



# THOMPSON OKANAGAN

## Sustainable Tourism Observatory: Thompson Okanagan, Canada **Annual Report: 2025**

Published by

# TOTA

THOMPSON OKANAGAN  
TOURISM ASSOCIATION

May 2026

**INSTO** | World Tourism Organization  
International Network  
of Sustainable Tourism  
Observatories

**Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association (TOTA)**

**Sustainable Tourism Observatory**

**Annual Report - 2025 Edition**

E. Walker Matthews, R. MacDonald, E. Layman

We thank the International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (INSTO) from the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UN Tourism), chaired by Dr. Dirk Glaesser, for the continued knowledge exchange through this network. We also thank our partners and colleagues at TOTA and our research department Symphony Tourism Services, who kindly shared their time and effort.

Current and past TOTA INSTO reports can be found here:

<https://www.totabc.org/destination-stewardship-blog/insto>

2280-D Leckie Road

Kelowna, British Columbia, V1X 6G6

Phone: +1 250-860-5999

[Info@TOTABC.com](mailto:Info@TOTABC.com)

[TOTABC.org](https://www.totabc.org)

## Acknowledgements

The INSTO team at TOTA would like to express gratitude to all those who provided their time and expertise towards the completion of this year's report, including:

- Eve Layman, Destination Development & Stewardship Specialist, serves as the lead for this report. As a key member of the INSTO team, she oversees the report's overall development and is responsible for the organization, management, and writing of any sections not specifically covered by our contributing co-authors listed below.
- Sonja Gaudet, Access & Inclusion Liaison, is a retired Paralympic athlete and gold medalist. Her knowledge and lived experience as an active and independent daily wheelchair user allows TOTA to offer wheelchair accessibility consultations, including assessments of key priority features for individuals who have low vision, hard of hearing, and sensory requirements. Sonja gave the report a true understanding of the Accessibility section.
- Jamie Bourne, Indigenous Tourism BC - Indigenous Tourism Specialist, Community Engagement & Development, works across the Thompson Okanagan, Kootenay Rockies, and Cariboo Chilcotin Coast regions on behalf of Indigenous Tourism BC. Jamie supports Indigenous communities, entrepreneurs, and organizations by helping build the skills, tools, and opportunities needed to develop market-ready tourism experiences, programs, and services. Her work focuses on strengthening community engagement, fostering partnerships, supporting tourism development initiatives, and advancing Indigenous economic development through training, marketing support, and business development resources. Jamie believes that Indigenous-led cultural tourism creates meaningful opportunities to balance socio-economic growth while protecting, celebrating, and sharing Indigenous cultures, traditions, and stories for future generations.
- Harshit Srivastava is an Energy Specialist with experience in energy management and sustainability analysis for tourism businesses. He contributed to the research, content development, and analytical assessment of the energy section of this report. His work focuses on identifying energy efficiency opportunities and promoting sustainable operational practices. Harshit combines technical expertise with practical insights to support environmentally responsible business strategies.
- Leonardo Arroyo Trejo is a Research Specialist at Symphony Tourism Services, a TOTA subsidiary. He was responsible for researching, sourcing and analyzing key tourism data, visitation and economic indicators, and contributed to the report's charts, explanations, and editing.
- Sandra Schira is the Water Science Specialist of the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB). Sandra is responsible for water and climate trends research in the Okanagan, including data analysis, writing and presenting technical reports, as well developing and implementing projects to help tackle these issues. She developed and maintains the OBWB's Climate Indicators Dashboard and supports its Hydrometric Monitoring Program. Sandra contributed to the report by providing support for the section on water management and climate action.

