Community Tourism Foundations® Program

SALT SPRING ISLAND
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT PLAN
2010-2013

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Tourism BC Representative:
Laura Plant
(604) 660-3754
Laura.Plant@tourismbc.com

Tourism BC/Tourism Vancouver Island Representative:
Merv Jefferies
(250) 740-1221
Merv@Tourismvi.ca

Facilitator:
Jennifer Houiellebecq
Tourism Planning Group
(250) 764-3005
jhouiellebecq@tourismplanninggroup.com
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1. Introduction and Purpose of Plan

The development of the Tourism Plan for Salt Spring Island was facilitated through Tourism British Columbia’s Community Tourism Foundations® program. The process was based on a series of community workshops and interviews with key stakeholders. All background material to the Plan relating to market trends and the current status of the tourism industry on Salt Spring Island has been presented in the Situation Analysis report and provides the context for the Tourism Plan.

Salt Spring Island is the largest island within the Southern Gulf Islands archipelago. It is 180 square kilometres and has a population of over 9,600. The Island is well connected to the Mainland, Vancouver Island and the other Southern Gulf Islands through regular ferry and air service. The Island’s ‘personality’ and visitor experience is strongly shaped by its agricultural industry, its wooded interior, its marine context, and its widely renowned arts sector.

Tourism is a key sector of the Salt Spring Island economy and significant effort has gone toward discussing how to promote and develop the island without compromising its environment or the quality of life of its local residents. The need to develop balanced goals and objectives that recognize the importance of environmental, social and economic sustainability is a theme that is common to these past discussions on tourism and is the central premise of the Official Community Plan.

An island setting presents unique challenges in developing sustainable tourism and, like many other islands, the concept of capacity and the concern over inappropriate development versus economic benefit tend to be at the forefront of debate in a manner that is often more evident and emotive than elsewhere. There is no doubt that ‘sustainability’ as a premise remains exceedingly difficult to define in practical terms, but its usefulness in developing this Tourism Plan remains in its value as a guiding principle for each proposed strategy and set of tactics.

Ultimately the tourism industry’s capacity to remain viable and a key element of the economy will depend on establishing an integrated approach that ensures mutual respect for a range of perspectives and potentially divergent values. This requires creating a ‘forum’ that facilitates participation and dialogue from all interested local groups and encourages consensus in decision making. Developing tourism on a platform of shared interests will assist in reducing potential polarization and should increase overall accountability.

1.1 The Planning Process

Considerable progress in establishing this dialogue has been made during the planning process and the Tourism Plan now seeks to build on these achievements. The planning meetings and subsequent discussions brought together over thirty stakeholders representing a wide spectrum of interests that included the accommodation sector, the arts and culture sector, the agricultural sector and agritourism, retail, tourism operators and attractions, local and regional government, conservation groups and businesses, transportation, and the Chamber of Commerce. The process began in June 2008. Three community workshops were held to review the current situation and establish steps for moving forward. Small working groups worked on particular elements of the Plan.

This document is the culmination of the process and has identified the vision, the strategic directions and the priority action areas that will strengthen tourism on Salt Spring Island.
2. Tourism on Salt Spring Island

It is estimated that 22% of working adults are employed in direct visitor activities on Salt Spring Island and that the industry generates a before tax revenue of $18 million. The Island offers an array of visitor experiences associated with its arts, culture, agritourism, and its natural setting and marine environment. Complementary product such as golf further enriches the overall Island product offering.

The location of Salt Spring Island puts it within close proximity of a large regional market place consisting of the Lower Mainland, Victoria and Seattle. Thirty-four per cent of visitors at the Visitor Centre (VC) in 2008 originated from non-Island BC residents, with a further 18% coming from other parts of Canada. The US sector has stayed relatively strong with 11% of the VC visitors coming from US and Mexico, which is not surprising given the attractiveness of the location to marine-based travellers.

The following table highlights the key considerations for planning that arose from the situational analysis.

2.1 Key Considerations for Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context for Planning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Macro Environment – Trends and Issues</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Global economic volatility – decline in occupancy rates throughout the province since fall 2008.</td>
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<td>• Changing demographics.</td>
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<td>• Growth in niche/experiential tourism – arts and culture, nature-based/ecotourism etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Growth of online bookings and use of internet for trip planning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increased demand for short breaks.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational Structure and Management of Tourism</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Historically the tourism industry has been fragmented. The Chamber has sought to take a lead but there has been no real collective voice for tourism or mechanism that would bring divergent interests together to work towards common goals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Wide range of organizations with a potential or actual interest in tourism but no structured approach that ensures integration and effective collaboration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lack of core funding for tourism development and promotion – urgent need to identify new sources of funding and to have a structure in place that can determine consensus-based spending priorities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Need to ensure that tourism planning and implementation of tactics reflects the underlying core values that are based on sustainability.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• While the OCP addresses economic opportunities, its emphasis is on preserving and protecting the Island’s unique amenities and environment. There are limited formal mechanisms for integrating economic development with land-use planning and there is no strategic plan for economic development or funding mechanisms to support an economic development / tourism function.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The shoulder and winter seasons represent a key opportunity for strengthening tourism. Demand is already strong in the peak summer months – July and August VC data account for almost half of all visitors recorded in a year, while the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
period May to September represents 76%.
- Given the importance of sustainability as an underlying value, there is a need to explore relevant new green practices in relation to tourism management and the operation of businesses.
- Lack of awareness and/or appreciation of the value of tourism to the Island's economy.
- No significant monitoring mechanisms in place despite focus on sustainability – the Tourism Plan offers an opportunity to introduce indicators to monitor the impact of tourism.

### Tourism Product and Product Sectors
- An island destination which makes it different from most places – while this can be considered a constraint, it is also an essential element of its overall attractiveness and offers a sense of mystique, intimacy, romance and escape.
- Substantial number of artists and artisans – wide range of opportunity to view art product and to visit studios.
- Strong performing arts/music product – the arts sector as a whole is the Island's primary product and key motivating factor in attracting visitors. Need to explore ways of enhancing the arts as a key component of the Island’s visitor experience and strengthening Salt Spring Island’s market position as an island that celebrates creativity.
- Growing agritourism sector – Salt Spring Island is renowned for its Saturday Market. Potential to focus on the “homespun” concept.
- Three provincial parks – range of nature-based opportunities associated with trails and park settings. Ongoing work related to the Island’s trail network and beach access.
- Number of marine-based operators offering marine adventures – Salt Spring is an entry point to the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve of Canada.
- Range of festivals and events.
- Two golf courses.
- Need further integration of sectors.
- Opportunities to develop product based on the concept of sustainability.

### Marketing and Communications
- No core funding for marketing – marketing initiatives are almost entirely funded by the private sector. Chamber produces a general guide to Salt Spring Island; Driftwood Publishing Ltd. produces a guide to the Southern Gulf Islands which includes a profile of Salt Spring Island.
- Prior to the planning process there had been no strategic approach to marketing – efforts were being put toward looking at new ways of increasing off-season business.
- Tourism stakeholders looking to move forward with a branding project – the Island has no consistent message or visual identity in its marketing communications.
- Substantial room to improve Internet marketing.

### 2.1.1 Planning for Tourism and Economic Development
A review of the regulatory framework and the overall enabling context for developing tourism has demonstrated a significant gap. The Islands Trust, which was set up as a provincial organization to regulate growth, has responsibility for land use on Salt Spring Island through the Official Community Plan and land-use zoning, while Capital Regional District oversees the servicing of the Island in relation to solid waste and recycling, water, sewage and regional park services. However, neither governance body has adopted a proactive role in planning for economic development. This gap in the enabling environment is somewhat ironic, as no organization or local government structure is actively involved in identifying and supporting appropriate economic development that will ultimately ensure the economic
vitality of the community and its ability to maintain the current range of services, while preserving the ecological integrity of the Island.

The tendency for ideological positions to become polarized further undermines efforts to plan for the Island’s economic future. The absence of a Community Futures Development Corporation on the Island with its focus on fostering entrepreneurial development through small business development in non-metropolitan and rural communities accentuates the gap in the enabling framework. While the Chamber of Commerce has sought to address related issues through supporting local businesses, it is constrained by limited funds and a lack of strategic direction in the form of an economic development strategy. Chambers of Commerce elsewhere in the province generally attract an element of core funding from local or regional government for the Chamber function, and where tourism is a core component of this function, the public sector contribution often reflects this additional responsibility. In this particular case, the Salt Spring Island Chamber does not receive any operational funding from government.

Without ongoing local or regional government involvement in economic development or core funding for the Chamber to function as an alternative lead organization, there are no structured mechanisms in place to identify creative and proactive ways through which a diverse, liveable and vibrant community can be created within the confines of our island’s finite land base and resources (OCP, A.4.4.8). In this respect Salt Spring Island is distinctly different from other communities in the Capital Regional District where there are a range of policies, structures and mechanisms in place to support the planning and promotion of strategic economic development, which in turn assist with attracting outside funding. Even at the regional level, recent work carried out by CRD on the Regional Growth Strategy excludes Salt Spring Island and the Southern Gulf Islands in light of the fact that the Islands Trust acts as their land use authority. In the absence of this type of enabling environment, a range of informal volunteer groups have evolved such as the Salt Spring Arts Council and the Salt Spring Island Farmers Institute, each designed to support an element of the economy. What has been missing to date, however, is a structure that seeks to direct the development and promotion of appropriate forms of tourism and an overview perspective that can facilitate the integration of these other efforts in a way that is mutually beneficial to the different sectors and to Salt Spring Island as a whole. Given the centrality of ‘sustainability’ as a key underlying value of Salt Spring Island, this weak enabling environment makes the community more vulnerable to inappropriate development proposals and increases the likelihood of relevant opportunities being overlooked.

2.1.2 Funding Tourism

In light of limited leadership in economic development, including tourism, it is not surprising that there is a significant issue with a lack of core funding for the ongoing development of tourism as a vital sector of the economy and one that has integral linkages with other key sectors. Tourism plays a critical role in attracting new money into the local economy and in supporting a wide range of services that are fundamental to the existing quality of life of local residents. Tourism BC’s annual fee-for-service grant of $25,000 to the Chamber for the operation of the Visitor Centre is the only designated core funding currently in place. While the Chamber and the Gulf Islands newspaper company have both worked to develop visitor guides, it is ultimately the tourism businesses that are bearing the main costs of promoting Salt Spring Island and its range of product. Given the importance of tourism to the economy and the urgent need to adopt a more comprehensive and holistic approach to managing the destination

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1 Other than the Tourism BC fee-for-service grant for running the Visitor Centre – a role that is an add-on to the Chamber’s primary activity

and the visitor experience, this lack of core funding is a serious issue and a major constraint on leveraging funds. This in turn is likely to undermine the community’s ability to position the destination and develop the industry in a way that is in keeping with the Island’s underlying values and commitment to healthy ecosystems.

A review of competitive tourism destinations across the province demonstrates that a strong public-private partnership with core funding reflecting this partnership enhances a community’s ability to manage and market effectively. While funds have been made available for specific projects, such as the CRD’s work on trails development, a partnership that is committed to overseeing and directing the ongoing development of tourism has been missing3. This Tourism Plan seeks to identify ways of building this partnership and increasing options for developing a new funding formula.

2.2 The Tourism Vision

Moving forward with strengthening the tourism industry involves establishing a vision as the initial step. The development of a Tourism Vision statement was undertaken at the outset of the planning process and has been used in defining the Plan’s strategic directions. This Vision statement is based on workshop discussions and a review of the underlying values of Salt Spring Island as expressed in strategies such as the Official Community Plan and earlier tourism planning discussions.

To deliver a unique visitor experience that embraces the authenticity of the community, celebrates its local distinctiveness, and contributes to the overall sustainability of Salt Spring Island.

2.2.1 Guiding Principles

To use the Tourism Vision effectively in guiding the development of the Tourism Plan, it is necessary to identify the range of values and principles that underlie the statement and to use these as Guiding Principles. The following principles are integral to the Plan and should be seen as foundational to ongoing tourism planning and development activities.

a) Tourism will recognize and maintain the local distinctiveness of Salt Spring Island that is exhibited in its eclectic lifestyle, its rich diversity in arts and culture, and in the significance of its natural environment.

b) There will be an inclusive, partnership-based approach to tourism development that encourages mutual respect for a range of perspectives and values.

c) A decision-making framework based on the principles of sustainability will be used to ensure that proposed tactics respect and balance natural and cultural values with economic objectives and benefits.

d) Tourism planning and delivery will seek to be responsive to visitor expectations and will be committed to excellence without compromising other elements of sustainability.

e) The development of tourism will add value to existing product in a way that spreads economic benefit throughout Salt Spring Island and across the seasons without an over-emphasis on a numbers-driven approach.

f) The industry will be built on effective management systems that seek to monitor impact and

3 The Salt Spring Island Parks and Recreation Plan (December 2009) identifies a commitment toward building recreation partnerships between the CRD Parks and Recreation Commission and the various other organizations that deliver and support the broad range of recreation opportunities on the Island.
maintain existing cultural and ecological values, while improving the economic benefits.

g) The industry will be committed to building local capacity and investing in the community.

2.2.2 Sustainable Tourism Objectives

The tourism objectives outlined below are framed with the context of the key parameters of sustainable tourism. They are based on a review of goals and objectives identified in previous planning discussions4 and have shaped the remainder of this Tourism Plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contribution of tourism to:</th>
<th>The tourism industry will seek to:</th>
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</table>
| Maintaining the integrity of the environment | • Protect and enhance the natural areas of Salt Spring Island through encouraging low impact visitor activities in appropriate settings  
• Support the implementation of conservation policies  
• Increase the visitor’s awareness of Salt Spring Island’s unique ecosystems and sustainability issues  
• Encourage the development of infrastructure that is in keeping with the island’s natural constraints and assists the visitor with experiencing the destination without undue impact on the environment or the marine ecology  
• Encourage the implementation of land-use planning policies that protect important viewscapes |
| Fostering the cultural heritage and authenticity of the Island | • Promote and support the local arts economy  
• Support the ongoing development of value-added agriculture that contributes to the visitor experience  
• Reduce seasonality of visitation patterns  
• Incorporate community-based cultural heritage products into the tourism sector without compromising local values |
| Strengthening economic benefits | • Minimize visitor-related economic leakages  
• Encourage the creation and/or strengthening of business and employment opportunities through enhanced linkages with agriculture, arts and craft, entertainment and music, and local support services  
• Nurture local supply chains  
• Support affordable housing policies |
| Enhancing the visitor experience | • Provide unique and memorable experiences that encourage repeat visitation, particularly in the shoulder and winter seasons  
• Deliver a quality experience that is in keeping with visitor expectations  
• Enable the visitor to experience the authenticity and distinctiveness of Island life |

4 Particularly the Southern Gulf Islands Tourism Study completed in 2008 for CRD
In implementing this Plan and in future planning consideration needs to be given to each of these dimensions. Undue focus on any one dimension will compromise the longer-term sustainability of the industry and may undermine those attributes that currently differentiate Salt Spring Island and contribute to its competitiveness.

