

Township of Oro-Medonte **3-Year Tourism Destination Action Plan**

2022-2025

Acknowledgements

The Township of Oro-Medonte is situated on the traditional land of the Anishnaabek People, and ancestral territory of the Huron-Wendat. The Anishnaabek include the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Pottawatomi Nations, collectively known as the Three Fires Confederacy. The land continues today as the home for diverse Indigenous Peoples including the historic Métis Community in Penetanguishene.

The Anishnaabek People continue to have an enduring relationship with this land, specifically the Chippewas of Rama First Nation, the Chippewa Tri-Council, and the Williams Treaties First Nations. The Huron-Wendat Nation also continues to pay respect and protect their ancestors and heritage on this land. We honour the Indigenous history and culture that has thrived for millennia in this territory and the Treaties that bind us together as partners in the spirit of a shared sustainable and prosperous future. We are all Treaty People. Our commitment begins with acknowledging the Truth so that we can move forward together towards Reconciliation.

The Township of Oro-Medonte's 3-Year Tourism Destination Action Plan is the outcome of a highly participatory research and engagement process that saw a breadth and diversity of stakeholders in the destination share their invaluable insight, input, and feedback. Thank you to all those residents, business owners and operators, as well as existing and potential partners who contributed their time, experiences, and perspectives across the development of this action plan.

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Introduction

The Township of Oro-Medonte's 3-Year Tourism Destination Action Plan (2022-2025) sets the direction for the Township's role as a destination leader and outlines the needed actions to maximize positive tourism impacts. Oro-Medonte is well positioned to leverage tourism as a tool for community benefit. Located in proximity to several large urban centres, Oro-Medonte's rural landscapes, outdoor recreation assets, and a growing array of unique local businesses present a real opportunity for building a strong destination identity through placemaking initiatives and coordinated growth. Outdoor tourism, agritourism, wellness tourism, and events are some key areas of potential.

An important factor informing the need for the Township's tourism action planning efforts has been the COVID-19 pandemic. The impacts the pandemic has had on domestic and international travel, access to and valuing of outdoor spaces, and the importance of local and independent businesses have underscored the importance of destination management approaches that balance economic, environmental, and socio-cultural needs to support strong communities and vibrant destinations.

To seize its tourism growth opportunities, it is key that the Township and its partners continue to work collaboratively and strategically towards the implementation of this action plan. This includes identifying and securing future needed supports and resources, such as the funding, staff, and expertise required to move forward with the tourism growth actions outlined in this plan.

Key Terms

Tourism Destination: A place where people choose to visit. Destinations have defined geographic areas that can vary in size from an entire country to a small town. For this report, the destination of Oro-Medonte refers to the municipal boundaries of the township. That said, it is important to recognize that visitors are often unaware of jurisdictional boundaries and may consider Oro-Medonte as part of a broader destination like Simcoe or the "near north".

Destination Management: The language of destination management marks a shift in a previous focus on marketing by tourism organizations. The United Nations World Tourism Organization points to destination management as a coordinated approach to accounting for and connecting various, and sometimes separate elements, that make up a tourism destination. This is done to avoid duplication of efforts, provide relevant visitor services, and support tourism businesses, among other outcomes.

Destination Steward: The Township of Oro-Medonte has a role to play and related responsibilities to support tourism growth in the destination. As such the Township can act as a destination steward in collaboration with its partners. It can do this by engaging diverse perspectives for tourism growth and balancing the breadth of needs and opportunities that can come from future tourism initiatives that benefit residents, business owners and operators, visitors, and other stakeholders in Oro-Medonte's tourism landscape.



Project Overview

From February to June 2022, the Township of Oro-Medonte worked, with the support of Orillia & Lake Country Tourism and the Oro-Medonte Chamber of Commerce & Tourism, to develop Oro-Medonte's first Tourism Destination Action Plan. Bannikin Travel & Tourism was engaged to facilitate the strategy development process, which included a variety of primary and secondary research activities used to generate insights unique to understanding the state of tourism in Oro-Medonte and its future growth potential. Importantly, the project sought to avoid duplication of efforts and as such was informed by past work and guiding documents including but not limited to the following:

- 2018-2022 Economic Development Strategy (2018, including recent updates)
- 2021-2023 Corporate Strategic Plan (2021)
- Oro-Medonte Tourism Gap Analysis & Policy Recommendations report (2021)
- Wayfinding Strategy (2021)
- Draft Master Plan: State of Parks and Recreation in Oro-Medonte (2022)
- 2021-2025 County of Simcoe Economic Development Strategy (2021)

The research began with a background document review that saw 25 documents selected, reviewed, and summarized from a total of 48 that were compiled. Data pulled from the background documents were then analyzed and organized into a PESTLE format, to get a better understanding of the *political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental* factors affecting tourism in Oro-Medonte and the broader region.