**INSTO issue area checklist:**

| Issue Area             | MST Pillar    | MST-Aligned Metric                                             | Status           |
|------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Seasonality            | Economic      | Distribution of tourism demand by month (% of annual total)    | Available        |
|                        | Social        | Seasonality of tourism employment (% seasonal/short-term jobs) | Available        |
| Employment             | Economic      | Tourism employment as a share of total regional employment     | Available(proxy) |
|                        | Social        | Tourism wage quality (median wage vs regional median)          | Available        |
| Economic Benefits      | Economic      | Tourism visitor expenditure per resident                       | Available        |
|                        | Economic      | Tourism share of regional GDP                                  | Available(proxy) |
| Local Satisfaction     | Social        | Residents agreeing tourism has a positive impact (%)           | Available        |
|                        | Social        | Perceived tourism pressure by season ("too much / too little") | Available(proxy) |
| Energy Management      | Environmental | Peak-season electricity demand relative to annual average (%)  | Available(proxy) |
|                        | Environmental | Availability of EV charging infrastructure                     | Available        |
| Water Management       | Environmental | Peak-season water demand relative to annual monthly average    | Available(proxy) |
|                        | Environmental | Basin drought / water stress classification during peak season | Available        |
| Wastewater Management  | Environmental | Wastewater treatment coverage and treatment level              | Available(proxy) |
|                        | Environmental | Wastewater system stress during peak tourism periods           | Available        |
| Solid Waste Management | Environmental | Per-capita solid waste disposal rate (destination-wide)        | Available(proxy) |
|                        | Environmental | Waste diversion and management readiness                       | Available        |
| Climate Action         | Environmental | Number of climate-related disruption events annually           | Available        |
|                        | Environmental | Annual % growth in EV charging infrastructure                  | Available        |
| Accessibility          | Social        | Availability of accessible tourism infrastructure              | Available(proxy) |
|                        | Institutional | Institutional commitment to accessibility                      | Available        |
| Governance             | Institutional | Existence and currency of a regional sustainability framework  | Available        |
|                        | Institutional | Continuity and transparency of sustainability monitoring       | Available        |

## Table of Contents

|                                                                                                 |           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Acknowledgements.....                                                                           | 3         |
| INSTO issue area checklist:.....                                                                | 4         |
| <b>Foreword.....</b>                                                                            | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>Executive Summary.....</b>                                                                   | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>A. General information.....</b>                                                              | <b>5</b>  |
| A.1. Population characteristics.....                                                            | 5         |
| A.2. First Nation communities population.....                                                   | 7         |
| A.3. Natural area.....                                                                          | 7         |
| <b>B. Tourism Seasonality (Economic / Social - MST).....</b>                                    | <b>8</b>  |
| B.1. Distribution of tourism demand by month (% of annual total).....                           | 8         |
| B.2. Seasonality of tourism employment (% of tourism jobs that are short-term or seasonal)..... | 8         |
| <b>C. Employment (Economic / Social – MST).....</b>                                             | <b>9</b>  |
| C.1. Tourism employment as a share of total regional employment (%).....                        | 9         |
| C.2. Average tourism wage compared to regional average (ratio or %).....                        | 10        |
| <b>D. Economic Benefits (Economic – MST).....</b>                                               | <b>11</b> |
| D.1. Tourism visitor expenditure per resident.....                                              | 11        |
| D.2. Tourism share of regional GDP (%).....                                                     | 12        |
| <b>E. Local Satisfaction (Social – MST).....</b>                                                | <b>13</b> |
| E.1. Percentage of residents who agree that tourism has a positive impact.....                  | 13        |
| E.2. Tourism-related complaints or negative perceptions (proxy).....                            | 13        |
| <b>F. Energy Management (Environmental – MST / SEEA).....</b>                                   | <b>14</b> |
| F.1. Visitor Transport Mode Share (Indirect Energy Proxy).....                                  | 14        |
| F.2. Electricity Emissions Factor.....                                                          | 16        |
| <b>G. Water Management (Environmental – MST / SEEA).....</b>                                    | <b>17</b> |
| G.1. Peak-season water demand relative to annual monthly average (%).....                       | 17        |
| G.2. Basin drought or water stress classification during peak tourism season.....               | 20        |
| <b>H. Wastewater Management (Environmental – MST / SEEA).....</b>                               | <b>22</b> |
| H.1. Wastewater treatment coverage and treatment level (destination-wide).....                  | 22        |
| H.2. Wastewater system stress during peak tourism periods (proxy).....                          | 22        |
| <b>I. Solid Waste Management (Environmental – MST / SEEA).....</b>                              | <b>22</b> |
| I.1. Solid waste generated per capita (destination-wide proxy).....                             | 22        |
| I.2. Waste diversion and management readiness.....                                              | 23        |
| <b>J. Climate Action (Environmental / Economic – MST).....</b>                                  | <b>24</b> |
| J.1. Number of climate-related disruption events affecting the tourism region annually.....     | 24        |
| J.2. Growth in electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure (% annual change).....             | 25        |
| <b>K. Accessibility (Social / Institutional – MST).....</b>                                     | <b>26</b> |
| K.1.TOTA's Access & Inclusion Program.....                                                      | 26        |
| <b>L. Governance (Institutional – MST).....</b>                                                 | <b>29</b> |
| L.1. Existence and currency of a regional tourism sustainability framework.....                 | 29        |
| L.2. Continuity and transparency of tourism sustainability monitoring.....                      | 31        |

