Municipality of Kincardine

Tourism Strategy – Indigenous Engagement Summary Report

October 2026 | Tourism Strategy Development

Summary

The Municipality of Kincardine is developing a Tourism Strategy to establish a long-term vision for sustainable tourism growth, strengthen destination experiences and balance economic opportunities with community well-being.

The Municipality is located on Treaty 45½, within the traditional lands and treaty territory of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation.

Indigenous engagement is an important component of the strategy development process and the Municipality's ongoing journey of truth, healing and reconciliation with the Saugeen Ojibway Nation (SON), comprising Saugeen First Nation and the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation.

Several discussions were held in October that emphasized that Indigenous history, culture and connections to the land and water are an important part of the Municipality of Kincardine's identity and should be meaningfully reflected in the Tourism Strategy. Participants encouraged the Municipality to move beyond territorial acknowledgement toward practical collaboration, shared storytelling, Indigenous-led tourism experiences, environmental stewardship and stronger economic partnerships.

It was also noted that there is a broader municipal responsibility which should extend beyond tourism promotion and economic development to include how the Municipality serves and engages Indigenous residents.

Several opportunities emerged, including Indigenous-informed signage and public art, cross-promotion of tourism attractions, participation in existing community events, regional tourism experiences and greater recognition of Indigenous history and contemporary culture.

A particularly promising opportunity was the development of a regional maple syrup trail or event that could connect Indigenous and non-Indigenous tourism operators while supporting shoulder-season visitation.

The discussions also reinforced the importance of responsible tourism. Not all cultural or natural sites are appropriate for public promotion, and tourism growth must respect Indigenous governance, cultural knowledge, environmental sensitivity and community capacity.

For the Tourism Strategy, the connection is that strong Indigenous tourism partnerships are built on genuine relationships that extend beyond tourism itself. Recognizing Indigenous residents and their needs helps demonstrate that the Municipality values Indigenous communities not only as tourism partners, but as an important part of the community.

Overall, the engagement provided a foundation for continued relationship-building and identified potential actions that could inform a more inclusive, sustainable and collaborative Tourism Strategy.

Key Themes of What We Heard

The discussions focused on understanding Indigenous perspectives on tourism development, identifying opportunities for partnerships and ensuring that Indigenous communities have a meaningful role in shaping how their history, culture and tourism experiences are represented.

- **Indigenous History, Culture and Representation**

Participants emphasized that Indigenous history and the continued presence of Indigenous peoples need to be visible throughout the Municipality of Kincardine.

While the community is strongly associated with its Scottish heritage, there is an opportunity to broaden destination storytelling to recognize the area's Indigenous history, treaty relationships, language and contemporary communities.

Indigenous peoples maintain active connections to ancestral lands through ceremonies, gathering medicines, cultural practices and the protection of significant places.

Tourism interpretation should recognize these as living relationships rather than presenting Indigenous culture solely as part of the past.

- **Indigenous Participation and Relationship-Building**

A consistent message was the importance of ongoing involvement from Saugeen First Nation and the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation in tourism planning and implementation.

Participants supported continued engagement through working groups, strategy review, collaborative initiatives and direct relationships with Indigenous artists, entrepreneurs, tourism operators and knowledge holders.

The Saugeen Ojibway Nation Environment Office identified opportunities to help facilitate connections and provide feedback, subject to capacity and organizational processes.

- **Indigenous Tourism Experiences and Economic Partnerships**

Participants identified opportunities to strengthen connections between the Municipality of Kincardine's tourism economy and Indigenous-owned businesses, attractions, artists and tourism operators.

Ideas included cross-promotion of attractions, reciprocal marketing, participation in festivals and events, and Indigenous-led cultural experiences such as guided walks and storytelling.

Partnerships should be mutually beneficial and encourage visitors to explore Indigenous tourism experiences within First Nations communities, where visitation is welcomed and appropriate.

- **Cultural Recognition, Signage and Public Art**

Participants discussed opportunities to increase Indigenous visibility through community entrance signage, bilingual wayfinding, interpretive displays, Indigenous public art and gathering spaces.

Potential opportunities included interpretation near the Every Child Matters crosswalk and recognition of Indigenous history along trails and at visitor destinations.

Culturally significant landmarks, including trail trees, were also discussed as possible educational opportunities. Any interpretation would require validation by Indigenous knowledge holders and appropriate protection of sensitive sites.

- **Environmental Sustainability and Water Stewardship**

Lake Huron and the surrounding natural environment were central to the discussions.

Participants emphasized the cultural and spiritual significance of water, the importance of protecting native species and the need to balance tourism development with environmental capacity.

Potential educational opportunities included native fish species such as lake sturgeon, fisheries management, water walks, shoreline protection and wildlife conservation.