In early March, a presentation was made to the Economic Development Roundtable. Later that month, Bannikin personnel completed an in-market research trip to Oro-Medonte, which was designed to get an appreciation for the visitor experience. In late March and across April, structured interviews were conducted with a breadth and diversity of individuals identified by the project team as having intimate knowledge of or an important perspective on tourism in Oro-Medonte. In total, 16 key informants shared their insight, input, and feedback on tourism in Oro-Medonte now and growing it in the future. At the start of April, a total of 16 current and prospective partner organizations participated in a virtual focus group, where they learned about the project, shared relevant information about each other's work, identified and discussed solutions to real and perceived challenges, and explored ways that they could support tourism through discussions and a guided group survey. Across the month of April residents of and visitor-facing businesses within Oro-Medonte were surveyed via an online questionnaire that attracted a total of 315 residents and 55 industry members to respond. A separate online questionnaire was used to survey Councillors.

Through the research, engagement, and planning work conducted, the Township of Oro-Medonte has the information required to make informed decisions about both its role and responsibilities as a destination steward and the actions needed to maximize the positive impacts of tourism while balancing the needs of the community in the near future. To support this important goal and to guide the resulting action plan, five objectives were set for tourism action planning at the start of the project:

1. To contextualize tourism in Oro-Medonte;
2. To identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges for managing tourism;
3. To engage diverse stakeholders, from business-owners to residents;
4. To understand how visitors experience Oro-Medonte; and
5. To determine the roles of the Township and its partners in tourism management.

Importantly then, this report draws from project outputs and deliverables and focuses on providing an accessible and detailed overview of key research insights, tourism growth opportunities, and recommended actions for the Township of Oro-Medonte to implement over the next three years (2022-2025).

Oro-Medonte's Tourism Landscape

The Context for Tourism

Located beyond the reaches of suburbia, Oro-Medonte offers visitors a breath of fresh air through its fields, forests, and variety of local businesses. An hour drive from a market of 580,000 people and 2 hours from 8.3 million people, it's a gateway to rurality for urbanite visitors and a place of respite for its residents. Since the pandemic, visitor demand for outdoor tourism activities close to home has increased drastically. With its diverse and growing list of tourism offerings, Oro-Medonte is well positioned to leverage this opportunity.

Tourism in Oro-Medonte Today

Tourism is an important part of Oro-Medonte's economy. In fact, employment in tourism has grown 22% between 2016 and 2021, from 711 jobs in 2016 to 868 in 2021, as reported in the *Township of Oro-Medonte Data Report (2021)*. This growth is noteworthy considering that the period includes the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Township has identified tourism as an important economic development opportunity and, as such, included an objective to develop and promote Oro-Medonte as a premier four-season destination in the *2018-2022 Economic Development Strategy*. An action related to this objective was to work with regional tourism partners and industry stakeholders to develop an action plan for tourism development. Both the Township's and the County of Simcoe's economic development strategies list tourism-related initiatives, such as business supports and infrastructure development, as ways to support local economic development.

To stay competitive, destinations rely on a resilient tourism industry. Based on the *EMSI Analyst Dataset (March 2020)* included in the *Township of Oro-Medonte Data Report (2021)* the average wage for tourism workers in Oro-Medonte is approximately \$23,600.00 a year, which is lower than the Ontario average and that of other leading sectors in the area. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism and hospitality businesses across Ontario face staffing challenges related, at least in part, to employees changing sectors. Although this challenge is not unique to Oro-Medonte, the presence of appealing and worthwhile career opportunities will be essential for tourism to be a vibrant contributor to the local economy. At the same time, fostering an enabling environment for business growth needs to be a priority. This means supporting current operators with expanding and/or evolving their businesses as well as attracting new entrepreneurs to the community. To do this the Township of Oro-Medonte will need to strive for balanced growth that simultaneously supports the social and environmental health of Oro-Medonte while furthering economic growth. In practice, this means protecting Oro-Medonte's natural and cultural assets as tourism projects are proposed and pursued. Natural assets are particularly valued by residents, provide important environmental services, and make up an important part of the destination's visitor offering.



As a lower-tier municipality of the County of Simcoe, the tourism landscape of Oro-Medonte is shaped by legislation, policies, and guidelines issued by different levels of government. Land-use policies, in particular, have a big impact on where and how tourism businesses develop. Some guiding land use policies influencing tourism growth, include but are not limited to, the *Township of Oro-Medonte's Official Plan*, the *County of Simcoe Official Plan*, Ontario's *Provincial Policy Statement*, and its *Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Prime Agricultural Areas*. Agritourism is an area of interest for tourism development in Oro-Medonte that comes with special land use considerations related to on-farm diversification and preserving farmland. Ongoing research exploring the expansion of the Greenbelt is also relevant because the study area includes land within the township boundaries, specifically the southern part of the township along the north shore of Lake Simcoe, which is included in the Proposed Bluebelt Expansion Area. Also relevant to the future of tourism are municipal-level conversations around the potential for a Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) and bylaws restricting short-term rentals.