### 2.3 Strategic Areas of Action

The planning workshops identified four key areas that need to be addressed in the Tourism Plan. These relate to:

a) Managing the tourism industry;

b) Product development that provides the visitor with the opportunity to ‘celebrate local distinctiveness’;

c) Infrastructural and service improvements that will improve the Island’s attractiveness and capacity to host visitors without undue negative impact; and

d) Developing a marketing communications strategy.

Each of these areas has been addressed with a series of strategies and tactics. Input from the workshops and small working group discussions have been incorporated throughout the Plan. The following section presents a summary of the Plan.

#### 2.3.1 Overview of the Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals / Strategic Areas of Action</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Build a supportive organizational structure that has the capacity and resources to develop and promote the tourism industry and to manage the destination in accordance with the guiding principles and overall objectives of the Tourism Plan. | **Building Leadership**
1. Establish a Tourism Committee as a Standing Committee of the Chamber of Commerce to oversee the direction of tourism development on Salt Spring Island.  
2. Determine procedures and human resources for implementation of initiatives.  
3. Pursue new core funding that will enable the effective implementation of the Tourism Plan and related initiatives designed to support and strengthen the community. |
|  | **Managing Tourism**
4. Develop management systems and programs that will strengthen the tourism industry and will enhance the visitor experience.  
5. Work with other partners and stakeholders to develop and implement appropriate indicators that will monitor the environmental, socio-cultural and economic impact of tourism on Salt Spring Island.  
6. Encourage tourism business throughout the Island to incorporate environmentally sustainable and socially responsible practices. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals / Strategic Areas of Action</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enhance and grow the range of tourism product that ‘embraces the authenticity of the community and celebrates its local distinctiveness’</strong></td>
<td><strong>Arts and Culture – including Agritourism</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Work with the arts community to strengthen the arts as core tourism product and the basis for differentiating Salt Spring Island in the marketplace.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Work with the agricultural sector to strengthen agritourism as a niche product, and promote and support related initiatives that will enrich the visitor experience and will increase the profitability of the farming industry.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Work with partners to utilize the Island’s heritage resources in developing visitor experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ecotourism and Sustainability Education</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Build on the Island’s strengths in nature-based and marine resources for developing ecotourism.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Utilize the Island’s focus on sustainability to develop related product.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive Experiences - the Retail Sector, Festivals &amp; Events, Winter Product, Health &amp; Wellness and Outdoor Recreation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Strengthen the retail sector’s understanding of the visitor market and related opportunities to increase revenue.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Consolidate existing festivals and events and identify opportunities to strengthen and develop this sector.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Develop new and innovative winter product around existing product sectors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Support the ongoing growth of health and wellness product and related policies that promote active lifestyles and outdoor recreation.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strengthen the competitiveness of Salt Spring Island through infrastructural enhancements and the introduction of new visitor services</strong></td>
<td><strong>16. Address the need for recycling facilities in all high use areas (including Ganges, the Marinas, public parks and ferry terminals), and the need to improve waste disposal facilities for Marina users.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Work towards reducing congestion in Ganges in the peak season through transit and parking initiatives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Improve level of visitor services and facilities at the Marinas and increase boat access in Ganges.</td>
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<td>19. Enhance the visual appeal of Ganges and other focal points on the Island.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Provide a reservations service for accommodation, activities and tours at the Visitor Centre.</td>
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<tr>
<td>21. Support existing initiatives to bring broadband internet to all of Salt Spring Island.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Build awareness of Salt Spring Island as an arts and cultural destination with a distinctive island identity and increase the value of tourism through an integrated marketing and communications strategy</strong></td>
<td><strong>External Marketing</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>22. Complete the work that has commenced on branding Salt Spring Island and build brand awareness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. Develop an up-to-date image bank and media kit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. Review existing print material and develop new collateral to reflect the positioning and branding.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goals / Strategic Areas of Action</td>
<td>Strategies</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Build awareness of Salt Spring Island as an arts and cultural destination with a distinctive island identity and increase the value of tourism through an integrated marketing and communications strategy | 25. Develop a promotional strategy that focuses on building market awareness within the targeted markets.  
26. Review existing Island experiences and utilize innovative packaging as a means toward creating new interest in Salt Spring Island and encouraging increased visitor spend.  
27. Develop an Island-focused web-based marketing strategy.  
28. Develop effective marketing feedback and control systems.  
**Communications with Local Industry & Community**  
29. Develop mechanisms for communicating with industry stakeholders.  
30. Build a greater awareness and appreciation for the tourism industry throughout the Island. |

This Tourism Plan should be viewed as a working document. While it presents strategic directions for the tourism industry for the next three years, it should be reviewed on a regular basis and used as a framework for developing annual operational plans. This will ensure that the outworking of the action areas continues to evolve and be shaped by the dynamics of the marketplace and the values of the local community.
3. Management of Tourism

GOAL:

Build a supportive organizational structure that has the capacity and resources to develop and promote the tourism industry and to manage the destination in accordance with the guiding principles and overall objectives of the Tourism Plan.

STRATEGIES:

Building Leadership

1. Establish a Tourism Committee as a Standing Committee of the Chamber of Commerce to oversee the direction of tourism development on Salt Spring Island.

2. Determine procedures and human resources for implementation of initiatives.

3. Pursue new core funding that will enable the effective implementation of the Tourism Plan and related initiatives designed to support and strengthen the community.

Managing Tourism

4. Development management systems and programs that will strengthen the tourism industry and will enhance the visitor experience.

5. Work with other partners and stakeholders to develop and implement appropriate indicators that will monitor the environmental, socio-cultural and economic impact of tourism on Salt Spring Island.

6. Encourage tourism business throughout the Island to incorporate environmentally sustainable and socially responsible practices.

3.1 Building Leadership

Given the significance of tourism to the Salt Spring Island economy and the high priority that is placed on the principles of sustainability, it is imperative that the industry develops an organizational framework that will enable it to determine a direction of growth and development that is in alignment with local values. Without a lead tourism organization in place that represents the various Island perspectives, the innate fragmentation of the industry has the potential to compromise its longer-term sustainability. Prior to the tourism planning process, the Chamber of Commerce has played a low-key leadership role, but this has largely been restricted to operating the Visitor Centre and overseeing the development of the Visitor Guide. The planning workshop discussions clearly identified the need for creating a structure that would facilitate ongoing collaboration and participants opted to establish a Tourism Committee that would assume immediate responsibility for developing a leadership role in tourism. This section of the Plan builds on this decision and seeks to strengthen the overall management of tourism on the Island and develop a more holistic approach to looking at issues associated with the industry.
Ultimately the key to the successful management of tourism within a destination is:

- Strong leadership that can enthuse stakeholders, change attitudes if necessary and establish mutual trust;
- The ability to work collaboratively in pursuing a shared vision;
- Clear roles and responsibilities; and
- Committed core funding.

**STRATEGY 1. Establish a Tourism Committee as a Standing Committee of the Chamber of Commerce to oversee the direction of tourism development on Salt Spring Island.**

Establishing a Tourism Committee that is representative of the key stakeholders associated with the tourism industry is a critical first step in moving forward with the development of tourism on Salt Spring Island. This will provide an essential forum for dialogue and the development of strategies and tactics that reflect a more integrated perspective. On the basis of the workshop discussions it was determined that establishing the Tourism Committee as a Standing Committee of the Chamber of Commerce was the most appropriate and logical approach at this stage given the role of the Chamber in operating the Visitor Centre and in developing the Visitor Guide.

Recognizing the importance of this step, the decision was made to move ahead with setting up the inaugural Tourism Committee. The range of stakeholders and tourism sectors were identified and representatives were ‘appointed’ from those attending the workshops.

**Composition of the Tourism Committee**

The inaugural Committee includes representation from industry, local government and stakeholder organizations as follows:

- The arts sector;
- Agritourism;
- Attractions/recreation/golf;
- The accommodation sector;
- Capital Regional District;
- Islands Trust;
- Salt Spring Parks and Recreation Commission (PARC);
- The Chamber of Commerce/Visitor Centre;
- Transportation;
- The Marinas;
- Sustainability interest groups.

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5 See Appendix 1
6 Subsequent discussions with the Islands Trust have highlighted the value of including a member of staff on the Committee. It is therefore recommended that the Committee includes a planner from the Islands Trust.
Further to this, it is recommended that the Committee is expanded to include representatives from each of the following:

- Tourism operators;
- Retail;
- The food and beverage sector; and
- A second representative from accommodation – where one represents properties and campgrounds with three or less rooms/units, and the second represents properties with four or more rooms/units (those currently collecting the Hotel Room Tax).

With this composition, the Committee provides a structure for developing a public-private partnership that should assist in raising the profile of tourism as a key sector of the economy and in developing a greater level of cohesion within the industry. Traditionally these various stakeholders have all played a role in tourism but there has been no real degree of integration between the tourism initiatives of the various sectors, nor has there been a comprehensive attempt to develop tourism in a strategic manner that is in keeping with local values and ecological parameters. Establishing this Committee and developing its capacity to be proactive in strengthening tourism, must be seen as key to maintaining the economic viability and the environmental and cultural integrity of the tourism industry.

In the initial period it is anticipated that the Tourism Committee will work with the Chamber to implement planned initiatives. The issue of implementation is addressed further in Strategy 2.

**Mandate of Salt Spring Island Tourism Committee**

The Salt Spring Island Tourism Committee will play the lead role in overseeing the direction of tourism development on Salt Spring Island. This role will include:

- Providing strategic direction on the development and implementation of marketing and product development initiatives;
- Actively pursuing core funding as outlined in this Tourism Plan and seeking additional leveraging opportunities for tourism development and marketing;
- Developing annual work plans in line with this Tourism Plan and associated budgets based on available resources;
- Reviewing the expenditure of any funds within budget guidelines and according to the directions established by the annual work plan and budget;
- Implementing mechanisms to evaluate work plan activities;
- Fostering partnerships for the implementation of specific projects;
- Promoting the interests of all tourism stakeholders;
- Promoting the need to integrate tourism planning with other aspects of economic development and land-use planning, including transportation; and
- Building tourism awareness and an appreciation of tourism within the resident population, the wider business community and local and regional politicians.
TACTICS:

1.1. Develop Terms of Reference and working protocols for the Tourism Committee. This should include procedures for appointing and/or electing subsequent Committee members. It is recommended that Committee members serve a two year term with annual elections and/or appointments. With the inaugural Committee half should hold their position for two years and the other half should relinquish their positions at the end of the first year to allow for continuity.

Consideration will need to be given to developing appropriate mechanisms for electing and/or appointing representatives from the various tourism and related sectors.

1.2. The relationship of the Tourism Committee to the Chamber should be reviewed periodically. While it is possible that the Tourism Committee may adopt an alternative governance model at some point in the future, the initial emphasis should be on securing funding, developing leadership capacity, and gaining credibility as the lead tourism organization.

STRATEGY 2. Determine procedures and human resources for implementation of initiatives.

Experience in other communities has demonstrated that where there is no staff person/Tourism Manager with responsibility for implementing specific initiatives and projects or no procedures for clearly identifying appropriate volunteers to spearhead projects, implementation of a tourism plan is unpredictable, poorly tracked and may falter altogether. The need for a dedicated Tourism Manager/Economic Development Coordinator on Salt Spring Island is particularly acute given the lack of emphasis that has been placed on proactively building a sustainable economy in keeping with the Island’s finite capacity and cultural identity. Identifying and focusing on appropriate development and the issues facing existing businesses in this uncertain economy should be seen as a matter of priority for Salt Spring Island and every effort should be made to seek funding that can be allocated to this task on an ongoing basis.

In the interim, consideration needs to be given to alternative approaches that can be used to ensure that tactics outlined in this Tourism Plan are actually implemented. Workshop discussions indicated that while the Tourism Committee should be established as a Standing Committee of the Chamber of Commerce in the initial period, the Chamber itself is somewhat stretched in its capacity to take on further responsibilities. The following tactics outline a series of options that were discussed – these vary according to the level of funding available.

TACTICS:

2.1. In the initial phase of implementation and in the absence of any real core funding, it is recommended that Chamber staff assist the Tourism Committee where possible. It is anticipated that the Chamber will continue to oversee tasks related to developing the Visitor Guide and the ongoing development of the tourism pages on the Chamber website, although these activities should be done under the direction of the Tourism Committee to ensure that messaging and positioning are consistent with the Tourism Plan and the direction being pursued by the Committee. Other tasks related to product development and tourism management will have to be moved forward by assigned volunteers and relevant organizations until there is adequate funding to pursue an alternative arrangement.
2.2. A minimal increase in core funding would open up the option of developing a contract with Tourism Vancouver Island to take on responsibility for overseeing key marketing initiatives. This option would add an increased cost of 20% on related marketing activities and would give the tourism industry the opportunity to benefit from the RDMO’s7 marketing knowledge and experience in utilizing scarce resources to maximum benefit.

2.3. Moving specific product development and/or tourism management initiatives forward are likely to require focused effort that cannot be taken on by the RDMO. As in the case of branding, it may be necessary to seek funds to appoint a contractor on a project by project basis.

2.4. The interests of the tourism industry and the Island’s economy in general will be best served through acquiring sufficient funds to allow for the appointment of a Tourism Manager/Economic Development Coordinator. Given the linkages between tourism, arts and culture, and agriculture, and the need to look at wider issues associated with building a healthy local economy, it is recommended that any such position involves a scope of work that also looks at the broader concerns of economic development and the promotion of home-based businesses.

**Role of a Tourism Manager/Economic Development Coordinator**

In the event that this position is established, the following responsibilities would be incorporated into such a role:

- Works with the Tourism Committee to oversee implementation of the Tourism Plan.
- Works closely with other organizations (such as the Agricultural Alliance) which are involved in aspects of economic development on Salt Spring Island to assist them with the implementation of relevant projects.
- Facilitates product development and innovative packaging through working with appropriate partners.
- Supports the deliberations of the Tourism Committee by providing the Committee with the information it needs to make recommendations.
- Assists the Tourism Committee in developing an annual work/marketing plan and related budget and works with the Committee to implement the tactics and evaluate the effectiveness of the activities.
- Builds awareness of the value of sustainable tourism and appropriate economic development on Salt Spring Island.
- Seeks additional core funding and leverages existing funds through grant applications and the development of strategic partnerships.
- Builds local business acumen through developing a stakeholder communications strategy, providing market intelligence to stakeholders, coordinating relevant educational and networking events, and conducting on-site visits with businesses.
- Assists local entrepreneurs with identifying opportunities to access venture capital.
- Works with partners to develop incentive and award programs that recognizes sustainability best practices.
- Raises the profile of Salt Spring Island as a ‘model’ for sustainability practices.

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7 Regional Destination Marketing/Management Organization
STRATEGY 3. Pursue new core funding that will enable the effective implementation of the Tourism Plan and related initiatives designed to support and strengthen a diverse, liveable and vibrant community within the confines of the Island’s finite land base and resources\(^8\).