---

|                                             |    |
|---------------------------------------------|----|
| M. Indigenous Tourism.....                  | 32 |
| M.1. Indigenous People and Communities..... | 32 |
| Conclusion and Future Outlook.....          | 35 |
| Sources.....                                | 37 |

## Foreword

Rich in Indigenous culture, the Thompson Okanagan region lies on the unceded, ancestral, and traditional territory of three Interior Salish nations: the Syilx, Secwépemc, and Nlaka'pamux peoples.

Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association (TOTA) is committed to working towards truth and reconciliation by collaborating with Indigenous tourism companies and communities in the Thompson Okanagan region and beyond. As an organisation and team, we continuously reflect on our relationship with the land and our commitment to reconciliation. We pledge to be an ally to the Indigenous peoples and communities in these territories and in our travels.

TOTA is a not-for-profit society governed by an elected Board of Directors representing business and community tourism interests throughout the Thompson Okanagan region.

Thompson Okanagan is one of British Columbia's six Regional Destination Management Organisations (RDMO), which reflect the strategic direction of the Province of British Columbia Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture, and Sport; Destination British Columbia; and the needs and priorities of tourism stakeholders.

The primary objective of this Observatory is the continued implementation of measurement and management practices to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of the region. Based on TOTA's work to date and in alignment with TOTA's Strategic plan, the following objectives were identified for continued monitoring and development in 2025:

- Strengthen the delivery of responsible tourism with a focus on Biosphere sustainability, accessibility, and Indigenous tourism
- Create alignment and synergy by strengthening partnerships and fostering cross-industry collaboration
- Utilise big data through data collection, cross referencing, validation, analysis, and interpretation
- Crisis management through monitoring, mitigation, planning, and communications
- Strategic marketing and communications through research, education, and feedback mechanisms
- Influence change through collaboration with community organisations, resident awareness and municipal, provincial, and federal advocacy



## Executive Summary

### Renewed report focus for 2025

As we look toward the future of sustainable tourism in the Thompson Okanagan region, this 2025 report introduces a new vision for our INSTO monitoring methodology. Instead of attempting to track the full breadth of sustainability indicators, we are significantly reducing the length of our reporting by confining our focus to just two metrics per issue area.

This report marks our first year attempting to align our monitoring with UN Tourism's Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST). A central element of this alignment is organizing our reporting around the three core pillars of the MST framework: the Economic, Environmental, and Social dimensions of tourism.

By deliberately starting with what is feasible, specifically focusing on metrics where we currently have reliable data infrastructure and established partnerships, we are adopting the MST's recommended flexible and modular approach. While administrative data lags mean environmental and civic indicators reflect 2023 and 2024 baselines, they provide a vital operational anchor alongside our real-time 2025 economic tracking.