Residents have a strong interest in how tourism is managed in Oro-Medonte, and many residents see potential benefits that tourism can deliver to their community. For example, most residents surveyed as part of the development of this plan agreed that tourism can stimulate the local economy and raise awareness to help protect local assets. At the same time, some resident concerns related to tourism growth include reservations around visitor lake-access on the largely residential waterfront and limiting short-term rentals in Oro-Medonte. The tourism industry is supportive of tourism growth in Oro-Medonte and, at the same time, recognizes current barriers to this, including limited visitor awareness of Oro-Medonte as a destination and limited infrastructure to support visitation, such as, a lack of public transportation services, wayfinding signage, and accommodation options for visitors.

Growing the Visitor Experience

Key visitor profiles identified in the *Oro-Medonte Tourism Gap Analysis & Policy Recommendations* report include families, couples, solo travellers, and New Canadians. Importantly, a recent Oro-Medonte Geofence Project using Environics data shared by RTO7 shows that current visitors coming to the township for outdoor



activities have a median age of 50-54 years. This is about 10 years older than the median age for source populations within a 2-hour drive. 40% of potential visitors from nearby population centres are couples with children at home with an average household income ranging from \$120,000-\$140,000. As such, there is an opportunity to expand communications that appeal to younger markets, particularly families with young children, and to draw in visitors from a broader range of ages. There is also an overarching opportunity to research and better define target markets for Oro-Medonte. These insights could be leveraged to pursue tourism initiatives that respond to visitor needs and to support industry in drafting their communications to reach these markets. Likewise, they can be leveraged by the Township when working with its partners to market the destination.

Importantly, the tourism industry in Oro-Medonte recognizes the value of local markets as consumers of the products and experiences offered by their businesses. Tapping into these markets provides the added benefit of turning residents into ambassadors for local business and the tourism industry more broadly. This is a powerful tool to drive repeat business and provide access to new customers when residents bring their visiting friends and family to local businesses or recommend tourism activities and experiences in the area.

When tourism business owners, operators, and residents are active members of the tourism community, this translates into better visitor experiences in the destination. Through the research that supports this report, it is clear that tourism industry members consider themselves ambassadors for Oro-Medonte. This positive finding is worth leveraging to ensure that business owners and staff are equipped to put this sentiment to use. This means connecting business owners and operators to each other and providing them with the tools they need to celebrate Oro-Medonte as a destination and provide personalized recommendations to visitors about what else to see, do, eat, and drink in the area. At the same time, there is an identified need to increase resident buy-in and ambassadorship for tourism to ensure positive community benefits through tourism.

Throughout the project's research, an opportunity was found to better use digital communications and resources to reach visitors online, which today, is where they tend to look for information. This means, ensuring more effective and consistent visitor-facing online assets to help them plan their trips to Oro-Medonte with the digital channels of local organizations and businesses. For example, work can be done to build up the online presence of local businesses through Google or other platform listings. Currently, Google searches related to visiting Oro-Medonte feature few listings for restaurants, attractions, or accommodations in the destination, and several listed businesses do not provide up-to-date information online. There are similar challenges when it comes to some of the online resources shared by tourism organizations about the destination. There is an opportunity to improve and increase representation of Oro-Medonte's tourism assets in partner organization's resources such as maps, sample itineraries, and tourism suggestions targeting specific visitor demographics. Working with tourism partners to facilitate the visitor journey through digital capacity-building for industry and ensuring that local tourism websites showcase the diversity of activities and businesses in the area will make trip planning easier for visitors and can support visitor participation in more tourism activities and longer stays in the area.

Oro-Medonte is home to several anchor businesses that help to establish the region as a four-season tourism destination, including ski resorts, craft breweries, year-round on-farm experiences, wellness activities, and multi-use trails. The region also attracts visitors through its large- and small-scale festivals and events. Although there are no true urban centres in Oro-Medonte, Craighurst has several businesses that offer dining and shopping options for residents and visitors. As the concentration of visitor assets (incl. restaurants, shops, public art, etc.) grows and strategic storytelling expands, so too will opportunities for placemaking within the destination.

In fact, placemaking is an important area of opportunity for Oro-Medonte. Limited signage and branding means that visitors to the area may not realize they are in Oro-Medonte, particularly if they are unaware of or simply passing through the area. Setting up prominent signage along entry points to the region is essential and is identified as a priority in the Township's Wayfinding Strategy. Similarly, ensuring tourism information is readily available at the Township office, major attractions, and small businesses can also support placemaking and destination development, by reminding visitors of where they are and offering relevant information about tourism in the township at local business locations. Beyond placemaking, the 2021 *Tourism Product Gap Analysis & Policy Recommendations* pointed out two other opportunities that can improve the visitor experience in the destination: the enhancement of outdoor area access points and the activation of parks. Considering that some of the major visitor draws to Oro-Medonte are its outdoor assets, from the forest trails to the waterfront, moving forward with these recommendations is important to facilitating resident and visitor access and continued enjoyment of the diverse outdoor spaces and parks in the destination.