The current lack of funding to support the type of tourism and economic development that is seen as desirable for Salt Spring Island is a significant constraint to maintaining a healthy economy longer term and to retaining existing quality of life based on current level of services. Salt Spring Island’s resident population is the largest population base within the Capital Regional District that does not benefit from regular access to local or regional government funded economic development services. Furthermore, unlike the situation in many other communities, the Chamber of Commerce is entirely self-funded, other than the Tourism BC Visitor Centre fee-for-service and does not enjoy any level of local or regional government support. If this Tourism Plan is to have any longer-term impact on the tourism economy and related sectors it is imperative that the community explores a range of possible opportunities. It is recognized that this strategy alone could require considerable time and energy but without making progress in this area the implementation of this Tourism Plan will be somewhat constrained.

In pursuing core funding of any kind, there is likely to be either a cost to the consumer or the local tax payer, or even both. Initially there may well be a level of resistance to incurring such costs and work will be needed to develop an appreciation that community investment is required if the Island is to maintain healthy economic systems.

The following section on Tactics identifies a series of options that should be considered and pursued in tandem.

TACTICS:

3.1. The 2% Additional Hotel Room Tax has become a major source of funding for community-based tourism development and marketing. The visitor tax was highlighted as a funding option in the CRD Southern Gulf Islands Community Tourism Study. The report estimated that the tax would raise approximately $100,000 per annum on Salt Spring Island. This estimate has not been substantiated and seems to be high given the number of beds and type of accommodation on the Island. Moving forward with implementation of the 2% was recommended in the planning workshops. However, since then the Government’s announcement of the Harmonized Sales Tax and its intention to rescind the Hotel Sales Tax next year initially appeared to remove the 2% AHRT as a viable element of a funding formula. More recently there has been an announcement that the 2% will remain intact until the end of June 2011 and those communities wishing to pursue implementation of the tax are free to do so. The future of this tax remains uncertain and no clear-cut advice can be offered in relation to possible sources of community funding beyond this date. The tax itself is only applied to those accommodation businesses with four or more rooms/units that are currently collecting the Hotel Sales Tax and requires at least 51% of the businesses representing at least 51% of the beds/units to support the initiative. If this level of support is likely to be forthcoming, it is recommended that the community pursues the implementation of this tax as it will generate funds in the shorter-term and may position the community for subsequent funding models yet to be proposed.

\(^8\) A.4.4.8 of the Official Community Plan
3.2. Given the role of the Capital Regional District in the governance and administration of the Island, CRD should be approached as a primary source of potential funding. In seeking further assistance from the Regional District, the Tourism Committee should consider one of the following two options and pursue accordingly:

3.2.1. Establish a tourism/economic development service tax that will generate approximately $60,000 to support activities related to the development and promotion of tourism and related initiatives. It is recommended that the Tourism Committee requests CRD to establish the service and that the CRD seeks approval through the system of 'alternate approval'.

3.2.2. The alternative model in place is the Juan de Fuca Economic Development Commission which was established through bylaw in 2003. The EDC Board oversees activities relating to economic development and assigns available funding according to annual priorities. The EDC Board is expected to prepare an economic development strategy, liaise with other levels of government, the private sector and the media in matters related to economic development and tourism, and coordinate related activities including developing an active marketing program to encourage both new and existing investors. Grants are provided to community organizations that are seeking to initiate projects in keeping with the EDC's goals and objectives.

Should either of these options be pursued, it should be done so in consultation with the Islands Trust to explore the opportunity for the Trust to partner in a funding formula.

3.3. Continue to generate marketing funds from local stakeholders through the development of targeted cooperative marketing activities.

3.4. Review the membership benefits package for Chamber members and identify opportunities for developing tiered packages that would ultimately attract both an increase in revenue and in the number of stakeholders participating in tourism related marketing and promotion activities spearheaded by the Chamber. Businesses wishing to participate in a Visitor Centre booking/reservation service, for example, would pay a higher fee to be included in the program (see Strategy 18). Preferential rates for cooperative marketing activities can be used as an incentive to build levels of membership.

If the 2% AHRT is put in place, preferential rates should be offered to accommodation properties that are collecting the tax in recognition of their support and to assist in offsetting the inequities of the tax system.

3.5. Work with all business owners in Ganges to gain commitment to the principle of establishing a voluntary business levy that would be assigned to beautification projects aimed at enhancing the aesthetic appeal of the Ganges area.

3.6. The Islands Trust's vision for Salt Spring Island as expressed in the OCP is based on a commitment to honour the natural integrity of the island, while striving to meet the basic needs of

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9 The annual funding for the development of the arts on Salt Spring Island from CRD amounted to $52,820 at a cost of $8.26 per average residential assessment.

10 Under the existing system, properties under four rooms have a distinct pricing advantage as they are not required to collect the current hotel sales tax of 8%, nor would the 2% AHRT apply to them. As such these properties would not be contributing to the level of funding acquired through the implementation of the 2%. Moreover, smaller businesses that are not collecting GST have a further 5% pricing advantage/differential. The introduction of the Harmonized Sales Tax will address a number of these inequities.
its inhabitants. In Section D.8.1 it states that to monitor ...(the OCP’s) effectiveness, the Local Trust Committee could identify several measures or indicators to find out whether community goals are being achieved by this Plan. To be methodical in the area of monitoring will require funding support from the Islands Trust. It is therefore recommended that the Islands Trust directs funding to the task of establishing a comprehensive set of indicators that looks at the impact of tourism as one of the Island’s key economic sectors.

3.7. The Islands Trust has policies in place for amenity zoning\(^\text{11}\). This involves the granting of additional development potential by the Local Trust Committee in exchange for the voluntary provision of a community amenity by the landowner. This occurs on a case-by-case basis upon application for rezoning. A list of ‘eligible community amenities’ is included in H.3.2 of the OCP but the option of funds to be held in trust is only specified in relation to the purchase of public parks and recreation lands. Consideration should be given to expanding the type of community amenities that ‘funds’ can be directed towards and increasing the options through introducing the concept of ‘voluntary contributions’ at rezoning or even on the granting of a development variance permit. With voluntary contributions the ability of a project to make such contributions is dependent on the lift in land value. With these changes in place there is potential to support a wider array of community amenities such as public art.

3.2 Managing Tourism

STRATEGY 4. Develop management systems and programs that will strengthen the tourism industry and will enhance the visitor experience.

Ideally a lead tourism organization within a community should be implementing a range of tactics that will support the tourism industry. This involves maintaining a comprehensive understanding of local trends and changes in the macro environment, and developing the capacity within the industry as a whole to respond proactively to emerging opportunities and/or address identifiable weaknesses and unexpected crises in a timely manner. This will assist individual operators and Salt Spring Island as a whole in creating a market-oriented approach to the delivery of visitor experiences.

In the early phase of implementation of this Tourism Plan it is anticipated that Chamber staff will work on the following tactics. However, voluntary assistance and input from Tourism Committee members may be necessary to move this strategy forward.

TACTICS:

4.1. Continue to work on maintaining a comprehensive electronic database of product inventory and related tourism services using the Tourism BC inventory spreadsheets developed for the Community Tourism Foundations program. Include product/service description, key contact name and contact details – e-mail address, mailing address and telephone number, and expand in a way that allows for the identification of potential development and marketing opportunities. Keep Tourism BC informed of changes to the product inventory.

\[<\text{Develop a series of contact lists for different sectors in e-mail format for electronic communication.}\]

\(^{11}\) See H.3 Appendix 3 – Amenity Zoning - OCP
4.2. Establish procedures for staying up-to-date on current trends, including market and product development initiatives within the region. There are a number of online sources of tourism news, such as the Canadian Tourism Commission’s News Alerts, Tourism BC’s news page, and the Council of Tourism Associations of BC (COTA) tourism news. Tourism Vancouver Island also produces a quarterly trends newsletter that identifies trends within the regional marketplace.

4.3. Promote the value of participating in relevant quality assurance programs.

- The Situation Analysis noted that a significant proportion of the accommodation properties have been approved by Tourism BC and a number have been rated under the Canada Select™ program. However, over three-quarters of the cottage sector and 40% of the B&B sector are not approved. It is imperative that these businesses are encouraged to register for inclusion in Tourism BC’s Approved Accommodation program. This approval process not only increases their exposure in the marketplace through Tourism BC’s Accommodation Guide and HelloBC.com, but it also ensures that property owners have met minimum requirements in relation to cleanliness and state of repair. This is particularly important on Salt Spring Island where home-based accommodation businesses are encouraged as the main way of increasing the bed-base.

- The Canada Select™ program is Canada’s only national accommodation rating program and has been applied to hotels, motels, inns, resorts, condominiums, B&Bs, and campgrounds. The program provides visitors with a nationally consistent standard of quality within each accommodation category and assists visitors in making choices that are in keeping with their expectations.

- The BC Agritourism Alliance offers a quality assurance program. Accreditation provides operators with the ability to use the BC Agritourism accreditation logo, access to the Highway Sign Program, and preferential rates for marketing through the Alliance.

- The Culinary Tourism Society BC offers an accreditation program to all food service establishments, culinary retail shops, tour operators and specialty culinary tourism experiences. The Society has developed ten core certification criteria that relate to the use of BC product, service/hospitality, value, uniqueness, quality, integrity, informative experience, ‘enviro’ sustainability, ‘local favourite’, and cultural/authentic factors.

Promoting and delivering a quality and authentic visitor experience is key to building competitiveness within a destination and to maintaining integrity as a community that focuses on the principles of sustainability. The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts is continuing to work on developing certification programs as a partner in the recently launched BC Partnership for Sustainable Tourism initiative. As programs are introduced, the Tourism Committee should review the implications of each and implement where relevant.

4.4. Facilitate access to appropriate training and industry development programs through highlighting available programs and exploring options for hosting workshops with partners such as Tourism BC and Retail BC. Examples include:

- Tourism BC’s WorldHost™ Training Services, which has superseded the SuperHost™ program;

- Tourism BC’s Building and Growing Your Business programs12 – a range of services designed to assist communities and entrepreneurs with developing and strengthening their tourism

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12 For further detail see http://www.tourismbc.com/IndustryPrograms/BuildingAndGrowingYourBusiness.aspx
business. These include Experiences BC, a new sector oriented program, and the Tourism Business Essentials® program – a series of guide books on key aspects of running a tourism business, and five specific Tourism Business Essentials workshops: Tourism Packaging and Product Distribution (Introductory and Advanced), Travel Media Relations, Ads and Brochures That Sell, and Sport Tourism.

The emerit certification program which offers owners, operators and employees an excellent opportunity to gain recognition for existing knowledge and experience in a wide range of tourism sectors. This program is recognized across Canada and raises the standard of excellence in the delivery of tourism. The training is structured in such a way that individuals can receive recognition at different levels of their career and includes the Tourism Essentials Certificate, the Occupational Knowledge Certificate, the Occupational Experience Certificate and the Professional Certification Certificate. For further detail see www.emerit.ca.

Retail BC offers workshops that include Selling Memories and Serving World Customers, both of which would strengthen the retail sector as an integral component of the visitor experience.

**STRATEGY 5.** Work with other partners and stakeholders to develop and implement appropriate indicators that will monitor the environmental, socio-cultural and economic impact of tourism on Salt Spring Island.

The OCP stresses the need to identify ways of monitoring community sustainability (A.5.2.25). Elsewhere there is considerable emphasis on the importance of monitoring the Island’s eco-cultural health and establishing baseline data\(^{13}\) on a wide range of parameters that together would provide an informed overview of the Island’s well-being.

Preserving the ecological integrity of Salt Spring Island and its marine environment is not only a critical end in itself, but is it is also vital in maintaining the resource base for the tourism industry. The Tourism Committee should therefore support all initiatives that focus on monitoring the Island’s ecological dimensions and should use indicators in making decisions regarding developing and promoting various activities and tourism related policies. Similarly, work needs to be undertaken on measuring the value of tourism from an economic perspective and on monitoring visitor satisfaction.

> Monitoring enables system managers to learn more about the behaviour of the system they are managing by measuring progress, defining challenges and sounding alarm bells. It also makes it possible to assess system ‘health’ and find out the direction elements are moving in as well as finding ways to increase system resilience and adaptive capacity.\(^{14}\)

With Salt Spring Island’s strong commitment to the principles of sustainability and the work of organizations such as the Institute for Sustainability Education and Action (I-SEA) and the Salt Spring Island Conservancy, the community is well positioned to take an exemplary lead in the development of work on indicators.

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\(^{13}\) For example: the current Healthy Ecosystems Healthy Community Initiative; the 2008 Salt Spring Island Area Farm Plan

TACTICS:

5.1. Establish a small Working Group from the partner stakeholders to develop a monitoring program for Salt Spring Island. This program should be comprehensive in nature and not exclusive to tourism. Consideration needs to be given to developing a range of measurable indicators that relate to the health of the environment, the health of the economy, the health of the community, and the type of experience visitors are having. Work will need to focus on developing consensus regarding preferred or optimal conditions and then identifying a series of indicators that will assess performance. Measuring progress in achieving these aspirations either through the tourism industry or other forms of human activity, and identifying issues that demonstrate conflict with these values are important processes in ensuring sustainability of the industry and in allowing for timely intervention when it is required. Where indicators illustrate positive impact for the tourism industry and this is communicated to the community, support for the sector will be enhanced.

At the time of writing this Plan, the BC Partnership for Sustainable Tourism is working on developing key indicators for the tourism industry following the recommendations of the two Green Forums. It is recommended that the Tourism Committee gets involved with the Partnership's initiative as soon as the stakeholder engagement process commences. Whether there are opportunities to participate in a pilot project remains to be seen.

5.2. As part of the monitoring program, it is recommended that tourism performance is measured using Tourism BC’s Value of Tourism Model. This model has been developed by Tourism Planning Group for the Community Tourism Foundations® program to provide communities with a structured, consistent approach to estimating the volume and value of tourism in a conservative and credible manner. Measuring tourism performance is key to monitoring the state of the tourism economy, maintaining an informed approach to tourism planning and demonstrating success to stakeholders and partners. In addition, understanding the value of tourism and its contribution to the economy will greatly enhance the community’s perception of the industry.

The core data collection component of the model is based on an accommodation survey that gathers the most recent annual performance data from all commercial accommodation operators, including campgrounds. Through the use of local, regional and provincial population and tourism indicators in conjunction with the community accommodation performance data, it is now possible to make an informed estimate of the total number of visitors (overnight, day, and visiting friends and relatives) and their expenditures in the community. With this model all information provided by the accommodation sector is submitted directly to Tourism BC and is only used for the purposes of estimating tourism contribution to the local economy. The data is aggregated to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Moving forward with this initiative will require explaining the importance of the program to all accommodation operators and gaining their cooperation. Further assistance is available from Tourism BC.

Contact Erin O’Brien, Research Analyst, Research & Planning, Tourism British Columbia, 250-356-5629, erin.obrien@tourismbc.com
STRATEGY 6. Encourage tourism business throughout the Island to incorporate environmentally sustainable and socially responsible practices.

Looking beyond the underlying values of Salt Spring Island, the concept of sustainability has become a cornerstone of government policy in British Columbia. The recent establishment of the BC Partnership for Sustainable Tourism is further indication that the Province and industry leaders together are committed to promoting appropriate action that will increase the overall sustainability of the industry and enhance the ‘green positioning’ of British Columbia as a destination in the global market place. At the same time visitors are increasingly looking for tourism operators that practise responsible tourism, and a growing number of destinations and operators are now differentiating themselves on the basis of promoting and delivering environmentally and socially responsible visitor experiences.

