

CHILCOTIN CENTRAL COAST  
DESTINATION  
DEVELOPMENT  
STRATEGY

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HIGHLIGHTS



DESTINATION  
BRITISH COLUMBIA

# THANK YOU

The Chilcotin Central Coast Destination Development Strategy is the outcome of a 20-month iterative process of gathering, synthesizing and validating information with stakeholders about the current status and future direction of tourism in the Chilcotin Central Coast planning area.

We thank the First Nations on whose traditional territories we gathered for our community meetings including: Bella Coola — home of the Nuxalk, Anahim Lake — home of the Ulkatcho, Alexis Creek — home of the Tl'etinqox and the

Tîlqhōt'ín National Government, Nimpo Lake — home of the Ulkatcho and Williams Lake — home of the Secwepemc.

Thank you to our tourism partners who participated in the process by attending community meetings, participating in surveys and interviews, engaging in follow-up conversations and forwarding relevant documents and insights. Special thanks to the members of the Working Committee as well as the facilitators of the Chilcotin Central Coast destination development process.

GOAT MOUNTAIN  
Photo: Kalum Ko

# WHAT'S INSIDE

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# 1

# INTRODUCTION

## WHY A STRATEGY?

The Chilcotin Central Coast Destination Development Strategy was developed to enhance the competitiveness of the Chilcotin Central Coast tourism destination over the next 10 years and beyond. The strategy was developed as part of Destination BC's Destination Development Program to support and guide the long-term growth of tourism in British Columbia. This document presents the key highlights of the Chilcotin Central Coast strategy.

## WHO IS IT FOR?

The Chilcotin Central Coast Destination Development Strategy is a guide for tourism partners as they work collaboratively to grow the visitor economy. The strategy will be reviewed and updated to reflect changing tourism objectives, priorities, and market conditions. Results will be tracked and emerging learning outcomes will inform future implementation activities thereby optimizing their effectiveness in increasing economic, social, and cultural benefits for the entire Chilcotin Central Coast area.

## WHERE IS IT FOR?

The Chilcotin Central Coast (Highway 20) planning area encompasses the area west of the Fraser River, stretching across the Chilcotin Plateau to the central coast. The northern geographic boundary includes Hartley Bay, Entiako, Finger-Tatuk and Fraser River Provincial Park. The western portion of the planning area is bounded by the Pacific Ocean and includes the central portion of the newly designated Great Bear Rainforest. The Fraser River demarcates the region to the east, and the southern boundaries include Bute Inlet, the Homathko Icefield and Big Creek Provincial Park.

## WHERE DOES IT FIT?

Chilcotin Central Coast is one of 20 planning areas across BC for which destination development strategies are being developed. Each planning area represents a logical destination for visitors in and around the province. As planning areas span across multiple jurisdictions, the importance of adopting an integrated approach with a shared vision and coordinated investment is critical. The Chilcotin Central Coast Destination Development Strategy is one of three planning area strategies being prepared for the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast tourism region. In time, informed by the outcomes of all relevant planning area destination development strategies, regional strategies will be developed. These will, in turn, inform the creation of a provincial strategy thereby ensuring a truly integrated and cohesive combination of bottom-up and top-down destination planning.

## A KEY IMPERATIVE

The recommendations contained within the Chilcotin Central Coast Destination Development Strategy form the foundation for additional, focused and aligned discussions regarding implementation. It will be important to ensure that the strategy becomes embedded in local, regional, provincial and federal decision making processes. It is only by working collaboratively in an integrated way to a shared agenda that the full potential of the Chilcotin Central Coast planning area will be realized.

## AT A GLANCE

In what follows, the distinctiveness of the destination is summarized and its vision for tourism introduced. While acknowledging the challenges the sector faces, its potential for growth is set out in terms of key opportunities and experience development potential. A consideration of each development priority and associated actions then follows. While further detail on each of these elements is available in the full strategy, they are brought together "At A Glance" to demonstrate the scope of the integrated nature of the approach being taken.

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# REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

## A DISTINCTIVE DESTINATION

With its intricate shoreline of narrow channels, deeply incised, steep-walled fjords, calm inlets and pocket coves, this area is home to a rich diversity of marine life and land mammals. Beyond the mountainous coastline of stunning granite cliffs and tumbling waterfalls, rise the impressive trees of one of the world's largest remaining tracts of unspoiled temperate rainforest — a lush, protected ecosystem that is a virtually untouched wilderness.