Supporting Destination Management

The Township of Oro-Medonte is committed to tourism as an opportunity for the community, as confirmed by the *2018-2022 Economic Development Strategy*. Investing in infrastructure that supports enhanced access to and increases the number of parks in the destination, which also supports tourism growth, are goals of the Township's *Draft Parks & Recreation Master Plan*. Relatedly, the Township's *2021 Wayfinding Strategy* recognizes a need to ensure that visitors and residents can navigate successfully to and around Oro-Medonte, including discovering the natural assets and resources.



Currently, responsibility for certain tourism management and marketing activities for Oro-Medonte as a destination overlaps between several partner organizations, including the Township of Oro-Medonte, Orillia & Lake Country Tourism, the Oro-Medonte Chamber of Commerce & Tourism, Tourism Barrie, Tourism Simcoe County, and Regional Tourism Organization 7 (BruceGreySimcoe). However, existing and ongoing collaborations between these different organizations is also a big strength for the destination. Looking forward, these partners will need to continue working together to build up Oro-Medonte as a destination while avoiding duplication of efforts and clarifying how they are working towards their tourism growth goals.

Noting that the Township and partners have already been working together to clarify their roles and responsibilities related to tourism, there remains a perception among many stakeholders that there are too many organizations involved in the management and marketing of tourism in the destination. This challenge is also noted by Tourism Simcoe County in their *2019 Experience Simcoe County* report, where the number and variety of organizations in the area with tourism mandates is illustrated. Confirming tourism roles across organizations will be important to ensuring efficient and effective use of tourism resources long-term. It is also worth noting that, the County of Simcoe recently embarked on a strategy development project for Tourism Simcoe County. This presents a further opportunity for the Township to continue working with partners to inform and influence the strategic directions for tourism in Oro-Medonte and the surrounding area.



The Township of Oro-Medonte recognizes the importance of collaborating with partners, including regional and provincial organizations, to grow tourism in the region and find synergies and commonalities. For example, on top of the existing collaborations noted above, the Township of Oro-Medonte also connects and collaborates with tourism partners in surrounding municipalities such as the cities of Barrie and Orillia, and other surrounding rural municipalities for tourism growth in the broader region. Fortunately, the majority of partner organizations engaged in the research process for the action plan expressed a strong interest in participating and contributing to growing tourism in Oro-Medonte. At the same time, it is important to have a lead organization to represent the municipality and its stakeholders.

The Township, specifically its Economic Development Division, is well positioned to take on a leading role in setting priorities and developing strategies in alignment with partners. As the Township and partners move forward with collaboratively developing tourism in Oro-Medonte, they will also need to stay attuned to business needs by engaging consistently with industry, since business owners are the ones actively responding to the changing demands of visitors and they understand their customers' needs firsthand.

Oro-Medonte's established and growing tourism industry, the Township's collaborative relationships with tourism partners, and the dual potential of growing local support for tourism while also reaching nearby markets are only a small portion of the factors informing the township's tourism growth opportunities. The next section of this report expands on the opportunities for the Township of Oro-Medonte to lead and collaborate with residents, industry, partners, and surrounding destinations for the future of tourism in Oro-Medonte.



The Future of Tourism in Oro-Medonte

Recognizing Potential: Areas of Opportunity

For tourism to develop, grow, and thrive in any destination, it requires the interest, willingness, and ability of tourism stakeholders to come together and collectively determine the ways in which they will seek to attract and service the demands of visitors to their home. In the case of Oro-Medonte, there is a wide range and diversity of voices who have an interest in the future of tourism. These include residents, business owners and operators, volunteer organizations, among others who are important collaborators in realizing the balanced future the Township looks to achieve through its tourism-related economic development activities. Consequently, moving towards targeted tourism development for the destination needs a variety of dedicated approaches to engage these diverse stakeholders in informing, supporting, and growing tourism in Oro-Medonte.

By its very nature tourism intersects multiple industries, touches on a wide array of stakeholder interests, and can deliver a range of impacts to a destination. Importantly then, through future tourism-focussed innovations there are also opportunities to grow in ways that bring social and environmental benefits for the destination. Identifying environmentally friendly transportation solutions that serve both resident and visitor mobility needs is but one example of how tourism related actions can, and should, have more than economic production as the outcome. To grow in an intentional, informed, and balanced way, it is important that the Township continue its collaborative approach to tourism. This can involve strengthening internal communications about tourism among the Townships' departments, expanding two-way communications with industry about the state of tourism in the destination, listening to residents and fostering constructive conversations about the role of tourism in Oro-Medonte, aligning tourism growth efforts with partners and neighbouring destinations, and formalizing partnerships and relationships with other organizations working towards shared objectives.