With this merging of trends within the marketplace and the guiding principles outlined in Section 1 of this Tourism Plan, it is imperative that the Tourism Committee actively encourages local tourism entrepreneurs to incorporate environmentally sustainable and socially responsible practices into the running of their businesses. Previous tourism planning processes involving Salt Spring Island stakeholders have highlighted the importance of developing a visitor education and awareness program and the use of the UBCM Phase 2 community tourism funds for the 2009 Poster Campaign was a step toward the implementation of this objective. Equally important, however, is the need to ensure that businesses themselves are taking all the necessary steps to minimize the impact of their activities on the environment and that the tourism industry collectively is characterized by sound and ethical business practices.

TACTICS:

6.1. The new ETHOS network that has just been established (see Footnote #16) has a particular focus on policies and tools to address climate change. A basic network membership is free and benefits include a travel calculator for businesses to imbed on their website to encourage travel related offsetting that invests in projects taking place in British Columbia. Carbon off-setting and the issue of climate change is an area that is of major concern to the global tourism industry and to tourism leaders within BC – this concern should be reflected in the approach that is taken to manage and promote Salt Spring Island’s tourism industry. It is recommended that the I-SEA assists the Tourism Committee in taking a lead on building a proactive position for the Island in relation to climate change and tourism.

6.2. Highlight examples of best practice to the industry and build an awareness of general trends in sustainability. Green your Business: Toolkit for Tourism Operators has a wide range of initiatives and practical steps that small and medium sized tourism businesses can begin to implement. The handbook has been designed for multiple tourism sector audiences and provides suggestions and case studies that have been arranged by tourism sector, business process, and the needs of small and medium sized enterprises.

- Review the handbook and promote specific tactics to stakeholders on a regular basis using workshops and electronic communications.

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16 In January 2010 the partnership announced the establishment a new Sustainable Tourism Network. ETHOS is committed to providing the tourism industry with tools and resources to authentically develop more sustainable operations and practices. For further detail see www.ethosbc.com. ETHOS stands for ‘engaging tourism and hospitality operators in sustainability’.

6.3. Undertake a review of current practices and establish a baseline. Use as a benchmark in ongoing monitoring. The Salt Spring Island Sustainability Checklist for Single Family Dwellings produced in summer 2009 could be adapted for use in the tourism industry.

6.4. Encourage the accommodation sector to participate in the national Green Key Eco-Rating program as well as the Island’s Green Accommodation initiative. The national program is based on a graduated rating system designed to recognize hotels, motels, and resorts that are committed to improving their fiscal and environmental performance. It assists participants with opportunities to reduce operating costs and environmental impacts through reduced utility consumption, employee training, and supply chain management. The program has considerable value as an awareness tool but it is based on self-verification. The BC Partnership of Sustainable Tourism is currently working on developing an appropriate rating scheme for BC that will be based on a more rigorous process of assessment.

6.5. Build awareness for the GreenTable Network – a Vancouver-based certification program for the culinary sector that is spreading across the province and into Alberta. There are two membership categories – one for food service operators and professionals, and the other for suppliers and growers. The Network’s mission is to foster sustainability through collaboration action and innovative solutions.

6.6. Work with the Islands Trust to develop incentives that will encourage tourism businesses to implement recommended practices.

As businesses adopt new practices, this emphasis on sustainability should be reflected in the marketing and promotion messages that highlight the ‘essence’ of Salt Spring Island.

EXAMPLE:

Tinhorn Creek Vineyards, Okanagan – Canada’s First Carbon Neutral Winery

Tinhorn Creek Vineyards has added to its sustainability practices by becoming the first Canadian winery to complete the Climate Smart program and offset their carbon footprint. Climate Smart, launched in 2007 teaches business principals to measure, reduce and offset their carbon footprint. The values and philosophy have been fully embraced at Tinhorn Creek Vineyards and have taken the winery to a new level of environmental responsibility. The Climate Smart Program enabled the Wine Maker and General Manager calculate the total greenhouse gas emissions produced by the winery, target areas to cut emissions with a continued effort towards 100% carbon neutral practices, and finally, offset the carbon footprint with the help of Vancouver based Offsetters, Canada’s key provider of solutions for individuals and organizations seeking to reduce their climate impact.

Tinhorn Creek Vineyards has been implementing responsible practices since its inception in 1994 and has been recognized by The Land Conservancy as a partner for their ongoing stewardship. They developed systems with South Okanagan-Similkameen Stewardship Program which has led to placing snake fences around the vineyard property to protect visitors, staff and snakes. Tinhorn Creek has also worked with local community based organizations to re-plant indigenous bushes and grasses. 100% of plant based harvest waste is composted and put back into the property. Glass is imported from as close as Seattle to offset carbon footprints and the winery is working towards more effective irrigation and viticulture procedures.

(press release August 31, 2009)
4. Product Development – Celebrating Local Distinctiveness

GOAL:

Enhance and grow the range of tourism product that ‘embraces the authenticity of the community and celebrates its local distinctiveness’

STRATEGIES:

Arts and Culture – including Agritourism

7. Work with the arts community to strengthen the arts as core tourism product and the basis for differentiating Salt Spring Island in the marketplace.

8. Work with the agricultural sector to strengthen agritourism as a niche product, and promote and support related initiatives that will enrich the visitor experience and will increase the profitability of the farming industry.

9. Work with partners to utilize the Island’s heritage resources in developing visitor experiences.

Ecotourism and Sustainability Education

10. Build on the Island’s strengths in nature-based and marine resources for developing ecotourism.

11. Utilize the Island’s focus on sustainability to develop related product.

Supportive Experiences - the Retail Sector, Festivals and Events, Winter Product, Health & Wellness and Outdoor Recreation

12. Strengthen the retail sector’s understanding of the visitor market and related opportunities to increase revenue.

13. Consolidate existing festivals and events and identify opportunities to strengthen and develop this sector.

14. Develop new and innovative winter product around existing product sectors.

15. Support the ongoing growth of health and wellness product and related policies that promote active lifestyles and outdoor recreation.
The tourism planning process identified three key sectors that together embrace the distinctiveness of Salt Spring Island. These include:

- Arts and cultural tourism with a particular emphasis on the visual and performing arts;
- Agritourism; and,
- Nature-based and marine-based tourism.

Traditionally the development of these sectors has evolved in a non-strategic manner that has not fully embraced the potential arising from the integration of the sectors nor has it necessarily looked at their growth in the context of the tourism industry as a whole. Rather, efforts have been based on the ability of local organizations and entrepreneurs to optimize sector-specific opportunities in relation to the arts, the diversification of agriculture, and the development of the resource base for nature-based activities. This Tourism Plan seeks to build on these efforts in a way that will strengthen the individual sectors while also heightening the overall viability of the tourism industry.

### 4.1 Arts and Culture (including Agritourism)

**STRATEGY 7.** Work with the arts community to strengthen the visual and performing arts sector as core tourism product and the basis for differentiating Salt Spring Island in the marketplace.

Salt Spring is internationally recognized for its gifted population of artists and artisans, among them such renowned names as Robert Bateman, Carol Evans and Jill Louise Campbell. Painters, potters, woodworkers, jewellers, textile artists, fine-art photographers, basket makers and clothing designers abound. Such is Salt Spring’s wealth of talent that *Coastal Living* magazine named the island the top "small arts town in Canada" and one of the top-10 such arts colonies in North America\(^{18}\).

It is this element of Salt Spring Island life in particular that provides the community with the potential to deliver a unique visitor experience that embraces the authenticity of the community, celebrates its local distinctiveness, and contributes to the overall sustainability of Salt Spring Island\(^{19}\). The Island’s visual and performing arts and its strong artisan community is undoubtedly a fundamental component of its core product and should be used to differentiate Salt Spring Island as a destination in the marketplace.

There are a number of organizations and marketing consortiums that are involved in the development of the arts on Salt Spring Island, including the Salt Spring Arts Council, the Island Arts Centre Society, the Salt Spring Studio Tour Consortium and Salt Spring Fine Art. However, despite the significance of this sector of the economy and its importance in contributing to a unique ‘sense of place’, no overall strategy has been developed to guide the development and promotion of the arts on Salt Spring Island. A regional CRD strategy exists, but this is not an adequate substitute and was developed over six years ago. Further work is now needed to define the Island’s creative mission and strategic goals and to consolidate the work of the various arts organizations to ensure that this sector is sustainable long-term and remains central to community life.

The Capital Regional District funds the arts on an annual basis with 2009 funding amounting to almost $53,000.

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\(^{18}\) Content from http://www.hellobc.com/en-CA/SightsActivitiesEvents/ArtsCulturalHistoricalExperiences/ArtistsArtGalleries/Salt-Spring-Island.htm

\(^{19}\) Vision statement.
TACTICS:

7.1. The Salt Spring Arts Council has commenced discussions on developing a Salt Spring Island Arts Strategy. This work should be supported as there is a critical need to consolidate the various arts initiatives that are underway and develop guidelines that can oversee the future direction of the arts as a sector in their own right and as a valuable component of the tourism industry. It is likely that this Strategy would include many of the following tactics. These tactics focus on strengthening the arts as a core tourism product.

7.2. It is recommended that the arts community work toward recognizing one umbrella organization that has a mandate for supporting the arts as a whole. There appears to be overlap between the role of the Salt Spring Arts Council and that of the Island Arts Centre Society. Recognizing a lead organization that acts as the voice and advocate for all the arts will assist in developing good communications between all art groups and between the arts community and other sectors, including tourism. To be effective in this wider ‘lead’ role, the particular organization that assumes this function will need to broaden its scope of effort and strengthen its capacities accordingly.

7.3. Undertake a comprehensive scan of arts and culture on Salt Spring Island and an analysis of its economic value. This is a significant undertaking but it will establish essential baseline data and it will provide a comprehensive inventory of product and overview of facilities, capacity, specific needs, and a better understanding of markets. The Salt Spring Arts Council is in the process of conducting a survey of artists that is looking at markets and/or audiences, sales outlets, promotional tools, professional development, access to studio space, involvement in related education, and associated issues and challenges. This work is a helpful starting point, but ideally it needs to be expanded in its scope.

- To undertake this work in a comprehensive manner, it is recommended that a number of research tools are used including questionnaires for artists and residents, focus groups and interviews. Achieving high levels of participation is important and will require a public relations strategy involving the local media that highlights the benefits of this work.
  - If funding is available, acquire professional assistance. If not, review work undertaken in other jurisdictions and tools developed by organizations such as 2010 Legacies Now.
- In assessing economic impact, focus on measuring spending and employment associated with the entire arts community, including arts related education, relevant events and festivals, societies and organizations. Economic data of this nature is essential in tracking the health of the industry and in attracting outside funding and investment. With ongoing tracking the data will also demonstrate return on investment and can be used to monitor the impact of new policies and initiatives.

7.4. Explore opportunities to develop and/or expand a public art program. This will strengthen the community’s strong association with the arts and will contribute to the liveability of the Island. The program will also offer the opportunity to expand public awareness and understanding of the value of the arts to the community.

- Work on identifying suitable public space and innovative opportunities for the display of artistic works.
- Establish a list of selection criteria and develop a fair and effective process for selecting, purchasing, commissioning and maintaining public art.
Funding will be a key issue. A review of other communities illustrates a range of tactics that have been used to establish the necessary financial resources.

**EXAMPLES:**

**Public Art Funding**

**Capital Regional District** – Four municipalities within CRD (District of Saanich, City of Victoria, District of Oak Bay, and the Township of Esquimalt) have “percent for art” policies in place. In Saanich the municipality has committed 1% of the value of the capital budgets for above ground projects towards the purchase or commission and maintenance of public art to be integrated into or displayed in public areas; and 1% of the budget for municipal building construction/renovation projects, or park redevelopment, in excess of $250,000 to the purchase or commission of public art for that building, structure or park.

**City of Surrey** – through the Public Art Policy's Funding Strategy, selected civic capital projects are required to provide 1.25% of the construction budget for the inclusion of public art. The percentage of art funds arising from smaller park development construction projects are pooled and included for allocation within the annual Public Art Master Plan.

**City of Kelowna** – contributes a sum equal to 1% of the City’s annual capital budget from general taxation revenue (a minimum of $100,000 per annum) to create a Public Art Reserve Fund to be used to fund civic public art projects, and to provide matching funds to encourage the provision of public art by the private sector within publicly accessible portions of developments.

**City of Revelstoke** - $1 per capita is annually allocated to a Community Public Arts Program.

7.5. Encourage local businesses to partner with artists in providing opportunities to showcase local art product. This will assist in emphasizing the degree to which the arts are completely integrated into all aspects of Island life and may provide further exposure for lesser known artists.

7.6. Package specific experiences associated with the arts, crafts and culture with accommodation. An experiential product that involves hands-on participation and/or workshops is ideal for packaging with quality bed and breakfast venues and targeted to the regional market for short-stay/getaway trips.

Similarly, explore opportunities to integrate art experiences with other sectors such as ecotourism or golf in innovative packages. Focus on all elements of the package to ensure a unique product with high added value.

**EXAMPLES:**

**Adventure retreats– Northern Edge Algonquin, Ontario**

This retreat centre on the edge of Ontario's Algonquin Provincial Park has offered a variety of products over the years that have included wilderness canoeing and kayaking trips, and retreats that focused on wilderness experiences, the arts, and spirituality. Recognizing that visitors were interested in various elements of what was on offer, the Centre launched new Adventure retreats back in 2007 that combined a range of experiences. A combination of kayaking with yoga in a four day Quest for Balance, a Tom Thomson retreat experience featuring a mix of art instruction with canoeing and watercolour painting, the Wanderings, Waterfalls, and Watercolours retreat that combines wilderness adventure with various opportunities for creativity in the arts, and...
retreats that are exclusively aimed at women are all examples of the Centre’s new approach to product development.

Island art/kayak retreat – White Squall Paddling Centre, Ontario

This 4 day island kayak adventure on Georgian Bay offers participants the experience of daily paddling trips where they learn to sketch and paint under the guidance of artist, Sharon MacKinnon. The package features home-cooked meals using fresh and whole foods. Accommodation is at a fishing camp lodge.

7.7. The possibility of applying for recognition as a ‘creative island’ under the UNESCO Creative Cities Network program was raised in a planning workshop. This program is designed to celebrate and maintain cultural diversity and is intended to link and promote communities in both the developed and the developing world that make creativity an essential element of their economic development. While participation in this program may be considered as a longer-term goal, there is a need to establish a stronger commitment to developing the infrastructure that would support training and apprenticeships as this is an integral element of the selection criteria. The program also assumes a strong public/private partnership at the community level designed to unlock the entrepreneurial and creative potential of small enterprises and to facilitate the development of new opportunities in ‘creative tourism’.

“Creative Tourism” is considered to be a new generation of tourism. One participant described his perspective that the first generation was “beach tourism,” in which people come to a place for relaxation and leisure; the second was “cultural tourism,” oriented toward museums and cultural tours. “Creative Tourism” involves more interaction, in which the visitor has an educational, emotional, social, and participative interaction with the place, its living culture, and the people who live there. They feel like a citizen. This third generation requires that managers also evolve, recognizing the creativity within their city as a resource, and providing new opportunities to meet the evolving interests of tourists20.

