, outlining how they will work together to achieve the November to April tourism vision.

Rationale

All partners need a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities when it comes to growing the November to April tourism season. They must also be accountable to each other across the development process for the strategy to be successfully implemented. These needs can be met by establishing a committee that supports the planning and coordination of the action plan initiatives. Not all partners will be involved in all initiatives related to growing the November to April tourism season, therefore, a committee with clear terms of reference will assist implementation partners by keeping everyone aware of progress. The committee will also provide a channel for troubleshooting challenges, identifying opportunities to collaborate, and course-correcting, as needed.

Partners

- Lead(s): Tourism PEI, TIAPEI
- Support(s): RTAs, DMOs

Timeline

2023-2024				2024-2025				2025-2026			
Sep-Nov	Dec-Feb	Mar-May	Jun-Aug	Sep-Nov	Dec-Feb	Mar-May	Jun-Aug	Sep-Nov	Dec-Feb	Mar-May	Jun-Aug

A2. Co-develop an M&E System

Co-design a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system to measure November to April tourism performance year over year that is inclusive of innovative KPIs.

B. FACILITATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETITIVE PRODUCTS

Create an environment that supports and contributes to the establishment of a tourism product offering that renders PEI a competitive and appealing destination to visit throughout the November to April period.

B1. Prioritize Funding Support

Build November to April tourism prioritization criteria into new and existing funding programs and supports.

Rationale

Because May to October tourism has been incentivized and funded over the decades, there is a need to strategically support the development of November to April tourism. This includes incentivizing stakeholders to focus on developing new and innovative products and experiences during this period, staying open throughout this period, and extending existing products and experiences into the November to April period.

Partners

- Lead(s): Tourism PEI (potentially Rural Development).
- Support(s): TIAPEI, RTAs, DMOs, FIP others, as identified (federal government, municipalities, departments)

Timeline

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B2. Develop New Food & Drink Products

Collaborate on the development of new activations that showcase food and drink in season during the November to April period.

Rationale

PEI boasts an abundance of incredible food and drink that is grown, harvested, and produced on the island from the finest seafood to top-notch craft alcohol. Food and drink present a unique opportunity to link different parts of the island using stories featuring November to April culinary specialties. Such stories have wide applicability since all visitors to PEI are likely to consume food and drink at some point. Moreover, food and drink products help combat seasonality. Activations such as festivals, events, and pop-ups, for example, can be used to attract a critical mass of people that make staying open financially viable for businesses.

Partners

- Lead(s): FIP
- Support(s): RTAs, DMOs (incl. industry), Tourism PEI, federal government (special projects funding)

Timeline

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B3. Build Experience Development Capacity

Provide training opportunities, workshops, best practice missions, and tools to business owners and operators committed to November to April product development to support the development of new and innovative experiences.

Rationale

Businesses committed to November to April product development are doing this in a significantly different tourism landscape than the May to October context. The number of visitors is significantly lower, the climate is different, and the resources currently available to businesses, including labour are not the same. As a result, many businesses are likely to benefit from support in developing new and innovative experiences and products tailored to the November to April context that will appeal to relevant target markets.

Partners

- Lead(s): TIAPEI (incl. independent contractor, as needed)
- Support(s): RTAs, DMOs, federal government (special projects funding)

Timeline

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B4. Create Exclusive Experiences

Develop "PEI exclusive" experiences that can be had only in PEI, and only from November to April.

Rationale

Visitors will not travel for an experience they can have at home. Points of differentiation are essential to growing demand for tourism offerings and building pride of place. In the first years of action plan implementation, the primary target markets for PEI's November to April tourism offerings will be Islanders and visitors from Atlantic Canada. Since PEI shares many of its

C. BUILD AWARENESS AMONGST DESTINATION STAKEHOLDERS

Solidify that PEI is an attractive and compelling destination to visit from November to April by building awareness around all that it has to offer during this season.

C1. Co-develop an E&E Calendar

Co-develop a tourism events and experiences (E&E) calendar to share with residents and visitors.

Rationale

Having *one* province-wide calendar that is widely recognized as *the* place to go for information on what is happening in PEI is important for strategic coordination and collaboration amongst tourism organizations. At the same time, it can be a valuable planning tool for residents and visitors looking for things to do. A comprehensive, up-to-date, and easy-to-navigate shared calendar will make it easier to strategically plan diverse and complementary tourism offerings across the November to April period and avoid scheduling competing events. At the same time, if the calendar is a recognized community resource, residents will be more likely to use it, participate in what is going on, and become ambassadors for the destination.

Partners

- Lead(s): Evolved working group
- Support(s): Tourism PEI, VICs, municipalities

Timeline

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C2. Market to the Heart

Develop a marketing campaign for November to April tourism that is focused on PEI as a place where you can either raise or lower your heart rate.

Rationale

People need to know what is on offer if they are going to take part, return for more, and recommend the experience to friends and family from near and far. Therefore, once a repertoire of high-quality November to April offerings has been developed in alignment with the experience pillars, marketing these will be the next step. In other words, there will be a need to show Islanders and prospective visitors just how diverse the experiences in PEI are across the months of November to April. Whether they are seeking action or relaxation, and in either case including great food and drink.

D. CULTIVATE COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

Towards increasing the authenticity of products, generation of tourism ambassadors, and reducing resident spending off-island, grow resident engagement in, and advocacy for, tourism activity during the November to April period.

D1. Develop Partners and Allies

Support the professional development of key tourism partners and allies by sending them to conferences, training, and learning journeys focused on winter placemaking.

Rationale

Great places to live are some of the best places to visit. Designing vibrant, animated, comfortable public and private spaces takes extra work during the November to April period. Wind, rain, snow, darkness, and temperature all need to be considered, but there are tried and tested examples in communities around the world, from innovations in windbreaks to winter markets to light festivals. Placemaking is highly interdisciplinary and requires the involvement of diverse players from municipal facilitates management to business owners to tourism organizations. The good news is that visitors today are looking to travel to authentic places and participate in experiences that locals love, so building great spaces and activations for residents also contributes to tourism.

Partners

- Lead(s): Tourism PEI, TIAPEI
- Support(s): evolved working group, federal government

Timeline

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D2. Empower Residents

Develop a program to empower and activate residents as November to April tourism ambassadors.

Rationale

PEI residents know what makes PEI special and can get people excited about visiting in the November to April period. Island ambassadors are emissaries for the destination to fellow residents, PEI expats, visitors, and prospective visitors. An Island Ambassador program can be designed to work towards diverse goals, from growing pride of place amongst residents to attracting visitors. When residents become champions for the November to April season, this will increase opportunities for attracting VFR (visiting friends and relatives) markets.