Addressing and building up current perceptions of tourism as a sector that benefits the Township, and its stakeholders is an initial area of opportunity. Existing stakeholder concerns and considerations associated with developing Oro-Medonte as a tourism destination focus on a lack of local access to tourism assets, primarily the waterfront, and concerns over the negative impacts on some residents' quality of life that short-term rentals can bring. As such, continuing to learn from and communicate with stakeholders about the perceptions of tourism, values, and experiences is an important area of work. By doing so, the Township can steer tourism growth so that it reflects what stakeholders value while building the case for the type of responsible tourism the destination seeks. For instance, resident perceptions when asked what is good about attracting visitors to Oro-Medonte focussed on the role tourism can play in stimulating the local economy, the potential that tourism holds to raise awareness of and protect local environmental assets, and the opportunity to share their place with others. Learning about the challenges while tapping into and growing positive sentiment towards tourism, can create a destination image, accompanying narratives, and a future reputation that are both a genuine reflection of what residents value and reflective of the visitor experience when in the destination.



Previous research and existing plans already present key areas of opportunity for tourism growth. Particularly when it comes to the infrastructural needs of the destination. For instance, the recent *Wayfinding Strategy* contains several recommendations whose implementation would lead to noticeable changes for tourism in Oro-Medonte such as improved signage upon entering the township. Meanwhile the *Oro-Medonte Tourism Gap Analysis & Policy Recommendations* report already points to a need for increased accommodation options for the destination. Current needs related to tourism supports in Oro-Medonte vary amongst stakeholders. For example, industry survey responses when asked about the most helpful resources that the Township or its tourism partners could provide to address their immediate business needs resulting from COVID-19, focussed on marketing and promotion of their business, access to funding opportunities for business improvements, and marketing and promotion of Oro-Medonte as a destination. Meanwhile, partners consulted in the partners' focus group highlighted existing needs for workforce and talent being felt by the tourism industry, affordable housing to support the workforce, and public transportation initiatives. Although these are all important needs, it is crucial for the Township, along with its partners, to clearly identify what falls within whose areas of capacity and responsibility, to then work efficiently and collaboratively to address these tourism needs. Equally important is clearly communicating with stakeholders the roles and areas of responsibilities for each tourism organization in the area, so that they in turn can seek guidance, support, and collaboration opportunities from the appropriate tourism organization.

Due to its location and connectivity, tourism in Oro-Medonte will continue to be pursued by a diversity of visitors from the region and further afield. This will be particularly true as pandemic restrictions and lockdowns end and the domestic market adjusts to the reopening of international borders. To meet visitor expectations, while also supporting local access to tourism assets, the Township of Oro-Medonte has an opportunity to identify where and how to encourage responsible visitation around the destination. This can include diverting visitors from key areas of demand that do not have the infrastructure to support them or encouraging industry to diversify their tourism offerings to provide more and new types of activities for visitors and residents. As such, there is an exciting opportunity to support industry members in connecting with each other and collaborating towards a wider array of tourism products and experiences. From the many hiking and biking trails to the variety of produce stands across the destination, or the potential cultural and historic assets to be activated for tourism, there is room to grow the number and types of assets that make up tourism in Oro-Medonte.



The above overview of tourism-related management and growth opportunities informs the future direction for tourism and holds direct connections to the Township of Oro-Medonte's role in tourism management. To narrow in on the opportunities uncovered and strategically plan for how to implement the recommended actions, the project team consisting of representatives from the Township, its tourism partners Orillia & Lake Country Tourism and the Oro-Medonte Chamber of Commerce, with the support of the Bannikin team that facilitated the project, have identified four areas of action to pursue over the following three years (2022-2025):

1. Building the Case for Tourism Growth and Management
2. Increasing Knowledge and Understanding
3. Encouraging Product Development and Growth
4. Supporting Infrastructural Development and Communication

How the Township will focus its efforts along these four areas and collaborate with industry and partners towards seeing tourism in Oro-Medonte grow into 2025 is outlined in the section that follows.

Seizing the Opportunities: Action Plan

The section below outlines the action areas, corresponding actions, and anticipated outcomes identified through the analysis of the project’s research and engagement activities. It’s important to acknowledge that the implementation of the below actions, and any future tourism growth success, is dependent on the scoping and securing of the needed additional resources and supports. To move forward with this action plan, the Township and its tourism partners will need to collaborate to both find synergies in their activities in support of this action plan, as well as identify, advocate for, and secure the needed funds, staff, expertise, and additional capacity to bring these actions to life.

Building the Case for Tourism Growth and Management

Destination development requires the interest, willingness, and abilities of individuals and organizations that stand most to benefit from tourism to be leveraged through collaboration. In addition to avoiding duplication of efforts, such an approach can play to individual strengths and capacities to create something that is bigger than anyone can achieve by themselves, a destination. At the same time, it is of utmost importance that all tourism stakeholders be made aware of news, developments, and opportunities to participate, especially those who may be negatively impacted by tourism activities.

Over the next few years, the Township will work to build the case for tourism growth and the shared management of the destination. To start, the Township will establish a tourism working group or subcommittee of the Economic Development Roundtable to advise the implementation of this tourism destination action plan and inform decision-making around future tourism work. This effort will be complemented by the formalization of the Township’s working relationship with key tourism organizations, specifically Orillia & Lake Country Tourism and Oro-Medonte Chamber of Commerce & Tourism, by formally establishing “Team Oro-Medonte”. Formalizing a working relationship can take several forms, from striking a Memorandum of Understanding amongst the key organizations to developing more detailed terms of reference for how the organizations will work together. This formalization needs to be considered and agreed upon in a way that makes the most sense for the organizations that would be establishing “Team Oro-Medonte”. Through regular and ongoing liaison, such as monthly meetings, “Team Oro-Medonte” will further collaborate and minimize duplication to take on and champion tourism challenges and initiatives.