Beginning with available data across these three dimensions is not just a pragmatic choice; it is the foundation for an effective, long-term strategy. This targeted focus allows us to stop spreading resources too thin, progressively identify vital data gaps, and deliver actionable, high-quality insights that drive meaningful change for our region.

### Current Status

The Thompson Okanagan region continues to navigate significant environmental and capacity pressures, but the tourism sector remains a robust economic engine for its 120 communities and 33 Indigenous communities.

Tourism visitation demonstrated steady recovery and growth in 2025, reaching 7.2 million trips—a 2.8% year-over-year increase. This visitation generated \$5.1 billion in regional spending, equating to approximately \$7,563 per resident. This per-capita spending is significantly higher than the provincial average (\$4,575), underscoring that the Thompson Okanagan economy relies more heavily on tourism than British Columbia as a whole. While 2025 visitation numbers show growth, lagging travel datasets show that transport emissions remain unbalanced; based on 2024 baselines, air travel accounts for only 15% of visitor trips but generates 48.3% of emissions.

The sector remains a crucial employer, supporting an average of 33,800 jobs throughout the year, or 10.9% of all regional employment. However, wage disparities persist; workers in core tourism sectors like Accommodation and Food Services earn an average of \$23.45 per hour, earning roughly \$0.62 for every \$1.00 earned by the average BC worker.

Community sentiment remains highly supportive, with 78% of Thompson Okanagan residents agreeing that the positive impacts of tourism outweigh the negative—a figure that sits above the provincial average. However, the data highlights distinct seasonal friction points. During the peak summer months (June–August), 43% of residents feel there are "too many" tourists, indicating acute strain on infrastructure and community capacity. Conversely, shoulder seasons demonstrate high community acceptance (69% feeling the balance is "just right"), while 39% of residents feel there are "too few" visitors in the winter, presenting an opportunity for strategic seasonal dispersion.

In 2025, the region shifted away from binary "check-box" accessibility ratings toward "Accessible Feature Transparency," empowering travelers to make autonomous decisions. Understanding that the accessible tourism market and their travel companions represent 25% of total tourism spend, TOTA recognizes that removing "deal-breaker" barriers is no longer just a social initiative, but an economic imperative crucial for capturing a highly loyal demographic.

The region possesses a distinct "Structural Decarbonization Advantage" due to the BC provincial grid's remarkably low carbon intensity (9.9 g CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh). This makes electrification the most effective decarbonization strategy for operators. Supporting this, regional electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure matured significantly, growing by 14.7% to 437 unique locations.

Water management remains one of the region's most severe vulnerabilities. Set against a backdrop of Level 4 and 5 droughts, the report utilized a "Liquid Proxy" (Max-Month Peaking Factor) to map tourism footprints. Communities face extreme seasonal infrastructure stress, with peak summer water usage jumping dramatically—up to 480% of the annual average in Midway, and 233% in Sicamous, reflecting the compounding pressures of summer tourism pulses and arid agricultural needs.

2025 marked a transition from awareness-building to active implementation for the region's 72 Indigenous tourism businesses. Driven by community-informed initiatives like the Listening to Learn Project and regional preparation for upcoming provincial programs like the First Welcome Trail, Indigenous tourism is increasingly recognized as a powerful tool for cultural revitalization, land-based education, and food sovereignty. Addressing ongoing capacity constraints, funding stability, and legislative barriers will be critical to ensuring that this growth remains authentic and community-led.

Looking forward, the long-term viability of the Thompson Okanagan requires integrated responses to seasonal bottlenecks, wage gaps, and the profound impacts of climate change. By refining its monitoring framework and grounding its strategy in reliable, targeted data, TOTA is exceptionally well positioned to translate these insights into measurable change for the region's environment, economy, and host communities.