The Great Bear Rainforest, which lies within this destination, is home to many Indigenous communities as well as abundant wildlife. Its most celebrated resident is the rare, cream-colored Kermode bear, or spirit bear, considered sacred by generations of Indigenous people.

Adjoining the Great Bear Rainforest, the Chilcotin Ark, an ecological sanctuary which encompasses a spectrum of ecosystems from rainforest to grasslands to high mountain peaks, is home to exceptional populations of woodland caribou, bighorn sheep, moose, deer, grizzly and black bears, cougars, and wolves. With conservation values that are little known beyond the destination, it traverses a procession of splendid landscapes: the lake-studded Alplands; the low-elevation old growth forests of the Klinaklini and Homathko Valleys; the long turquoise lakes of Tatlayoko, Chilko, and Taseko; the extensive meadows and rolling alpine of Big Creek Park; to the semi-arid country of the Fraser River.

Connecting these diverse landscapes is the thin ribbon of Highway 20, an unparalleled adventure which draws visitors westwards from Williams Lake to Bella Coola through the forests and ranchlands of the Chilcotin Plateau, towards with the gleaming peaks of the Coast Mountains.

The diversity of the people and cultures within the destination are linguistically, culturally and historically rich. Comprising of 11 First Nations, 28 unincorporated community entities and two regional districts, this planning area uniquely has no incorporated communities. Historically, the Chilcotin Central Coast communities were reliant on natural resources with an emphasis on agriculture, forestry, and fishing, hunting, and mining. With some of these industries now in decline there is a growing emphasis on reinvigorating and diversifying local economies. Tourism, education, health services and public administration are currently the major employers. Tourism opportunities, particularly in the areas of bear viewing, other wildlife viewing, outdoor recreation, sport fishing and heli-skiing have been growing. Aquaculture, commercial fishery activities (including shellfish, fish processing, salmon enhancement), tree farm licensing, marine transportation and repairs, Indigenous arts and a growing community of entrepreneurial artisans also contribute to economic activity in the planning area.

## A SHARED VISION

Natural assets are simply stunning. There is a strong pride and love of place shared by tourism partners — it is one of the last remaining unspoiled, sparsely populated wilderness areas in the world where appreciation for the land, cultures and its people is alive and strong. The vision for tourism development in the next 10 years reflects this:



THE CHILCOTIN  
CENTRAL COAST IS  
A VIBRANT, LESS-

TRAVELLED DESTINATION THAT  
RESPECTS AND REFLECTS THE  
UNIQUE HERITAGE OF ITS LAND,  
PEOPLE AND CULTURES AND  
REALIZES ITS TOURISM POTENTIAL  
BY OFFERING UNIQUE  
EXPERIENCES TO TRAVELLERS  
WHO SHARE THESE VALUES AND  
WANT TO CONNECT WITH RAW,  
UNSPOILED NATURE.

# 2

# REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

While the destination faces a number of distinct challenges in terms of the uncertainty around land negotiations and agreements; the reliability of sea access; the affordability of air access; ecosystem carrying capacity; limited connectivity; the market readiness/availability of purchasable experiences and the challenge of climate change, key opportunities include:

- The Great Bear Rainforest
- The 2019 new ferry service
- Rebranding and investment in the circle touring route
- Investment in touring infrastructure
- Shoulder season extension with BC Ferries and BC Parks
- New product development — particularly Indigenous experiences
- Investment in non-traditional types of accommodation, food, and beverage
- The development of coastal paddling opportunities
- The designation of the Chilcotin Ark
- Increased partner collaboration

## EXPERIENCE POTENTIAL

Product experiences with appeal to motivate travel, encourage longer stays, and sustain year-round tourism throughout the destination include:

- **WORLD-CLASS PROTECTED NATURAL AREAS AFFORDING VISITORS AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIENCE PRISTINE WILDERNESS UNLIKE ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD** — with a focus on the Great Bear Rainforest, the Chilcotin, Tweedsmuir Provincial Park, other provincial parks, ecological reserves, and protected areas. The 2019 commencement of a direct ferry service from Port Hardy to Bella Coola re-establishes the former “Discovery Coast” circle touring route”. While the name of this route is under review, it provides an opportunity to appreciate the abundance of unique, interesting natural attractions that are, for the most part, difficult to access.
- **BACKCOUNTRY AND OUTDOOR ADVENTURE IN EXPANSIVE WILDERNESS ENVIRONMENTS** — with a focus on some of BC’s highest mountains, largest glaciers, highest concentrations of alpine lakes and stunning, protected coastal landscapes and a variety of longstanding and more recent operators offering all types of outdoor pursuits including back country hiking heli-skiing and guest lodge/resort experiences.
- **ABUNDANT OPPORTUNITIES FOR WILDLIFE AND BIRD VIEWING** — with a focus on some of the best bear viewing in the world, including opportunities to see the unique Kermode/Spirit bear. An extensive wilderness also offers chances to see elk, cariboo, deer, wolves, wolverines, bears, foxes, bald eagles, whales, and more.
- **UNSPOILED, PROTECTED COASTAL AREAS SURROUNDED BY STUNNING LANDSCAPES FOR WATER-BASED PURSUITS** — with a focus on opportunities for recreational boating as well as angling, crabbing and prawning in the region’s lakes, rivers, countless streams, fjords and ocean inlets. High-amenity locations include spectacular natural hot springs, resident humpback whale populations and fantastic fishing and seafood foraging.
- **A RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE WITH DIVERSE STORIES TO SHARE** — with a focus on Indigenous experiences offered by eleven diverse First Nations; a variety of unique, cultural and heritage attractions including the Bella Coola Nuxalk petroglyphs, the Klemtu Big House, First Nations pow wows and the historic Nuxalk-Carrier Grease Trail. Plus, opportunities to connect with cowboy culture through ranch and horseback riding vacations.

BRACEWELL'S ALPINE WILDERNESS ADVENTURES  
Photo: Kari Medig



# 3

# AT A GLANCE

**VISION STATEMENT** The Chilcotin Central Coast is a vibrant, less-travelled destination that respects and reflects the unique heritage of its land, people and cultures, and realizes its tourism potential by offering unique experiences to travellers who share these values and want to connect with raw, unspoiled nature.

THEME 1	<b>LIFELINES: IMPROVE TRANSPORTATION TO, FROM, AND WITHIN THE CHILCOTIN CENTRAL COAST</b>			
<p><b>INSPIRE CONFIDENCE</b> Within the context of ferry access, continue to work with BC Ferries to develop a schedule that works for tourism, and enables the sector to forward plan with confidence. Enhance the experience for visitors by providing daylight sailings along with a schedule that aligns with seasonal highlights and can accommodate longer stays.</p>	<p><b>ALIGNED, AFFORDABLE &amp; AGILE</b> Strategically engage with airline authorities to address the affordability of air access and the prospect of better aligned flight and ferry schedules. Drawn by the appeal of the Great Bear Rainforest, ensure that Bella Coola Airport is equipped to deal with the anticipated increase in visitor numbers.</p>	<p><b>SAFE, SIGNED &amp; SERVICED</b> Work with relevant partners to address improvements along Highway 20 to include rest stops, Wi-Fi connectivity, paving of key links, livestock safety, maintenance and emergency response. Lobby for the retention of routes that are vital for visitor access and address the shortage of public and shared transportation options.</p>	<p><b>SENSE OF PLACE</b> In promoting a “common look and feel” for the area, address Highway 20 road improvements, visitor amenities and interpretive messaging, including its consistent communication in promotional material/maps. Mindful of the role of Bella Bella, improve the sense of arrival at Bella Coola marina as a key gateway to the Great Bear Rainforest.</p>	
THEME 2	<b>ONE VOICE: LEAD STRATEGIC GROWTH THROUGH CONTINUED COLLABORATION</b>			
<p><b>PLACE MARKETING</b> In light of its growing recognition, ensure that guidelines for the use of the Great Bear Rainforest trademark are embraced by the sector. Ensure promotional activities align with strategic development plans and product development timelines and that they respect the impending trademark.</p>	<p><b>PLACE MANAGEMENT</b> Develop a Parks Management Plan that aligns BC Parks planning interests with the Marine Areas Planning Partnerships for the Great Bear Rainforest. Working collaboratively with key stakeholders, identify opportunities for tourism development that can be accommodated without compromising the integrity of the resource base.</p>	<p><b>PLACE PROTOCOLS</b> Within the context of the Nenqay Deni Accord, in partnership with relevant stakeholders and guided by First Nation leaders, advance a set of protocols for the development and management of tourism within title lands. Include consideration of a compensation policy for non-Indigenous private property that may be transferred to Aboriginal Title.</p>	<p><b>PLACE OF SANCTUARY</b> Explore the opportunity to sustainably develop, safeguard and celebrate the Chilcotin Ark as a permanently recognized or designated land area.</p>	
THEME 3	<b>EXCEED EXPECTATIONS: DIVERSIFY AND EXPAND THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE</b>			
<p><b>MARKET READY</b> In anticipation of the new ferry service providing greater access to the destination, identify additional purchasable product that will appeal to group and independent travellers. Within the context of support programs, focus on specific Indigenous tourism development opportunities.</p>	<p><b>MANAGED ACCESS</b> Within the context of a key stakeholder-led land strategy, expand the trails system within the corridor of Highway 20. Identify opportunities to provide short trails, supporting amenities as well as maintenance and management interventions. Explore the scope to utilize a harmonized trail strategy and examine the viability of increased investment in the Nuxalk-Carrier Grease Trail.</p>	<p><b>TIMELY INTERVENTIONS</b> Encourage BC Parks to increase the number of public bear watching platforms and align their operating season with the new direct ferry service from Port Hardy to Bella Coola schedule. Identify key locations for additional visitor look-outs, backcountry hiking, and mountain biking trails, as well as opportunities to provide support services and purchasable visitor experiences.</p>	<p><b>DEEPER ENGAGEMENT</b> Enable Indigenous communities, keen to be involved in the business of tourism, to curate, develop and promote purchasable experiences, tours, and products that will bring First Nations culture, artistry, traditions and heritage to life for visitors. Create more purchasable travel packages for both independent and group travellers along the Circle Tour.</p>	