Towards mobilizing a critical mass of key stakeholders across Oro-Medonte, the Township will design, develop, and deliver a tourism awareness and ambassador program that targets industry and residents. To celebrate the positive impacts that tourism has in Oro-Medonte, the Township will facilitate the identification and sharing of good news stories, shedding light on tourism assets and benefits as part of the process, with tourism partners assisting in sharing these stories.

Through the Township’s planned activities around building the case for tourism growth and management, the following outcomes will be achieved:

- Efficient and effective implementation of the tourism destination action plan
- Stronger working relationships with tourism partner organizations
- Increased capacity amongst industry and residents to champion tourism
- Increased awareness of the good that tourism has and can bring to Oro-Medonte



Increasing Knowledge and Understanding

When it comes to destination development and management, the gathering and sharing of tourism-related data and insights is an invaluable exercise. For example, when market research is made available to tourism businesses, they can make informed decisions around investing in the development of new products and services or adapting existing ones to meet changing demands. However, tourism data can be challenging to access and interpret. It also needs to flow in both directions for tourism to develop from the bottom up, with all destination stakeholders in mind. Any effort to collect, compile, analyze, and share market intelligence with the tourism community while collecting feedback from it, is a step in the right direction. Where there is a need for insight into specific challenges, the Township will commission or conduct research into solutions.



Over the next few years, the Township will work to increase knowledge and understanding about tourism in the destination. The Township will work to enhance its cross-departmental communications of news, information, and updates that may influence or impact tourism and tourism development. To better understand current and prospective visitor markets, the Township will work with industry and partners to collect, analyze, and share data about visitors to Oro-Medonte. It is recommended that the Township create and distribute tourism infographics that will assist industry and partners in making strategic decisions. Where there is a need for specific information about challenges faced by tourism stakeholders and solutions

to overcome these, the Township will conduct or commission new research. For example, there is a need to increase visitor access to Oro-Medonte tourism assets and experiences as well as secure the needed workforce to support these, so the Township will conduct research into viable transportation options and tourism workforce supports, which could include investigating solutions created by similar destinations that have overcome these challenges.

As part of the Township's efforts to gather and package relevant data and insights for tourism stakeholders, it will perform a bi-annual industry temperature check. This can take the shape of a survey of tourism operators, which could use both in-person and online methods of collecting feedback, this will assist the Township to understand and stay on top of industry pains and priorities as well as news, needs, and successes. Working with partners, the Township can support industry networking and learning opportunities, which could include bringing industry together, facilitating connections, and sharing information and resources.

Through the Township's planned activities to increase knowledge and understanding about tourism in the destination, the following outcomes will be achieved:

- Increased cross-departmental communication of tourism-related news, information, and updates
- New and relevant data on visitor markets for Oro-Medonte
- Increased industry and partner access to tourism-related data
- Insight into innovations and solutions to tourism-related challenges
- Increased knowledge and understanding of industry needs and priorities
- Better connected and supported tourism industry

Encouraging Product Development and Growth

A destination's unique selling proposition highlights its points of differentiation from other destinations, including those comparable and nearby. Anything that can be combined, marketed, and sold to visitors, whether tangible or intangible, from attractions and accommodations to recreational and cultural experiences, make up the tourism product. Not surprisingly, product development is an important part of destination development, marketing, and management. Where there is history, heritage, and culture within a destination that do not yet play a significant role in the visitor experience, there is untapped potential to create a more meaningful connection between visitors and place.

Before a visitor even arrives in a destination, their customer journey begins; therefore, it is important that destination stakeholders come together to determine who, what, where, when, why, and how to market the destination. This will not only assist with attracting more visitors but also targeting the visitor segments that match the product that is on offer, leading to a better visitor experience and ideally, longer stays and increased spending.

Over the next few years, the Township will work to encourage product development and growth.

Individual businesses are showcasing the history, heritage, and culture of Oro-Medonte but information about and access to these assets is limited. The Township is going to support community-based opportunities to activate arts, cultural, and heritage assets, beginning by creating a database of these assets along with the community groups who have the potential to collaborate. The Township will continue working with industry and partners to create tourism packages and itineraries for Oro-Medonte that respond to market demand and match the visitor segments the destination is trying to attract. Moving away from a customer-server dynamic and towards a host-guest dynamic in the destination, these packages and itineraries will be complemented by the development of responsible visitation guidelines and related communications. These will be co-designed with tourism stakeholders, including residents and businesses, to ensure that visitors are welcomed to and respectful of their home, Oro-Medonte. In support of growing the tourism sector and visitor offerings, the Township will create a prospectus for potential investors in Oro-Medonte as a destination, this will be informed by insights derived from previous studies, including the *Oro-Medonte Tourism Gap Analysis & Policy Recommendations*. This work will benefit from the increased cross-departmental communications around tourism and tourism development.