## A. General information

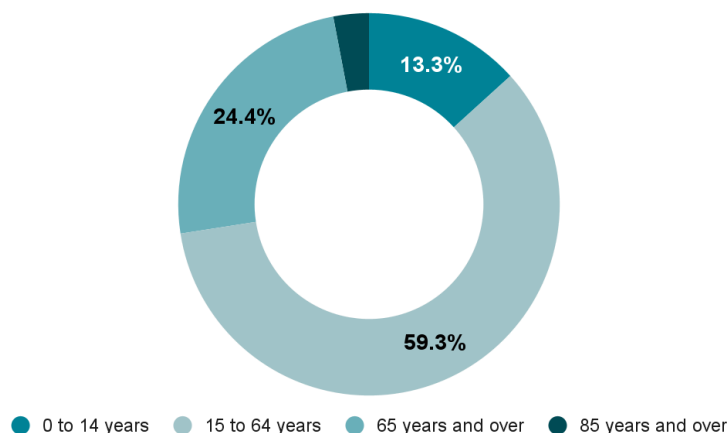
Located in the Southern Interior of British Columbia (BC), Canada, the Thompson Okanagan region covers approximately 71,600 km<sup>2</sup>. Its name is derived from two major geographic features: the Thompson River and Okanagan Lake. The diverse landscape of the Thompson Okanagan ranges from the alpine of the tallest peak in the Canadian Rockies in the north to the semi-arid steppe of the Okanagan Desert in the south.

The population is 653,300 as of 2024, (updated 2025 statistics for the tourism region are not available at the writing of this report) and is home to over 120 communities, 33 Indigenous communities and 2,100 tourism businesses. It is a region rich in Indigenous culture, located on the traditional and unceded territories of the Syilx, Nlakápmux and Secwépemc First Nations people.

The following statistics remain the same from the 2024 report as they are taken from the Canadian National Census completed in 2021 which will be completed in 2026.

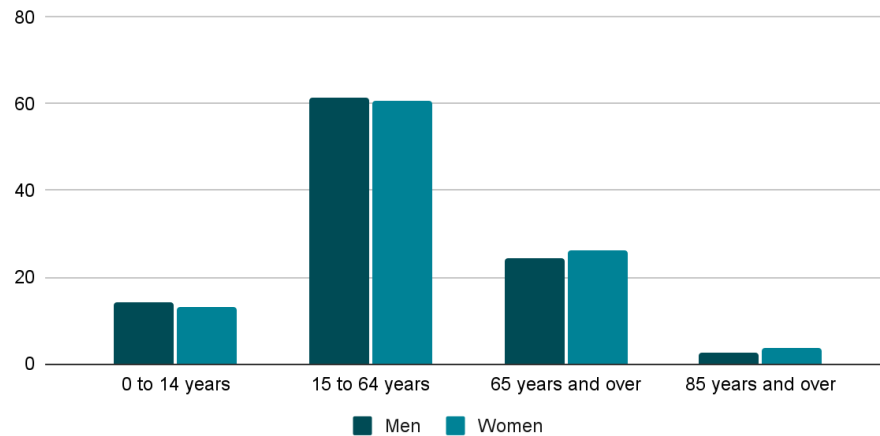
### A.1. Population characteristics

A.1.2. Total distribution (%) of the population by broad age groups in 2021



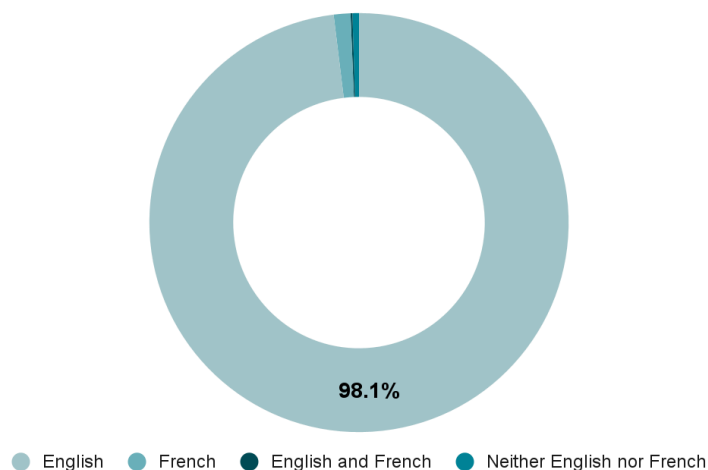
The majority of the population is aged between 15 and 64 (59.3%), the second largest group is aged 65 and over (24.4%), the third is aged between 0 and 14 (13.3%) and only 3% of the population is aged 85 and over.