THEME 3 CONTINUED	<p><b>FUTURE PROOFED</b></p> <p>Initiate feasibility assessments to determine the scope, scale and nature of multi-purpose visitor/cultural interpretive centres in Bella Coola, Bella Bella and in the Chilcotin areas. Assess opportunities for developing alternative accommodation options within the Tsilhqot'in National Government Region. Respond to the destination specific research needs of small businesses.</p>	<p><b>CONSUMER FOCUSED</b></p> <p>Identify operators who would benefit from international distribution channel training to increase the pool of visitor experiences. Work with travel trade partners to restore confidence and recover business lost following the cancellation, re-launch and delay of the Port Hardy to Bella Coola BC Ferries route.</p>	<p><b>OPEN FOR BUSINESS</b></p> <p>Support and encourage local food and beverage businesses along Highway 20 to diversify their offer and adjust their opening times to meet visitor demand. Create a no-interest or low interest capital investment fund to enable accommodation providers to upgrade, refresh and expand their offer. Include consideration of new niche opportunities such as yurts, huts, etc., as well as other non-traditional options.</p>
<b>CUT THE RED TAPE: ENABLE TOURISM BUSINESS VIABILITY AND SUCCESS</b>			
THEME 4	<p><b>OFF THE GRID</b></p> <p>Ensure the proposed visitor information services plan acknowledges the lack of modern communication connectivity. Identify supportive measures at rest stops/ places where visitors congregate to include visitor kiosks, Wi-Fi, electric car plugs and the use of mobile visitor solutions.</p> <p><b>JOINED UP</b></p> <p>Building on past success, ensure that strategic alliances between key partners play to their respective strengths; align with shared destination development goals and optimise business opportunities and visitor outcomes. Secure funding for a Cariboo Chilcotin Coast Tourism Association (CCCTA) resource dedicated to liaising with First Nation communities relative to tourism development opportunities, training needs and other aspects of support.</p>	<p><b>IN TUNE</b></p> <p>Reduce risk and uncertainty by ensuring that the policy and regulatory environment facilitates, encourages and supports the business of tourism. Address restrictions on the sale and consumption of wild foods and seafood to enable tourism operators, forager guides and restaurants to include "wild food experiences" as part of their offer.</p> <p><b>ADVOCATE &amp; SUPPORT</b></p> <p>Communicate the value of tourism to local citizens, business owners, First Nation governments, band councils and wider communities. Nurture their support for the sector and ensure the needs of tourism are reflected in relevant plans. Consider the creation of a Tourism Ambassador Program for the travel corridor.</p>	<p><b>COMPETENT</b></p> <p>Within the context of developing a long-term labour market/ business development and human resource training strategy, ensure that existing programs are available and easily accessed by prospective participants. Address the identified training needs of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous operators, entrepreneurs, and business owners.</p> <p><b>SHARE RESPONSIBILITY</b></p> <p>Within the context of co-operative approaches to maintaining business viability, investigate the cost of liability insurance for small operators who only need seasonal cover.</p>
<b>KEEP IT SPECIAL: PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT WHILE MANAGING TOURISM GROWTH</b>			
THEME 5	<p><b>MANAGE &amp; MITIGATE</b></p> <p>Work collaboratively to develop a sustainable tourism charter for responsible visitor and business behavior relative to wildlife and fisheries management. Aim to reduce the detrimental impact of human use on marine and land-based wildlife and expand the economic benefits of eco-tourism and wildlife viewing.</p>	<p><b>MEASURE &amp; MODULATE</b></p> <p>Work with key stakeholders to agree on measures for assessing the impacts of tourism on the carrying capacity of the natural ecosystem.</p>	<p><b>ATTRACT &amp; RETAIN</b></p> <p>Maximize the uptake and use of Labour Market Development Agreements and associated programs. Facilitate a more efficient labour market by promoting career, education and training opportunities as well as more effective recruitment strategies.</p>
<b>BUILD RESILIENCE: SUPPORT NATURAL DISASTER RECOVERY</b>			
THEME 6	<p><b>ADAPT TO CHANGE</b></p> <p>Secure temporary tax and operating permit relief for businesses impacted by recent wildfires. Within the context of developing a tourism focused natural disasters plan, ensure that tourism operators embrace climate change and mitigation measures. Adopt a regional approach to tourism emergency preparedness, response and recovery and agree on visitor communication protocols in affected areas.</p>		