Through the Township's planned activities to encourage product development and growth, the following outcomes will be achieved:

- Increased number of arts, cultural, and heritage assets being activated through tourism
- Increased number of opportunities for visitors to experience and stay longer in Oro-Medonte
- Increased visitor appreciation and respect for Oro-Medonte
- Increased investment in tourism and tourism-related businesses
- Increased opportunities for residents to encourage the Visiting Friends & Relatives (VFR) market and sharing their destination



Supporting Infrastructural Development and Communication

Growing tourism in any destination needs to be paired with planning for and supporting the implementation of needed and relevant infrastructure. Infrastructure in this case can be understood as both the physical innovations added to or enhanced within a destination, as well as the non-physical relationships and communication structures in place to support the physical participation in tourism activities. Importantly, tourism infrastructure does not have to, nor should it, exist separate from local needs and realities. The expression “a good place to live is a good place to visit” holds true when considering how services and development projects related to tourism should also benefit local stakeholders and vice versa. Aspects such as wayfinding infrastructure can support navigating around a destination for residents as much as for visitors, and wayfinding also has a role to play in building and communicating the feeling of being in a particular destination, being part of its sense of place, with its own character and identity markers. Importantly, as much as the physical realities of destination need attention and innovation so too do the relationships and communications that move information back and forth across the diversity of a destination’s stakeholders, from the promotions that visitors receive about the destination’s products to the understandings in place among industry members about who is involved in tourism and the role that they play. In short, all tourism stakeholders from residents to DMOs have a role to play in identifying, calling for and collaboratively realizing the infrastructure needed to make a place a good place to live and welcoming to visit.

Over the next few years, the Township will work to support infrastructural developments and communications. Oro-Medonte is showcased as a destination across a variety of channels linked to partner tourism organizations, such as the Orillia & Lake Country Guide and Chamber of Commerce and Tourism’s visitor map to name a few. However, the variety of tourism assets and range of visitor-facing businesses are not adequately or consistently represented and communicated across different visitor-facing resources. Several actions will work to address this. The Township will proceed with the implementation of the wayfinding strategy, prioritizing gateway signage and tourism-related assets in municipal/community services signage to build up the physical markers of the destination and its tourism assets. As the resources to implement the wayfinding strategy are sourced and secured, the Township will proceed with identifying the realities of access to the lake and its supporting infrastructure by working with partners to clearly communicate these and ensure that visitors are aware of where and where not to access the waterfront year-round (i.e., beaches, boating, fishing).

Once “Team Oro-Medonte” has been formalized, the collaborating organizations, being the Chamber of Commerce and Orillia & Lake Country Tourism, will work together with the support of other partners, to evolve, finalize, and distribute a formalized organizational role & responsibilities information sheet. This sheet will support the need to clarify with stakeholders, and industry in particular, the roles and responsibilities of the Township and its partners working in tourism in Oro-Medonte and the broader region. In line with its collaborative approach, Team Oro-Medonte will also collaborate to develop guidelines that inform marketing Oro-Medonte as a destination, including choice messages such as access and lack of access to the waterfront from Oro-Medonte, and share these with industry and partner organizations to directly inform the narratives showcased and messages shared about the destination. Drawing from this, the Township will work directly with specific partners to support and ensure that a variety of tourism assets are being showcased, and consistent messages about the destination are communicated to visitors through their resources. To further support shared understandings and narratives of tourism in Oro-Medonte, the Township will create a resource that illustrates the various ways that businesses can support tourism and its growth in Oro-Medonte. The tool will point to good practices for collaboration and destination building, including how to work with the Township, as well as key messages industry can leverage when celebrating themselves, their neighbours, and the destination.

Through the Township’s planned activities to support infrastructural developments and communications, the following outcomes will be achieved:

- Increased visibility and accurate representation of Oro-Medonte as a tourism destination
- Increased appreciation and support for the Township's role and responsibilities in tourism
- Better understanding among industry about their role in supporting tourism growth and the destination
- Improved understanding of tourism messages and priorities among industry and partners

Action Plan Framework

The following table illustrates the recommended action areas for tourism growth in Oro-Medonte, each corresponding action, and the anticipated outcomes are elaborated in the previous section.