- Support the development of a school for arts excellence. This would not only strengthen a UNESCO application and the overall position of the arts, but it would also offer new and innovative opportunities for developing arts related visitor experiences, particularly in the shoulder and winter seasons.

STRATEGY 8. Work with the agricultural sector to strengthen agritourism as a niche product, and promote and support related initiatives that will enrich the visitor experience and will increase the profitability of the farming industry.

Agriculture is a key element of the Salt Spring Island economy and plays a critical role in maintaining the rural landscape and cultural heritage of the community. Strengthening the ongoing viability of this sector has become a matter of significant concern and prompted the development of the Salt Spring Island Area Farm Plan21. This Plan, which is being implemented by the Salt Spring Island Agricultural

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Alliance with the support of the Local Trust Committee, identifies the need to introduce the concept of agri-tourism into the OCP and recommends encouraging the balanced pursuit of agri-tourism activities that benefit agriculture and do not lead to the loss of productive agricultural land.

Agritourism is a growing niche sector within the province that gives the visitor the opportunity to appreciate and experience a destination’s farm economy, while at the same time strengthening the sustainability of the farm businesses. Unique farm-based experiences, effective packaging and quality are all critical elements for building a successful agritourism business. Experience elsewhere indicates that the farming community can generally benefit from mentorship and advice in developing agritourism, given the secondary nature of tourism to the core activity of the business. Examples do exist of highly successful attractions, such as the Salt Spring Island Cheese Company, but on the whole this sector is still in its early stages of development.

The following tactics are designed to provide ideas for developing agritourism further and to build stronger linkages between agriculture and other sectors of the economy. They will also assist in moving the Area Farm Plan forward.

**TACTICS:**

8.1. Develop product inventory with details on nature of experience, season and hours of operation, capacity for delivering a group experience, and contact details.

8.2. Explore the opportunity to partner with agritourism businesses in the Capital Regional District and the Cowichan Valley Regional District to develop a regional self-guided agritourism product. There are a growing number of circle tours and agritourism consortiums within BC that are becoming significant attractors, including the Fraser Valley Circle Farm Tour, that consists of a series of farm tourism tours in a number of adjacent regions and communities – (Abbotsford, Agassiz-Harrison Mills, Chilliwack, Langley, Mission, and Maple Ride-Pitt Meadows). Developing a regional circle tour that highlights a range of agritourism businesses, local and regional festivals and events with an agrarian theme, and building linkages with rural and/or farm-based accommodation would assist in profiling Salt Spring Island as an agritourism destination to a wider market.

8.3. Explore the potential to develop a themed trail on the Island that exposes the visitor to a range of Salt Spring Island products, including farm-based products, arts and crafts, and gardens. This may be an event-styled trail, such as the North Saanich Flavour Trail which occurs over two days in August, or a self-guided trail such as the Tea Trail in Cumbria, England. Both are profiled below.

< Building product of this nature involves identifying opportunities for integrating different types of tourism experiences. There is a natural alignment between the arts, agritourism and other elements such as gardens, as they are all authentic ‘made in Salt Spring Island’ products. This ‘homespun’ quality is one that needs to clearly profiled in all marketing communications.

### EXAMPLES:

**Tea Trail Cumbria, England**

This highly successful regional trail in north England combines countryside scenery with quality farmhouse produce and hospitality. In 2006 the trail was reported to have acquired “cult status” and the farm-based tea shops had produced their own *On Tour with the Tea Trail* T-shirts. Proceeds from the T-shirts were directed toward the repair of local footpaths. A more recent version of the trail guide includes a scone-making workshop. The success of this quintessential English experience...
demonstrates the value of partnerships and the opportunities that can be gained from taking a very ordinary tourism product and turning it into a unique experience.

http://mediafiles.thedms.co.uk/Publication/CU/cms/pdf/TeaTrail.pdf

**The North Saanich Flavour Trail**

This two-day event is now in its third year and offers visitors and local residents an opportunity to tour North Saanich farms, wineries, nurseries, markets and restaurants in a way that showcases North Saanich food production. The event gives participants a hands-on experience and a ‘taste’ of local flavours.

**Taste the County™, Prince Edward County – Ontario**

The mission of Taste the County is to promote agriculture, tourism, arts and culture, and related consumerism in Prince Edward County. What commenced in 1999 as a sponsored initiative with Chamber support and public sector funding has become a self-sustaining, not-for-profit organization. There are two signature products:

**Taste Trail** – a self-guided tour route that links together Prince Edward County's finest artisanal food producers, restaurants, wineries (as well as a cidery and a brewery) – all dedicated to crafting products from local ingredients. The tour showcases 23 participating locations and offers visitors the opportunity to wander from place to place alternating between tastings, tours and dining experiences. All participants provide an added-value experience, such as a tea-room, a tasting area and/or on-site entertainment – Referred to as an authentic epicurean experience. An interactive web-map, a print brochure and signage all promote this example of terroir-based gastronomy.  

http://www.tastetrail.ca/tourroute.html

**Taste! a celebration of regional cuisine** – each year Taste the County hosts a one-day TASTE celebration – a wine and culinary event that showcases a range of products and producers. The web site features accommodation and transportation partners and offers various inclusive packages.  

http://www.tastecelebration.ca/index.html

The Taste Trail web site also promotes a series of packaged themed drives – historical packages, wine and dine packages and arts trail packages. Each is based around an accommodation product and is designed to give the visitor a unique experience.

8.4. There is considerable potential for developing innovative packaged product and marketing this product into the regional marketplace. Salt Spring Island already has an experienced tour operator in this field – partner with Island Gourmet Safaris to develop, promote and deliver new packages.

8.5. Work towards amalgamating the local organic food guide and the farm produce and services directory and develop a publication that serves both residents and visitors. Utilize this guide to profile agritourism sites.

- Distribute the guide to all restaurants and businesses that offer food, including B&Bs. Meet with the owners and managers and discuss the market appeal and value of developing menus from local produce.

8.6. Encourage relevant businesses to work with the BC Agritourism Alliance. The BCATA offers an accreditation program that is designed to promote product and service quality control and to showcase the province as a leading agritourism destination. The organization also offers assistance with insurance and road signage. The latter represents a joint initiative that includes
the BCATA, the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands and the Ministry of Transportation. Currently the Island has no members in the BCATA and is not profiled in the product database within the visitor pages of the website – see http://www.agritourismbc.org/farms.htm.

8.7. Work with restaurants and chefs to explore opportunities to build Island cuisine. As noted, Salt Spring Island has a strong association with farm-fresh product, much of which is organic, and there are opportunities to build solid linkages between the agriculture sector and the culinary sector and to create innovative product that can be readily promoted into the regional marketplace.

- Develop a branding/symbol to denote restaurant menu items based on local produce.
- Build awareness for the GreenTable Network – see Tactic 6.4.
- Where available, ensure that the restaurants have promotional material/racking cards from the profiled farms and/or farm stalls.
- Explore opportunities to develop unique farm-based culinary experiences. Island Natural Growers are currently developing a “Local Feast in the Field” similar to the Feast of Fields events – see case-example. This initiative should be fully supported

EXAMPLES:

Feast of Fields, the Okanagan

2009 saw the launch of a new culinary event in the Okanagan that embraces the region’s harvest and its sustainability focus. The inaugural event was held in Summerland and offered visitors an array of international flavours made with local ingredients. It is a spin-off of the popular Feast of Fields held annually in the Lower Mainland and on Vancouver Island - gourmet harvest festivals that are fundraising events for FarmFolk/CityFolk, a non-profit society that campaigns to raise awareness of the need to support a local, sustainable food system. The event showcases chefs, vintners, brewers, farmers, and food artisans from the hosting region and offers participants the opportunity to sample a range of offerings – each paired with a local wine or beer. The Okanagan Feast of Fields sold out – tickets were priced at $85/person.

Fairburn Farm Culinary Retreat and Guesthouse, Cowichan Valley

Featured in Gourmet Magazine, August 2009, as one of the 45 most memorable cooking vacations in the world.

Chef Mara Jernigan offers a 5 day intensive program on a historic 130 acre farm in the Cowichan Valley. This Culinary Boot Camp includes harvesting from the farm’s 2 acre kitchen garden and orchards, foraging for mushrooms with a local mycologist, baking from a wood burning brick oven, field trips to meet local producers, wine tastings, canning and preserving and a range of recipes and techniques. The program includes tuition, accommodations, meals, field trips, and homemade preserves to take home. The vacation involves a visit to the Duncan Farmers’ Market to purchase fresh produce.

A View of the Lake B&B, Kelowna

A B&B that offers a unique culinary experience. The accommodation venue includes a Demonstration Kitchen where cooking demonstrations are conducted by an award winning chef. Each tailor made demonstration starts with canapés with sparkling wine and then continues in the ultra modern 550 square foot kitchen with four courses enhanced with local wine.
Trip Advisor Review: We had the chance to meet up with some friends who were staying at this lovely B&B. They invited us to join them for the demonstration cooking and dinner. We are beyond glad that we made the choice to attend this amazing event. The view from the deck and the kitchen were breath taking. The canapés before dinner were excellent, and the dinner itself was the best meal we have eaten out, ever. Each course was delicious, and fresh! Steve gets the ingredients that day, so there is nothing but goodness in these treats! The friendly, fun atmosphere in the kitchen made it feel like we were not in a stranger's kitchen, but that of a good friend. Steve was very entertaining and he answered any and all of our culinary questions with honest information. The evening went by and we were sorry to see the meal and visiting come to an end. If you are in the area and are looking for a different dinner experience, get some friends together and book this!!

8.8. Review existing events and agritourism sites to identify opportunities for raising the profile of the visual and performing arts and for integrating agritourism with the arts. Farm buildings can provide unique settings for the temporary display of art products.

- Consider developing an agri-art competition – giving it a spring or harvest theme could assist in building should-season business.
- Identify opportunities for cross-marketing.

8.9. Promote periodic networking events to keep farm operators up-to-date on current trends in agri-tourism, effective practices, and opportunities/ideas for business development. Encourage informal networking as a means of developing business support.

STRATEGY 9. Work with partners to utilize the Island’s heritage resources in developing visitor experiences.

The Island has a rich cultural heritage associated with the First Nations and the diverse groups of early settlers. The OCP has identified the need to protect important components of the Island’s heritage and section A.8.2.1 states that the Committee should make information about the island’s heritage widely available and provide assistance and encouragement to those who protect it. Currently this aspect of Salt Spring Island is not is not being presented effectively as a component of the visitor experience.

TACTICS:

9.1. Support the Islands Trust in their initiative to develop a heritage management plan (OCP A.8.2.11). This management plan should contain an interpretive strategy and should examine the role of heritage in tourism.

- In the interim, work with the Islands Trust to produce a heritage brochure and/or trail. The current use of photocopied notes that is available from the Visitor Centre does a disservice to the local heritage and minimizes its significance.
- Explore opportunities for integrating aspects of the local heritage with other visitor experiences and for giving existing facilities such as the Farmers Institute and Gulf Islands Spinning Mill a higher profile.

9.2. The Islands Trust has proposed establishing a Community Heritage Commission in 2010. It is recommended that the Tourism Committee is represented on this Commission.
9.3. The planning discussions identified the need for additional museum-focused space. Support moving forward with a feasibility study on a new cultural heritage facility.

4.2 Ecotourism and Sustainability Education

**STRATEGY 10.** Build on the Island’s strengths in nature-based and marine resources for developing ecotourism.

While Salt Spring Island offers a scenic and unique setting as an island with a temperate maritime climate, nature-based tourism should not be positioned as a mainstream primary product given the many concerns that were expressed regarding the fragility of the environment. However, there remains considerable potential to further develop niche ecotourism opportunities and to promote and facilitate nature-based and marine-based activities for those visitors who have come to Island for its arts and culture.

Considerable infrastructural work is underway that will improve access throughout the Island and will assist in developing new ecotourism products. The OCP clearly identifies the need to develop an interconnected public trail network that can be used for passive recreation, access to park land, and non-vehicular transportation (B.7.2.1.4) and has highlighted the intent to develop a Community Greenways system of private and public greenways, some of which may also be associated with the island's trail network (A.5.1.7). In response to this, a range of initiatives are being implemented and the CRD has directed funding toward the work.

PARC has played a strong role in moving projects forward and has established a Trails Advisory Committee to guide the process of developing the trails network and has appointed a Trails Coordinator for a year contract commencing in September 2009. The work that is just beginning on a new Strategic Plan for PARC will further assist in consolidating and directing current initiatives. In addition to expanding the trails network, work has also progressed on improving public access to shoreline areas and plans are in place to evaluate all ‘road end’ access points under the control of the Ministry of Transportation this winter.

In addition to strengthening access through trails and greenways, 14% of Salt Spring Island’s total land area is protected – this includes community, regional and provincial parks together with land protected by covenants and held jointly by the Islands Trust and the Salt Spring Conservancy.

**TACTICS:**

10.1. The work on developing trails, greenways and improved beach access that is currently in progress should be fully supported by the Tourism Committee and its potential for developing new and expanding on existing tourism product should be explored in a comprehensive manner.

- Ensure that the Tourism Committee is kept informed of all trail and access initiatives. The participation of PARC on the Committee will assist in maintaining this dialogue. This is essential in developed an integrated approach to resource management and to maximizing the benefits from such projects.

- Ensure that the trails inventory currently being developed identifies length of trail, trail suitability / recommended activity usage (hiking, off-road cycling, horse-back riding), potential
for conflict issues, seasonal constraints, accessibility and trail head facilities, signage requirements (see 10.3), and connectivity issues.

- Identify opportunities for developing 'signature' trails on Salt Spring Island and within the wider region. There is considerable potential to develop a regional cycle trail that includes the Lochside Trail and the Galloping Goose trail in Capital Regional District and trails in the Cowichan Valley including parts of the Trans Canada Trail.

- Participate fully in the current CRD initiative to develop a Regional Pedestrian and Cycling Master Plan. Use the impetus of this initiative to attract new investment capital to developing Island trails.

- Continue to work with local land owners to improve connectivity and develop critical linkages.

- Review potential for trail development in partnership with the agricultural sector as an expansion of agritourism.

- Review local business capacity to support recreational cycling as a visitor activity on the Island. Work with the business community to identify and highlight associated opportunities, such as the increased potential for cycle hire.

- Develop new print and web based collateral for the expanded trail system. Ensure that the guide is readily available in electronic format on the community tourism website to assist prospective visitors in planning their trip. In the case of recreational cycling, all web-based information should clearly indicate the type of cycling experiences that are available.

10.2. While access to the top of Mount Maxwell is a Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure issue, there are concerns regarding the usability of this road for regular vehicles. Given the iconic nature of the viewpoint to the Island, it is recommended that this issue is brought forward in discussions with the Ministry and that BC Parks is involved in the associated implications of capacity and site management, should road access be improved.