# 4 GEARING UP

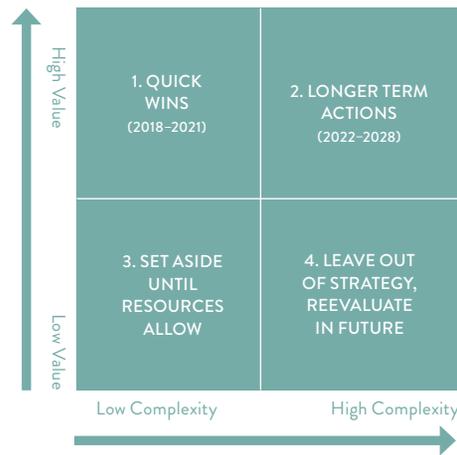
## SUCCESS NETWORKS

This strategy is intended to inform actions for the future, which over time may be embedded in local, regional, and provincial decision making. The result will be an integrated system of priorities to achieve better development decisions, drive greater tourism revenues, and realize benefits for businesses and communities in the Chilcotin Central Coast destination area. All this will contribute to a thriving, vibrant and growing economy.

Joint strategy ownership among all planning area tourism partners is a critical component of this program's success. The strategy identifies a suggested success network of tourism partners to champion and move actions within each objective forward.

## FRAMEWORK

The strategy presents the destination development objectives using a consistent framework to determine the prioritization of each objective and the relative timing for implementation. Objectives with a provincial or regional scope are identified as well and will inform the regional and provincial destination development strategies.



## CATALYST PROJECTS

The following eleven actions were identified as catalyst projects for immediately moving the strategy into implementation.

### Lifelines — Improve Transportation to, from and within the Chilcotin Central Coast

- Continue to work with BC Ferries to develop a schedule that works for tourism and enables the sector to forward plan with confidence.

### One Voice — Lead Strategic Growth Through Continued Collaboration

- In light of its growing recognition, ensure that guidelines for the use of the Great Bear Rainforest trademark are embraced by the sector and all those with an interest in this special place.
- Consider a compensation policy for non-Indigenous private property that may be transferred to Aboriginal Title.

### Exceed Expectations — Diversify and Expand the Visitor Experience

- Encourage BC Parks to increase the number of public bear watching platforms and align their operating season in response to the new ferry service schedule.
- Create more purchasable travel packages for both independent and group travellers along the Circle Tour.
- Identify operators that would benefit from international distribution channel training to increase the pool of visitor experiences.

- Create a no or low-interest fund that businesses could access to upgrade and/or expand their operations.

### Cut the Red Tape — Enable Tourism Business Viability and Success

- Develop a visitor information services plan that acknowledges the lack of modern communication connectivity.
- Establish a framework for collaborative action between CCCTA, the Indigenous Tourism Association of British Columbia, and the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada to leverage long-term destination development opportunities.
- Create a small working group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders to co-educate on the value of collaboration protocols for long-term business success and cross-community tourism development, product development, marketing, and tourism planning.

### Build Resilience — Support Natural Disaster Recovery

- Secure temporary tax relief and operating permit relief (2018-2021) for tourism businesses impacted by the 2017 and 2018 wildfire tragedies.

# LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION?

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You can likely find it in the more detailed Chilcotin Central Coast Destination Development Strategy or you can reach us at:

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FRONT COVER PHOTO: GREAT BEAR RAINFOREST, Stephen Harrington

TWEEDSMUIR PROVINCIAL PARK  
Photo: Taylor Burk