Action Area 1: Building the case for tourism growth and management	
Actions	Anticipated Outcomes
1. Formalize working relationship with key tourism organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formalized collaboration amongst key tourism organizations Healthy working relationship, with regular/ongoing communications, among key tourism organizations
2. Establish a Tourism Working Group/Subcommittee of Economic Development Roundtable to advise implementation of the tourism destination action plan and inform future tourism work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational tourism working group/subcommittee of Economic Development Roundtable that meets quarterly
3. Design, develop, and deliver a tourism awareness and ambassador program that targets both industry and residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased awareness and support for tourism in Oro-Medonte
4. Facilitate identification and sharing of good news stories about tourism assets & benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased awareness and support for tourism in Oro-Medonte
Action Area 2: Increasing knowledge and understanding about tourism	
Actions	Anticipated Outcomes
5. Collect, analyze, and share data about visitors to Oro-Medonte through industry and partner support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New and relevant data on visitor markets for Oro-Medonte Increased understanding of visitor markets for Oro-Medonte
6. Enhance communications with other Township departments to identify and share tourism information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased cross-departmental communication of tourism-related news, information, and updates Increased communications about tourism-related issues with other departments (e.g., resident perceptions)
7. Perform bi-annual industry temperature check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased knowledge and understanding of industry needs and priorities Improved communications with tourism industry
8. Create infographics about tourism in Oro-Medonte	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased industry and partner access to tourism-related data Increased access to tourism-related information amongst key stakeholders
9. Conduct research to identify viable tourism transportation solutions for Oro-Medonte	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insight into innovations and solutions to tourism-related challenges Awareness of opportunities to innovate Increased appreciation and support for the Township's role and responsibilities in tourism

10. Work with partners to support industry networking and learning opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better connected and supported tourism industry • Increased number of opportunities to share and inform tourism development opportunities
Action Area 3: Encouraging product development and growth	
Actions	Anticipated Outcomes
11. Create a prospectus for potential investors in Oro-Medonte as a tourism destination, based on existing tourism needs/gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased investment opportunities in tourism and tourism-related businesses
12. Support community-based opportunities to activate arts, cultural and heritage assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of arts, cultural, and heritage assets are being activated through tourism
13. Work with industry and partners to create packages and itineraries, respectively, for Oro-Medonte	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of opportunities for visitors to experience and stay longer in Oro-Medonte • Increased visibility for Oro-Medonte as a tourism destination
14. Develop responsible visitation guidelines and related communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased visitor appreciation and respect for Oro-Medonte • Increased understanding of welcomed and unwelcomed behaviour/activities connected to tourism
Action Area 4: Supporting infrastructural developments and communications	
Actions	Anticipated Outcomes
15. Ensure that Oro-Medonte and its tourism assets are adequately represented in partners' visitor-facing resources (e.g., visitor-facing websites)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased visibility for Oro-Medonte as a tourism destination • Increased number and types of tourism businesses, activities, events, and experiences being showcased
16. Create a resource for businesses to support tourism and its growth in Oro-Medonte	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased knowledge and understanding for business roles in supporting tourism growth and the destination
17. Implement Township Wayfinding Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased visibility for Oro-Medonte as a tourism destination (i.e., sense of place)
18. Identify and clearly communicate lake access, including beaches, and supporting infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved local and visitor understanding of public access and supporting infrastructure to lake shore
19. Work with Team Oro-Medonte to develop guidelines to inform destination marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved understanding of Oro-Medonte's tourism messages and priorities among industry and partners
20. Work with partners and Team Oro-Medonte to evolve, finalize and distribute an organizational role & responsibilities information sheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased appreciation and support for the Township's role and responsibilities in tourism

The Way Forward: Collaboration

It's no coincidence that this Action Plan refers to the importance of collaboration with the Township's tourism partners as much as it does. A key point of action for tourism in Oro-Medonte, as the Township moves towards implementing its Tourism Destination Action Plan, is the value and importance of existing and future collaborative relationships. The Township has several tourism-focused relationships in place, and the openness and willingness of the Township and its partners is a huge strength in support of the future of the destination. Just as important, is the exciting potential to formalize and grow existing partnerships while also establishing new ones.

Although this action plan outlines the recommended actions for the Township to lead and manage tourism development in the destination, there is an essential part for industry members to play. Industry has a unique and important role in informing the implementation of actions by contributing their experiences and visions for the destination and supporting the destination by championing each other. Residents too have a key role as hosts in the destination. The appreciation and passion that Oro-Medonte residents have for their home was shared clearly and consistently across the development of this action plan and there is an opportunity to collaborate toward shaping a destination where residents' values are reflected and inform the tourism offerings.

The actions provide opportunities for the destination. More specifically they outline how the Township can act on identified needs and opportunities to take a leading role in managing the destination using this report as a tool for defining the next steps. Moving forward, Township staff along with tourism partners can work towards defining an implementation plan. Importantly, for the Township to move forward with the planned implementation of its tourism destination action plan, it will need to secure the needed resources to make the recommended actions realities. This means that the Township may need to look for and secure additional resources such as funding for projects, staff, and additional expertise to take on certain actions, along with continued partner support.

Finally, the Township's commitment to growing tourism in a strategic and inclusive way informs the momentum to take the actions in this plan from words on paper to reality over the coming three years. By continuing to work in partnership to secure needed resources and encourage collaboration among its stakeholders, the Township stands to co-create an image and experience of Oro-Medonte as a destination known for its outdoor assets that are attracting visitors and residents across all four seasons, recognized for its established visitor-facing businesses, and celebrated for the variety of agritourism offers and cultural initiatives active in the destination.