10.3. A number of organizations are looking at the issue of signage and the need for a standardized approach. Responding to the need for signage offers an opportunity to develop and implement a signage program that will ultimately assist in strengthening the image of Salt Spring Island and its sense of place, facilitate ease of movement, and will enhancing the overall experience of the visitor. It is recommended that a sign strategy is developed that looks at preferred circulation patterns, sign purpose and sign design, and the potential to use signage to reinforce the branding of Salt Spring Island (see Tactic 20).

10.4. Review current interpretation and consider expanding a sign strategy to include an interpretive plan for the island. In developing ecotourism as a niche product there will be a greater demand for learning experiences. Expanding the use of interpretation will provide more meaningful experiences and will reinforce the significance of the Island’s natural and cultural heritage and the fragility of the ecosystems.

22 Refer to A Guide to Using and Developing Trails in Farm and Ranch Areas - http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/sf/trails/index.htm - Ministry of Agriculture and Lands

23 Discussions are underway between PARC and the Water Preservation Society, Island Pathways, Trail and Nature Club, and the SSI Transportation Commission

24 Refer to Tourism Research Innovation Project, June 2007, Welcome! A Manual to Enhance Community Signage and Visitor Experience
The summit of Mount Maxwell is an example of a key site that has insufficient interpretation given the outstanding views and the natural questions that arise in the minds of visitors. Cooperate with BC Parks in assessing ways of improving the level of interpretation on the Island.

10.5. Explore potential for developing niche product for specific interest groups within the ecotourism sector, such as birding tourism. This market is primarily comprised of the baby-boom age group with mid to high disposable income, active lifestyles, and is characterized by a demand for non-consumptive, learning/exploratory vacation experiences. This type of niche product will require new ‘tools’ to assist visitors in their birding experiences and to strengthen Salt Spring Island as a destination with a viable birding tourism product. It can also be developed to attract visitors in shoulder seasons during spring and fall migration.

- There are a number of accommodation venues that have identified the Island’s potential for birding enthusiasts. Work with these operators to develop targeted packages.
- Review other birding destinations and identify tactics that could be applied to Salt Spring Island, such as the development of web-based reference material.
- Enter discussions with tour operators that focus on the ‘learning adventures’ market such as ElderHostel.

10.6. Work with existing marine and land-based tour and activity operators to explore the potential for developing new packaged product. Adding in innovative experiences, such as a culinary experience or spa can enhance the value of the package considerably.

10.7. Explore opportunities to integrate art and ecotourism to reinforce the natural setting.

**EXAMPLE:**

**The Wildcraft Forest – EcoMuseum & Herb Farm**

The WildCraft Forest is an Ecomuseum and interpretive forest which offers a unique combination of nature-based arts and cultural experiences. It is located in the Monashee Region just on the edge of the North Okanagan. The site includes a Wild Tea Plantation, forest trails, interpretation of the local natural and cultural history, an Arts and Craft Village with working studios and galleries, a teahouse with an outdoor gift and farm market, the Whole Earth Discovery Centre, and the WildCraft Forest Sculpture Trail. The Discovery Centre has a research field lab that provides educational tours, programs and demonstrations as well as research projects that explore sustainability and stewardship within natural eco-systems. The Centre also operates a campground, which includes RV Parking and a Tipi Hostel. The WildCraft Forest Sculpture Trail is open during the summer months and is the setting for over 25 innovative contemporary artwork.

**STRATEGY 11.** Utilize the Island’s focus on sustainability to develop related product.

The Island’s focus on sustainability and the work of the Institute of Sustainability Education and Action (ISEA) provide a resource base for utilizing this theme to greater effect in the tourism market. ISEA has already hosted various workshops but there is potential to reposition these products, build a more clearly defined niche sector, and present the Island as a BC community at the forefront of sustainability.
issues and practices. However, strengthening this sector to this extent does involve continual analysis of existing Island practices to minimize inconsistencies and to demonstrate that the Island as a whole is indeed ‘walking the talk’.

**TACTICS:**

11.1. Work with I-SEA and interested stakeholders to review the potential for developing new workshops on sustainable technologies and practices, and opportunities for integrating other elements of the Island visitor experience into such products.

11.2. Continue to raise awareness of existing green programs affecting the tourism industry that have already been identified in this Tourism Plan – Green Key Eco-Rating program and the GreenTable Network. Encourage participation.

11.3. Undertake market research to identify appropriate audiences for various workshop related products and target accordingly.

11.4. There is ongoing work on developing healthy ecosystems through the *Health Ecosystems Health Community Initiative* on Salt Spring Island. Consider raising the profile of the Island in this area and extending the level of community responsibility through participating in an international program such as *The Natural Step*. The Natural Step (TNS) Framework is based on systems thinking and looks at a community holistically, acknowledging that what happens in one part of a system affects every other part. It uses an upstream approach that anticipates and avoids problems before they occur, rather than reacting to their downstream effects. Whistler was the first community in Canada to implement the Framework, followed more recently by Canmore in 2005. The Island of Hawai‘i is currently considering it, recognizing many of the challenges of a closed system.

**EXAMPLES:**

**Earthwalk Eco Education Centre, Ontario**

The Centre located on 5 acres offers sustainable educational experiences throughout Eastern Ontario and beyond. Its mission is to raise consciousness about sustainable solutions to social and environmental issues. It offers over 100 workshops, seminars and courses on subjects that range from eco home design and construction, healthy home solutions, renewable energy and eco transportation, to organic food production, eco gardens, and natural health strategies.

The various program areas are each targeted to specific audiences. The Green Building Programs, for example, are oriented towards architects, builders, planners as well as individuals planning on building or renovation. They explores a wide variety of eco design and construction solutions ranging from using renewable and/or recycled building materials to utilizing renewable energy, rain water harvesting, heat recovery, solar optimized windows, energy conservation, and alternative high efficiency building systems including techniques for straw bale, cord wood, timber frame, ICF’s and rammed earth. The green community programs cover the concepts associated with sustainable community development from eco landscaping and green roofs to urban agriculture and a systems approach to eco villages.

In the same manner, each of the other subject areas offers a range of topics that would appeal to a particular market segment. The programs are offered on and off location.
Radisson Hotel and Conference Centre, Canmore

The Canmore Radisson Hotel and Conference Centre was originally built in 1994 as the Greenwood Inn and has expanded from 90 guest rooms to 236, to become Canmore’s premier venue for large conferences and community events under the ownership of CHIP Real Estate Investment Trust. As a CHIP property, the Canmore Radisson was involved in CHIP’s environmental program – the Green Key ECOmmodation Rating Program prior to participating in The Natural Step to a Sustainable Canmore initiative. The Conference Centre had already implemented a series of sustainable practices and had established baseline data.

However, even with these practices in place, a high level mapping of the hotel's operations revealed a number of violations of The Natural Step’s four sustainability system conditions, ranging from a reliance on fossil fuels to contributing to the Third World pollution associated with lax environmental standards. In addition to looking at the hotel at that point in time, management also considered what it could look like if it met all of The Natural Step’s sustainability system conditions. The ultimate goal was for the hotel to have an environmental footprint no larger than the space it sat on.

The hotel’s sustainability vision statement, produced during the Natural Step Training, states: *Our vision is to provide outstanding customer service while moving towards sustainability. To do this we will evaluate every strategy, policy, partnership and procedure using the guiding principals of the Natural Step framework and its four sustainability system conditions.*

- Condition 1: Contributions to systematic increase of substances taken from earth’s crust
- Condition 2: Contributions to systematic increases in concentrations of substances created by society
- Condition 3: Contributions to degradation of nature
- Condition 4: Contributions to conditions that undermine people ability to meet their needs

In each case, responses to a series of searching questions allowed the Hotel to develop an Action Plan based on a range of short and longer-term tactics.

The Hotel features on *I Stay Green*, a website promoting green tourism options worldwide.

www.naturalstep.org; www.istaygreen.org

4.3 Supportive Experiences - the Retail Sector, Festivals & Events, Winter Product, Health & Wellness and Outdoor Recreation

**STRATEGY 12.** Strengthen the retail sector’s understanding of the visitor market and related opportunities to increase revenue.

Salt Spring Island has a diverse range of retail outlets that contribute significantly to the visitor experience and to the overall tourism economy. Visitors to the Island are a ‘captive’ audience and are looking for unique moments. The retail sector has the potential to play a vital role and many businesses have a clear appreciation of the affinity that exists between the two sectors. However, there are further opportunities to strengthen the association in a way that is mutually beneficial.
TACTICS:

12.1. Host a workshop that is aimed at the retail sector, including market vendors. Examine the potential role of tourism in contributing to the bottom line. Emphasize the need to understand the dynamics of the visitor market and visitor expectations in the context of retail.

- As already noted in Section 4.3, consideration should be given to offering Retail BC workshops – in particular Selling Memories and Serving World Customers, both of which would strengthen the retail sector as an integral component of the visitor experience.
- Encourage business owners to regularly review the demographic profile of their customers. Provide an advisory service through the Chamber that will assist owners in evaluating and implementing tactics focused on increasing revenue from this sector.
- Highlight the critical need to extend hours of business as a way of strengthening the evening experience, particularly during the summer months and long weekends.

12.2. The Saturday Market is a key attractor during the summer months and a significant element of the local economy both in terms of revenues generated, and in the Island’s positioning as a destination with a strong emphasis on local products and produce. Continue to explore opportunities to use the Markets as a means of increasing visitor spend on the Island.

- The spill-over effect has already been demonstrated and quantified. Encourage market vendors and permanent business owners to cross-market and cross-sell.
- As outlined in the previous strategy, consider developing new culinary tourism products that incorporate the purchasing of seasonal product in the Market as part of the overall experience.
- Highlight the Saturday Market in the shoulder season as a component in any packaged product.

12.3. Review shop local best practices elsewhere and work with local businesses to develop new tactics for promoting a heightened awareness of this approach to business growth. There is a program in place for residents (Residents Card), but visitors should also be targeted. Develop tracking procedures to monitor success.
EXAMPLE:

North-West Washington – Whatcom’s *Think Local – Buy Local – Be Local* Campaign

This campaign is aimed at increasing awareness about the personal, community and economic benefits of choosing local, independently owned businesses FIRST. In 2008 *Where the Locals Go!* coupon book was developed and is sold for $10 at a wide range of local outlets. Research conducted in 2006 noted that 3 in 5 households were attributing a behaviour change as a result of the initiative. More specifically, the findings cited that:

- 69% of local residents were familiar with the program;
- 58% were more deliberate about choosing local, independently owned businesses first;
- 47% were spending more locally;
- 92% of the participants would recommend the program to other businesses;
- 86% of participating businesses now consider whether a product is locally made/grown, or a store is locally owned when deciding on business purchases – 65% claim that this is a change in thinking which has come about since the program was launched.

Other DMOs and community organizations such as Tourism Thunder Bay and Our Fernie Community Co-Op have introduced coupon books aimed at residents and visitors alike. Coupons are likely to be increasingly attractive as a stimulant in a climate of economic downturn.

**STRATEGY 13.** Consolidate existing festivals and events and identify opportunities to strengthen and develop this sector.

Festivals and events have become a significant driver of tourism in many communities and can play an important role in strengthening niche sectors and a destination’s market positioning in relation to these sectors. There are a number of different festivals and events on Salt Spring Island with each being hosted by a range of interest groups or individual tourism operators. In moving forward there is a need to look at these festivals and events in a more strategic manner and to explore the scope for streamlining their planning, marketing and development.

**TACTICS:**

13.1. Develop a comprehensive database of all current festivals and events as part of the overall tourism inventory. Identify the relevant organizers, volunteers, festival supporters, resource
services and funding opportunities. Use this database for facilitating the hosting of events on the Island.

- Develop a marketing template that allows for the coordination and cross-marketing of events.

13.2. Identify potential to strengthen existing festival and event product and develop new product. Areas of consideration include:

- Expanding the geographic reach of existing events and developing a Southern Gulf Islands event;
- Amalgamating existing events that have a common theme to develop a larger festival with the potential to attract greater numbers;
- Exploring opportunities to develop a winter wildlife festival with Tourism Cowichan; and
- Packaging existing events with accommodation, restaurants and the option of air transportation to increase their value and marketability in the regional marketplace.

13.3. Create a process for evaluating the events and use this process to determine tactics for enhancing each event and generating new benefits. Various tools have been developed to assist with this process and consideration of an appropriate methodology should be built into the festival and events planning process\(^{25}\).

13.4. Hold an annual networking workshop for all event planners and organizers. Review strengths and weaknesses and develop tactics for future events. Discuss tactics in 13.2 and review findings from 13.3.

**STRATEGY 14. Develop new and innovative winter product around existing product sectors.**

Generating new winter business will increase the viability of small businesses and will assist in reducing the seasonality of tourism employment. When looking at the potential for developing a winter market, the emphasis should be on the BC markets. There are constraints in developing winter business as many services do close and the range of potential visitor experiences is greatly reduced. Building this sector will require new approaches, such as a B&B business being prepared to offer evening meals.

Winter tourism in BC is generally more price sensitive than summer tourism and value for money has to be demonstrated together with innovation.

**TACTICS:**

14.1. Work with interested stakeholders to assist them in developing and promoting products that attract enthusiasts regardless of weather, such as a short break based around birdwatching or hiking. Partnerships between stakeholders will assist in creating a more marketable product and

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\(^{25}\) Examples include Research Resolutions & Consulting Ltd., August 2005, *Guidelines for Measuring Tourism Economic Impact at Gated Events and Festivals*, and *Guidelines: Survey Procedures for Tourism Economic Impact Assessments of Ungated or Open Access Events and Festivals* – both these documents were financed by the CTC and the province/territory DMOs. This material can be accessed on the Tourism BC website at http://www.tourismbc.com/template_list_research.asp?id=7147.
can offer a business that is normally closed in winter the opportunity to be open by prearrangement.

- Weather is likely to be inclement, so focus on the contrast between the wildness and relative solitude outside and the romanticism of the indoors in winter – good cuisine, hot chocolate, warmth/open fires, table games etc. Selling winter products is largely based on creating an image.

- Highlight availability of facilities to dry clothing and footwear.

- For B&B/guest houses, operators could consider the possibility of working with restaurateurs/chefs that do not run a winter business to consider the option of preparing culinary experiences in the accommodation setting.

14.2. Work with participating stakeholders to develop a targeted mailing list and use a post-card campaign to promote a package. Use a signature image that will attract attention and create interest. Follow-up with further e-mail alerts.

**STRATEGY 15.** Support the ongoing growth of health and wellness product and related policies that promote active lifestyles and outdoor recreation.

The health and wellness sector is an area of tourism that has seen significant expansion of product and corresponding growth in demand. Whether it is regarded as a primary trip motivator or an experience that complements a wide range of other niche sectors, such as golf, nature-based tourism, or arts and culture, it is a component of a destination that is becoming increasingly important. Within Salt Spring Island there is a growing availability of wellness product at venues such as Hastings House and Salt Springs Spa Resort, together with a range of related services and activities that include various alternative therapies and workshops. This provides a solid base to build on, and is in keeping with the Island's overall emphasis on healthy lifestyles. Moreover, it is an ideal sector to utilize in strengthening the shoulder and winter season visitor experience.