The piping plover was identified as a possible symbol to help communicate the importance of ecological resilience and responsible tourism.

- **Four-Season Tourism Development**

Participants identified opportunities to create tourism experiences beyond the summer season through regional partnerships.

Ideas included a maple syrup trail, spring and winter cultural experiences, Indigenous-led nature walks and environmental education.

A regional maple syrup initiative generated particular interest as a potentially achievable partnership connecting producers, tourism operators and communities across the region.

Respectful Visitation and Protection of Cultural Heritage

Participants emphasized that tourism growth must respect Indigenous governance, culturally significant locations and the capacity of natural environments.

First Nations lands should not be treated as unrestricted public tourism spaces, and visitors should be directed toward appropriate, sanctioned experiences.

Sensitive cultural information, historical artifacts and significant sites require careful protection, with Indigenous communities guiding decisions about what information should be shared.

Potential Opportunities for the Tourism Strategy

The following table consolidates the key themes identified through the engagement discussions and potential opportunities for consideration in the Tourism Strategy.

Theme	What we heard	Opportunity for the Tourism Strategy
Indigenous History and Representation	Indigenous history, treaty relationships and the continued presence of Indigenous peoples should be more visible in Kincardine's tourism identity.	Incorporate Indigenous history, contemporary culture and treaty relationships into destination storytelling and visitor information, with Indigenous guidance.

Theme	What we heard	Opportunity for the Tourism Strategy
Indigenous residents in the Municipality of Kincardine	Recognition of the Indigenous population living in Kincardine and the need to consider access to culturally appropriate local services and supports from the Municipality – not just specific to tourism. Engage or hire local Indigenous individuals who bring cultural knowledge, community connections and lived experience.	Strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities through tourism collaboration while connecting broader feedback about Indigenous representation, community inclusion and access to culturally appropriate services to the Municipality's Journey to Reconciliation and other municipal initiatives.
Building Relationships, Trust and Collaboration	Strong interest in developing genuine, reciprocal relationships between Indigenous communities and municipal staff. Personal connections, regular communication, community participation and building a shared understanding of each other's priorities is essential to fostering meaningful relationships and effective collaboration.	Have meaningful opportunities to participate in tourism planning and implementation. Establish ongoing relationships with SFN and the Chippewas of Nawash through regular dialogue, collaborative planning and participation in community activities. Explore continued engagement in tourism, economic development and other shared interests.
Indigenous Cultural Experiences	Indigenous knowledge holders, historians, artists and guides may be interested in sharing cultural experiences and stories.	Explore Indigenous-led storytelling, guided experiences and cultural programming where communities wish to participate.
Signage, Language and Public Art	Indigenous culture and language could be more visible through signage, public spaces and cultural interpretation.	Explore Indigenous-informed entrance signage, bilingual wayfinding, public art and interpretive displays.
Cultural Heritage Protection	Significant historical sites, trail trees, artifacts and cultural knowledge require respectful interpretation and protection.	Work with Indigenous knowledge holders to identify appropriate interpretation opportunities while protecting sensitive locations and information.
Tourism Partnerships and Cross-Promotion	Greater collaboration could benefit tourism operators, businesses and attractions across Kincardine, Saugeen and Nawash.	Develop reciprocal marketing partnerships, share visitor information and promote appropriate regional tourism experiences.
Indigenous Business and	There are opportunities to strengthen connections with Indigenous	Build relationships with Indigenous businesses and encourage participation

Theme	What we heard	Opportunity for the Tourism Strategy
Artist Participation	entrepreneurs, performers, artists and vendors.	in existing events, festivals and tourism initiatives.
Four-Season Tourism	Maple syrup experiences, nature walks and seasonal cultural activities could attract visitors outside the summer season.	Explore collaborative shoulder-season experiences, including a regional maple syrup trail or event.
Environmental Stewardship	Tourism must protect Lake Huron, wildlife, culturally significant areas and natural resources.	Incorporate responsible tourism, water stewardship and environmental education into tourism programming and destination messaging.
Indigenous Participation in Events	Existing festivals and community events provide opportunities to increase Indigenous representation and cultural understanding.	Work with event organizers and Indigenous partners to explore appropriate programming, artist participation and cultural interpretation.
Respectful Visitation and Visitor Management	Increased visitation must respect First Nations governance, cultural practices and environmental capacity.	Promote appropriate visitor behaviour, sanctioned tourism experiences and protection of sensitive areas.
Tourism Data and Performance Measurement	Participants expressed interest in how tourism success will be measured and how information could be shared between communities.	Explore shared approaches to tourism data, performance measures and information-sharing that respect Indigenous data governance.