**TACTICS:**

15.1. While there is an array of product and practitioners on the Island, the ‘healing arts’ is not a coordinated sector and is not reflected to any significant extent in the ‘positioning’ of the destination. The degree to which the product is ‘export ready’ varies considerably from a high-end component through to a wide range of small-scale therapy-based businesses. There is a need to undertake a complete scan of this sector and to develop an inventory of available products and services. Providing an initial forum/workshop for discussion will assist in assessing the overall strengths and weaknesses of this sector and next steps in moving forward. It is likely that a mentorship/advisory program would be invaluable in expanding this sector’s capacity to integrate more effectively with the tourism industry.

15.2. At the time of finalizing this Tourism Plan, work has just been completed on the Salt Spring Island Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan (December 2009). This report focuses on the Island’s parks and recreation facilities, which are not only an essential component of Island life, but also enrich the visitor’s experience and spectrum of available opportunities, and are key to attracting the family market. The report highlights a series of recommendations that are designed to improve facilities and the operational framework within which recreation services are offered. Not surprisingly there are strategies and tactics within the report that are common to this Tourism Plan, and every effort
should be made by the Tourism Committee and associated stakeholders to support the implementation of the Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan.

- Continue to highlight the range of outdoor recreational opportunities in marketing communications and identify opportunities to promote and package the services of activity operators. Emphasising the value of building innovative partnerships between operators and the accommodation sector, and profiling the range of businesses in a reservations service will assist in raising awareness and generating increased visitor spend.
5. Supporting Infrastructure and Services

GOAL:
Strengthen the competitiveness of Salt Spring Island through infrastructural enhancements and the introduction of new visitor services.

STRATEGIES:
16. Address the need for recycling facilities in all high use areas (including Ganges, the Marinas, public parks and ferry terminals), and the need to improve waste disposal facilities for Marina users.
17. Work towards reducing congestion in Ganges in the peak season through transit and parking initiatives.
18. Improve level of visitor services and facilities at the Marinas and increase boat access in Ganges.
19. Enhance the visual appeal of Ganges and other focal points on the Island.
20. Provide a reservations service for accommodation, activities and tours at the Visitor Centre.
21. Support existing initiatives to bring broadband internet to all of Salt Spring Island.

The planning workshops highlighted the need to address a number of infrastructural issues on the Island and to deliver new tourism services. Such strategies are designed to strengthen the sense of place and improve the overall image of Salt Spring Island and the ease with which the visitor can experience the Island.

STRATEGY 16. Address the need for recycling facilities in all high use areas (including Ganges, the Marinas, public parks and ferry terminals), and the need to improve waste disposal facilities for Marina users.

While there is a recycling depot at Rainbow Road for Salt Spring Island residents, there are no facilities in the areas of high visitor use to collect recyclable waste products. This was an area of major concern to many of the workshop participants as unnecessary levels of visitor waste are going into the landfill. Furthermore, the underlying 'message' that the lack of recycling receptacles conveys on an Island that has a high level of concern for sustainability and the health of its environment is contradictory to its core values. Given that the OCP recognizes the need to support the reduction, recycling and reuse of solid waste materials (C.4.3.1.2) generated by residents and visitors alike, this is an issue of high priority.26

26 A three month pilot project sponsored by the CRD ran during the summer of this year. The longer-term outcome of this project was not known at the time of writing this Plan.
In addition to the recycling issue, there is the need to improve general waste disposal facilities for marine-based visitors and recreational vehicles.

**TACTICS:**

16.1. Work with partners to provide recycling bins in all areas of high pedestrian traffic.

- Pursue all potential funding sources to establish operational funds for the recycling service and waste collection. Sources include PARC, CRD, the Islands Trust, the Salt Spring Foundation and a voluntary levy from business owners (for general beautification) or a sponsorship program.

- Collaborate with PARC to provide and service six double-sided bins for Centennial Park, Mouat's Park and Rotary Park.

- Work with business owners to highlight the need for cooperation in providing the service. It is anticipated that the Chamber of Commerce will play a lead role in these discussions. The estimated number of bins required for Ganges, the Marina areas and the three ferry terminals is ten. If a sponsorship program is utilized to assist in funding the recycling initiative, use the bins to identify key sponsors. Alternatively the receptacles can be used to profile a new brand mark (Tactic 20.5).

- Establish a contract for pick-up services.

16.2. Encourage the Islands Trust to continue its policy of supporting the provision of sani-dump facilities for boats and recreational vehicles (OCP B.3.1.2.6) and to establish a pump zone bylaw.

**STRATEGY 17. Work towards reducing congestion in Ganges in the peak season through transit and parking initiatives.**

There are congestion problems in peak season that need to be addressed to mitigate any detrimental impact tourism may be having on the quality of life of local residents.

**TACTICS:**

17.1. There is work in progress aimed at implementing the *North Ganges Village Transportation Management Plan* and Phase One of the implementation process has commenced. This is looking at the design of the proposed infrastructural improvements, including those relating to bicycle lanes, bus stops, pedestrian access and traffic control. The Tourism Committee should attend all ‘open house’ meetings associated with this project.

17.2. Support current initiatives associated with providing suitable tour bus parking areas to assist in maintaining this market.

17.3. Continue to work with the Salt Spring Island Transportation Commission to develop scheduling for the new BC Transit service. Where possible, increase the connections with arrivals and departures at ferry terminals to ease the level of vehicular traffic on the roads. Such scheduling will need to include Sundays.

- If capacity is available, consider collaborating with Market vendors to offer a Market discount voucher scheme for visitors that use the transit service rather than their personal vehicles.
Work with tourism businesses to develop packages that offer opportunities for Transit travellers to experience the Island. Packages should include accommodation and attraction options – all sited on the scheduled routes. Use discounts as a means of increasing the marketability of these packages in the regional marketplace.

**STRATEGY 18.** Improve level of visitor services and facilities at the Marinas and increase boat access in Ganges.

**TACTICS:**

18.1. The majority of marine-based arrivals stay within the vicinity of Ganges. There is a need to develop innovative ways of encouraging these visitors to explore other parts of the Island thereby helping to spread the economic returns from this sector of the market.

- Work with BC Transit and the Salt Spring Island Transport Commission to designate the Marinas as scheduled bus stops.
- Develop touring packages associated with the bus route. Work with tourism businesses to offer discount incentives and packaged products that will make this an attractive option. These packages should be available for purchase at the Marina and the Visitor Centre with a commission fee being directed to the Chamber as revenue for the tourism function.
- Develop similar incentive-based packages for visitors renting other forms of transport inclusive of a shuttle service or pick-up.

18.2. Support the existing proposal for dinghy dock expansion in Ganges.

18.3. Support the retention and expansion of washroom/shower facilities for boaters at marinas.

**STRATEGY 19.** Enhance the visual appeal of Ganges and other focal points on the Island.

A tourism industry that aims at embracing the authenticity of the community and celebrating its local distinctiveness must promote and support the need for funding to be directed toward projects that will enhance the visual appeal of focal points on Salt Spring Island and will strengthen the sense of place and the unique qualities the Island.

**TACTICS:**

19.1. Develop an Art Banner Walk along Upper and Lower Ganges Road from Hastings House to the Village. This Banner Walk will reinforce the positioning of Salt Spring Island as a destination renowned for its arts and will provide an opportunity to celebrate local artists.

- Develop an inventory of potential banner locations and installation requirements. Gain permission from the necessary parties.
- Identify universal hardware specifications and develop design guidelines for the banners (e.g. text font and size etc.).
- Implement an application process that provides the Tourism Committee with an opportunity to determine design.
Work with PARC to erect the banners.

19.2. Consider entering the BC Communities in Bloom for 2010. There are various registration categories that are dependent on community size and range from community show-case projects to full competitive status. The program as a whole promotes civic pride, environmental responsibility and beautification within set criteria and works well as a collaborative effort engaging citizens of all ages, service groups, businesses, associations and local government in a public-spirited effort to succeed and be recognized within the community. The program criteria include: Tidiness, Environmental Awareness, Community Involvement, Natural & Cultural Heritage Conservation, Tree/Urban Forest Management, Landscaped Areas, Floral Displays, and Turf & Groundcover.

Consider working with the Japanese Garden Society to enter Heiwa Garden as a showcase project. Other possible lead partners in this initiative include Service Clubs and the High School.

19.3. Pursue other steps to improve the look and feel of local areas.

- Display hanging flower baskets and planters.
- Establish procedures for removing garbage from focal beaches.

**EXAMPLE:**

Heritage Garden – Town of Lake Cowichan (featured showcase project 2008)

This garden started out as a weedy gravel area that was an eyesore in the centre of the Town by the Tourist Booth. The Communities in Bloom Committee held market days on Saturdays throughout one summer to raise funds to cover the cost of an irrigation system. The plants were donated and the Town allocated a budget to the Committee for turf, fine gravel for paths, and soil. The garden is weeded and maintained by the Committee and continues to bring much pleasure to all in the community.

**STRATEGY 20.** Provide a reservations service for accommodation, activities and tours at the Visitor Centre.

Considerable discussion took place during the planning process regarding the need for a concierge service. In keeping with the objectives that were being highlighted, it is recommended that the Visitor Centre develop a reservations service. An effective service should increase business across all sectors.

**TACTICS:**

20.1. Develop a commission-based booking/reservations service within the Visitor Centre with the fee being directed towards the tourism function. Promote the availability of the service on the Salt Spring Island tourism website and in all promotional material relating to the Island.

27 see http://www.bccommunitiesinbloom.ca
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- Develop packaged itineraries and offer the option of customized itineraries to visitors. Work with tour guides such as Island Gourmet Safaris to facilitate tours.
- Use a tiered Chamber membership package to determine stakeholder participants in the program, with those paying a higher membership fee being eligible. Charge a commission fee on all bookings.
- Ensure that the Visitor Centre staff involved in administering the program are familiar with all accommodation properties and tourism businesses that are on offer.

STRATEGY 21. Support existing initiatives to bring broadband Internet to all of Salt Spring Island.

There is a group of residents on the Island seeking federal funding support to move forward with bringing broadband Internet access to all of Salt Spring. This is an initiative that should be supported by the Tourism Committee as good Internet access is essential to compete effectively in today’s marketplace. Aside from the tourism industry, broadband Internet would open up new economic opportunities for residents that would be entirely in keeping with all the underlying principles of sustainability.

TACTICS:

21.1. The Tourism Committee should encourage all partners to lobby for the necessary funding.
6. Marketing Communications

**GOAL:**

*Build awareness of Salt Spring Island as an arts and cultural destination with a distinctive island identity and increase the value of tourism through an integrated marketing and communications strategy.*

**STRATEGIES:**

**External Marketing**

22. Complete the work that has commenced on branding Salt Spring Island and build brand awareness.

23. Develop an up-to-date image bank and media kit.

24. Review existing print material and develop new collateral to reflect the positioning and branding.

25. Develop a promotional strategy that focuses on building market awareness within the targeted markets.

26. Review existing Island experiences and utilize innovative packaging as a means toward creating new interest in Salt Spring Island and encouraging increased visitor spend.

27. Develop an Island-focused web-based marketing strategy.

28. Develop effective marketing feedback and control systems.

**Communications with Local Industry & Community**

29. Develop mechanisms for communicating with industry stakeholders.

30. Build a greater awareness and appreciation for the tourism industry throughout the Island.

To date there has been no strategic approach to marketing Salt Spring Island as a destination. The Chamber produces an annual visitor guide to the Island and the Gulf Islands newspaper company (Driftwood Publishing Ltd.) produces a publication for the Southern Gulf Islands as a region. However, beyond these efforts the responsibility for marketing the Island experiences has fallen to the private sector. As a result the Island lacks clear market identity as a destination and overall positioning is weak. Recently there have been efforts to look at off-season marketing opportunities, but a lack of funding remains a key constraint.

This section of the Tourism Plan identifies a number of strategies that will need to be employed over the coming three years. While the availability of funding will ultimately determine what can be done to
strengthen the presence of Salt Spring Island in the marketplace, the development of a more strategic approach to planning through the ongoing work and discussions of the new partnership-based Tourism Committee is likely to generate greater returns on investment than would otherwise occur.

In implementing a marketing and communications strategy, consideration needs to be given to identifying the range of target markets and audiences. These can be grouped into two main categories – ‘external’ and ‘internal’ as follows:

External:
- Primary geographic markets – the regional markets of the central and southern regions of Vancouver Island, the Lower Mainland and Seattle.
  - Short-stay markets; baby boomers
  - International visitors within the regional markets (primarily European and US) – looking to visit Salt Spring Island as day visitors or one night stays
- Secondary markets include Alberta and rest of Canada where Salt Spring Island is likely to be a component of a longer trip.
- Niche markets – arts and heritage; ecotourism; marine-based tourism
- The travel trade – tour operators and travel agents
- The travel media – writers in travel and relevant areas of interest, such as sustainability.

Internal:
- All tourism stakeholders on Salt Spring Island
- The wider business community on the Island
- Partner organizations
- Local, regional and provincial politicians and local and regional government staff
- Island residents
- Regional and provincial tourism organizations – Tourism Vancouver Island, Tourism BC, BC Agritourism Alliance, the Culinary Tourism Society BC etc.
- Regional tourism stakeholders – as a means of increasing regional collaboration

6.1 External Marketing Strategy

Effective marketing involves creating a distinctive place in the minds of potential visitors. To do so requires moving away from generic messaging and adopting an approach that will clearly evoke distinct images in the customer’s mind and will differentiate Salt Spring Island from other destinations in BC. If a more targeted approach to marketing is adopted then positioning is the next step in determining the attributes that are meaningful to potential visitors. This strategic positioning should be reflected in all communications, policies and procedures in a way that generates consistency and conveys images that are believable, benefits that are desirable, and an indication that the Island can deliver on its ‘promise’. Branding is an important element of a positioning strategy and work has already commenced on developing a new brand.

In the final analysis marketing and product delivery are fundamentally interlinked. When the actual experience matches or exceeds the expectations generated by the promotional messages, the
marketing is strengthened significantly by word-of-mouth and referral, visitor numbers grow, and length of stay and visitor expenditure can be increased. On the other hand where there is a ‘disconnect’ between a community’s product and the promoted image of the destination, the effectiveness of the marketing can be severely undermined.

The following strategies are primarily focusing on increasing independent leisure travel visitation, particularly in the shoulder and winter seasons, and improving visitor spend and length of stay year round. Salt Spring Island’s location and good accessibility lends itself to being able to develop a strong short stay market. To do so successfully, however, is as much dependent on product development and the delivery of new creative experiences as it is to marketing – hence the significant focus on product development in Section 4.

**STRATEGY 22.** Complete the work that has commenced on branding Salt Spring Island and build brand awareness.

The planning process voiced a strong need to develop a new and distinct identity for Salt Spring Island and funding has been made available for a branding project.

Care should be taken to work in partnership with all key partners from within the community as a similar need for branding has been noted in other contexts – namely the OCP (B.3.1.2.15) and the Salt Spring Island Area Farm Plan. It is recommended that the community develops an umbrella brand that captures the overall essence of the Island and is applicable in different contexts. This will strengthen the image and reinforce the brand.

**TACTICS:**

22.1. Define the brand proposition ensuring that it is ultimately a single proposition that resonates with potential customers as an emotional trigger that increases the likelihood of pursuing a Salt Spring Island experience. This should define how Salt Spring Island wishes to be perceived as a destination vis-à-vis other destinations.

22.2. Define and understand the differentiating attributes of the Island’s core product – Island art; experiences ‘made in Salt Spring Island’; Island life; and the Island setting in terms of its unique environment and its potential for ecotourism.

- Review how other Island product can add value to the core experiences

22.3. Ensure that promotional messages embody the brand but do not generate the type of image that would ultimately undermine the character of the Island. The brand should be seen as a key tool in both promoting the essence of Salt Spring Island and in preserving that essence and the authenticity of the community.

22.4. Once the branding process is complete undertake a media relations campaign with both the travel and the arts media to promote the new brand.

22.5. Include the brand mark on all new promotional material and the art banners.

- Have the design firm produce a graphics standard manual that includes all the technical specifications of the brand mark, including a stakeholder version of it.
- Encourage all businesses to adopt the stakeholder version when developing new collateral.
STRATEGY 23. Develop an up-to-date image bank and media kit.

All communications rely on good visual images and up-to-date stories and information. The availability of such material is not only important for regular marketing communications, but it is vital in attracting travel writers and the travel trade.

TACTICS:

23.1. Create an image bank of visual material that depict all aspects of Island life, with particular focus on the primary product sectors and images that will reinforce the positioning. If a photographer is retained for this purpose, ensure that the images are available royalty-free for use in all media. High resolution images are required for all print purposes.

23.2. Develop and maintain an up-to-date media kit. Include an inventory of quick facts about the Island.
   - Create inspiring and newsworthy editorial copy that is seasonal and/or product specific and share with Tourism Vancouver Island. Target relevant specialized media and travel writers with press releases.

STRATEGY 24. Review existing print material and develop new collateral to reflect the positioning and branding.

TACTICS:

24.1. Consider amalgamating the Salt Spring Island Visitor Guide into The Gulf Islander Visitors’ Guide. The benefit of having both publications in circulation is somewhat questionable and one regional publication would reduce costs for local stakeholders thereby creating a greater likelihood of participation in alternative marketing programs. Tourism North Vancouver Island, a new destination management organization acting on behalf of the northern communities, is seeking to follow this same principle of focusing on developing sub-regional collateral.
   - Ensure that the content of new print material reflects the new positioning and branding.

24.2. Develop new collateral material for the trails and related experiences with the GPS coordinates included.

24.3. Work with the Islands Trust to develop new interpretive/promotional material for local heritage

STRATEGY 25. Develop a promotional strategy that focuses on building market awareness within the targeted markets.

It is anticipated that the tactics employed will increase as the availability of funds increases. Gaining return on investment can be maximized through working in effective partnerships with other DMOs and with local stakeholders.
TACTICS:

25.1. Work closely with Tourism Vancouver Island and identify opportunities where the Chamber can partner cooperatively with other stakeholders to promote the Island as a destination. Publications such as *Westworld* and Tourism BC’s *British Columbia Magazine* reach wide audiences. In the past participation has been based entirely on private sector buy-in and has not necessarily reflected a strategic approach for the Island as a whole.

- The use of local funds can be used more effectively with Tourism Vancouver Island through opportunities to leverage with the *Tourism Partners* program and with Tourism BC’s *Community Tourism Opportunities™* program.

25.2. Develop presence on the *Van Dop Arts & Cultural Guide to British Columbia*.

- Participate in related programs such as *Art of the Getaway*

25.3. Utilize the regional press in the Lower Mainland, Victoria and Seattle to promote getaway special packages.

25.4. Work with Tourism Vancouver Island to gain increased access to relevant travel trade and travel media.

- Assist Tourism Vancouver Island with hosting ‘familiarization’ tours for the travel trade and travel media. Focus particularly on shoulder and winter season experiences.

25.5. Identify relevant consumer travel and lifestyle shows and attend priority shows as funding becomes available. Work in partnership with adjacent communities/islands to reduce costs and create greater critical mass.

25.6. As the Tourism Committee gains positive profile and funding becomes available, consider establishing a Southern Gulf Islands DMO to act as a sub-regional management and marketing organization. This could lead to increased efficiencies in marketing through a pooling of resources and would assist in developing sub-regional packages.

**STRATEGY 26.** Review existing Island experiences and utilize innovative packaging as a means toward creating new interest in Salt Spring Island and encouraging increased visitor spend.

TACTICS:

26.1. Work with all tourism operators and related businesses to highlight the need to develop new experiences and to add value to existing experiences through building partnerships and producing new packaged products – continue to do so on an ongoing basis.

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28 Audience: BCAA members are an educated, affluent and highly motivated demographic: 72% of readers have post-secondary education with 23% in the professions or senior management; 77% own their own home. Circulation: 530,595 copies per issue. Home-delivered to BCAA members and widely distributed at BCAA outlets throughout the province.

29 With over 1.2 million readers, and annual cumulative impressions of 2.1 million, British Columbia Magazine ranks in the top 20 paid-circulation English magazines in the country. Readers travel frequently, lead active lifestyles, and share a passion for B.C.
Hold Tourism BC’s *Tourism Packaging and Product Distribution* workshop from the Tourism Business Essentials program.

Develop themed getaway packages for spring and fall and the winter season. Promote in the regional marketplace using local press and radio. Target specific market segments such as women or the leisure learning market.

26.2. Target specific regional communities such as Cowichan Valley and develop exchange packages over a specific period in the off-season. Encourage residents in each community to benefit from discount pricing to experience the neighbouring destination.

26.3. Review opportunities to partner with regional stakeholders and create an inclusive island hopping product that incorporates accommodation, travel, and unique experiences. Stakeholders such as BC Ferries offers special discounts for frequent movement between islands, but these may not be entirely suited to the actual package. Work with the airlines and BC Ferries to explore opportunities of developing an inclusive price, thereby saving the customer time and effort in trying to coordinate different elements.

26.4. Establish a 1-800 call-to-action number for all promotional campaigns and marketing material. The calls must be taken by someone with a comprehensive level of knowledge regarding the various campaigns and alternative opportunities.

**STRATEGY 27.** Develop an Island-focused web-based marketing strategy.

The Internet is often the prospective visitor’s first point of contact with a destination and has become a key tool in vacation planning for the independent traveller. In addition to the early stages of trip planning, a growing number of travellers are using the Internet while on the vacation itself. Access to accurate and timely information is critical, and while print material remains important, the Internet as the message medium must be given much greater priority. In the case of Salt Spring Island, the main community website for tourism is the Chamber’s site at www.saltspringtourism.com. While this site provides a comprehensive and categorized list of all tourism ‘member’ businesses with links to all of their websites, there are no tools to assist in planning a vacation and the user has to move back and forward between linked websites. Fortunately the new community content on HelloBC.com provides a viable alternative resource, although this does not provide a rationale for overlooking the community website.

**TACTICS:**

27.1. Use professional services to refresh the design and content of the Chamber tourism pages to reflect the new positioning and branding for Salt Spring Island. Pay particular attention to the functionality of the pages and the ease of browsing. Link the current ‘Virtual Tours’ page to the tourism menu.

- Utilize a search engine optimization program.
- Develop the tourism information base on the site and integrate online versions of all print collateral.

27.2. Work with stakeholders to raise awareness regarding Tourism BC’s Listings Program and encourage a high level of participation in the program. Stakeholders not participating will not be featured in HelloBC.com.
Refer stakeholders to TourismBC.net for a comprehensive list of programs designed to assist stakeholders in connecting with consumers.

27.3. Utilize travel blogging as a mechanism to generate new and ongoing interest in Salt Spring Island as a unique vacation experience. The use of Twitter, a micro-blogging tool, offers potential to attract attention to new products and special offers. Similarly mechanisms such as Flickr and YouTube provide opportunities for sharing visual material and unique moments, as does the Canadian Tourism Commission’s LocalsKnow.ca website.

Encourage blog entries on HelloBC.com and use the Share the Excitement!™ widget to highlight the blog entries on the Salt Spring Tourism website and other Island stakeholder websites.

27.4. Develop a page for the travel trade and tour operators. Develop and post suggested itineraries.

**STRATEGY 28. Develop effective marketing feedback and control systems.**

Developing feedback and control mechanisms is essential to measuring the effectiveness of marketing Salt Spring Island as a destination and the return on marketing investment. These tracking mechanisms will complement any work that is undertaken in developing indicators and measuring the value of tourism, and will shape the ongoing planning process.

**TACTICS:**

28.1. Ensure that all targets established are measurable and that systems are in place to track and evaluate effectively.

- Include procedures for collecting and collating unsolicited positive and negative comments. Review and respond accordingly.

28.2. Establish measuring devices and tracking systems for specific promotional campaigns that measure enquiries generated and actual sales.

- Track effectiveness of any discounting techniques to gauge impact of price adjustments.

28.3. Develop procedures for assessing the effectiveness of public relations such as media space gained and number of feature articles in the press.

28.4. Use feedback measurements in the annual review of the tourism industry and in forward planning for marketing and product development.

**6.2 Communications with Local Industry and the Community**

A healthy tourism industry requires community-wide understanding of its value and the positive impact that can be derived from it. Tourism generates new revenue in the local economy and its ‘ripple effect’ can be critical to the viability of many affiliated businesses. An appreciation for these internal economic dynamics will assist in building the level of support that is necessary from the resident and business community and in attracting a greater level of local and regional political commitment and funding.
STRATEGY 29.  Develop mechanisms for communicating with industry stakeholders.

The tourism industry can be significantly strengthened through developing mechanisms that facilitate regular communication and encourage dialogue. The formation of the Tourism Committee is an important step in establishing dialogue between divergent interests and in working towards strategic consensus. It is equally important to communicate outwards in a way that will consolidate the industry and develop a sense of ‘community’. Tourism is a fragmented sector by its very nature, and creating dialogue will assist in moving towards common goals and will improve the industry’s ability to respond proactively to visitor needs, changing trends, issues and opportunities.

TACTICS:

29.1. Develop an electronic newsletter for all stakeholders with an interest in tourism. Use the newsletter to communicate marketing opportunities, best practices, industry trends, performance indicators, regional news and professional development opportunities.

29.2. Develop a weekly promotional flyer for activities on the Island and circulate as a pdf file to all accommodation stakeholders. Request high visibility for the flyer in bedrooms and lobbies. The flyer could be used to promote vouchers (based on an advertising ‘fee’).

   Driftwood Publishing Ltd. produce a weekly “What’s On” in the newspaper. Discuss options for using this or developing an alternative style and format.

29.3. Host an annual tourism event to highlight the annual work plan. Commence with holding an event to launch the Tourism Plan and to introduce the new Tourism Committee. Use each occasion for networking and to profile relevant trends and opportunities.

29.4. Build links with the regional and provincial industry through ensuring that tourism employee and Committee members attend either the Tourism Vancouver Island AGM/Conference and/or the COTA Provincial Tourism Industry Conference.

STRATEGY 30.  Build a greater awareness and appreciation for the tourism industry throughout the Island.

Building a competitive tourism industry requires support from the entire community – residents, businesses and politicians alike. This support is not entirely forthcoming at this stage and will have to be nurtured and developed proactively through an effective community public relations program that demonstrates the benefits to be derived from the tourism industry.

In nurturing a general appreciation of the tourism industry, it is also important to develop specific product knowledge within the community. The Visitor Centre and Chamber staff and volunteers in particular, together with frontline staff, owners and managers in accommodation, hospitality services and retail all have a key role to play in disseminating relevant visitor information and in motivating visitors to visit specific attractions and participate in various activities. To do so effectively there needs to be processes in place that will help stakeholders build this awareness and knowledge base.

Likewise local residents will have a substantial impact on the activity patterns of visitors who fall into the category of ‘visiting friends and relatives’ and tactics need to be in place that will assist residents in being effective hosts.
TACTICS:

30.1. Work with local media on an ongoing basis to enhance knowledge and understanding of the tourism industry and its value to the economy.

- Develop regular press releases for the local press and radio on tourism ‘stories’ of interest and the overall tourism economy.
- Encourage stakeholders to keep the Chamber informed of new or improved product.
- Organize and promote familiarization tours for frontline staff, other businesses and residents. Invite stakeholders from neighbouring communities/islands, Tourism Victoria, Tourism Cowichan etc. to increase awareness of Salt Spring Island experiences.
- Participate in the Victoria Attractions Association “Be a Tourist in your own Hometown” initiative in early March.

30.2. Establish a stand at the Saturday Market and highlight the services of the Visitor Centre, the availability of any discount/buy local coupons, special/seasonal features at particular attractions, and provide relevant print material that will encourage spontaneous business.

30.3. Make presentations to the Island’s Service Clubs regarding the tourism industry.

30.4. Work with Gulf Islands Secondary School to increase awareness of tourism and related careers.

- Assist school staff in developing project/case-study material to support curricula.
- Work with the school to provide opportunities for senior students completing their Graduation Transitions program. The program has a Community Connections component that requires students to demonstrate at least 30 hours of work experience and/or community service. Identify relevant volunteer opportunities within the tourism industry that would allow students to demonstrate the skills required to work effectively and safely with others and to succeed as individual and collaborative workers. Review Suggested Achievement Indicators with interested stakeholders and event organizers in determining suitable opportunities.

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7. Implementation

Effective implementation of this Tourism Plan is dependent on three critical factors: the development of a strong underlying organizational structure; long-term sustainable funding; and a commitment to ongoing planning. The Plan has outlined recommendations for establishing a Tourism Committee, and has identified the need for new core funding. The funding is critical not only on terms of increasing the community’s ability to participate in new marketing programs, but also in terms of creating the human resources needed to implement the Plan. With these two elements addressed successfully, the industry’s ability to plan and move forward on a more strategic basis will be greatly enhanced.

7.1 Annual Planning

This Tourism Plan provides strategic direction for the next five years. To move forward effectively, however, the Tourism Committee will need to use the Plan each year to identify immediate priorities and establish an Annual Work Plan. This Work Plan should highlight partners/stakeholders responsible for the implementation of each initiative and should establish a budget. In establishing this budget, there should be close consultation with Tourism Vancouver Island to determine availability of partnership programs such as Tourism BC’s Community Tourism Opportunities program, and to assist with identifying appropriate activities.

This Tourism Plan has stressed the need for regular monitoring. Such monitoring is essential for effective annual planning and for tracking the performance and growth of the tourism industry. The following exhibit summarizes the ongoing monitoring/planning approach and demonstrates how the strategic directions for Salt Spring Island can be refined and modified on the basis of progress and changing market trends. This ensures that the Salt Spring Island Tourism Plan remains a working document.

![Diagram of Annual Planning Process]

Source: Tourism Planning Group
Appendix

Inaugural Tourism Committee

The arts sector – Gary Cherneff
Agritourism – Marguerite Lee (Chair)
Attractions/recreation/golf – Candace Snow
The accommodation sector – Nora Layard
Capital Regional District – Garth Hendren
Islands Trust – George Ehiring
Salt Spring Parks and Recreation Commission (PARC) – Gayle Baker
The Chamber of Commerce/Visitor Centre – Gail Sibley
Transportation – Harold Swierenga
The Marinas – John Roland
Sustainability interest groups – Margery Moore