### A.1.3. Distribution (%) of the population by broad age groups between men and women in 2021



Gender representation is essentially equal, there are slightly more men until women start outliving men in the 65 years and over segments.

### A.1.4. Total first official language spoken in 2021



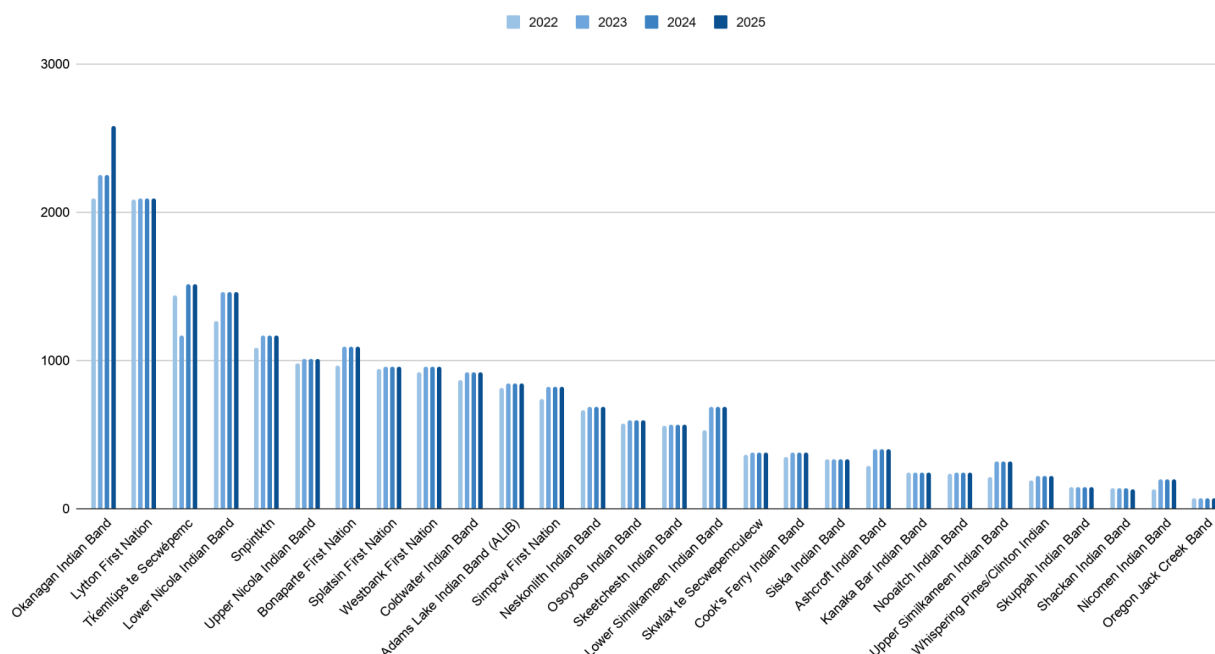
In total, there are 585,570 English speakers which represents the vast majority, 7,705 French speakers, 2,995 people who speak neither English nor French and only 855 English and French speakers.

## A.2. First Nation communities population

The Thompson Okanagan region is home to the traditional, unceded territory of three Interior Salish nations: the Syilx, Secwépemc, and Nlaka'pamux peoples.

Indigenous people have lived in the area now known as B.C. for more than 10,000 years. They developed their own societies, cultures, territories and laws. When European explorers and settlers first came to B.C. in the mid-18th century, the province was home to thousands of Indigenous people. Some estimates are modest, ranging from 80,000 to 100,000. Others are as high as 350,000, and there are outlier estimates in excess of 1 million. There are currently 33 Interior Salish Nations.

A.2.1. First nation communities population



## A.3. Natural area

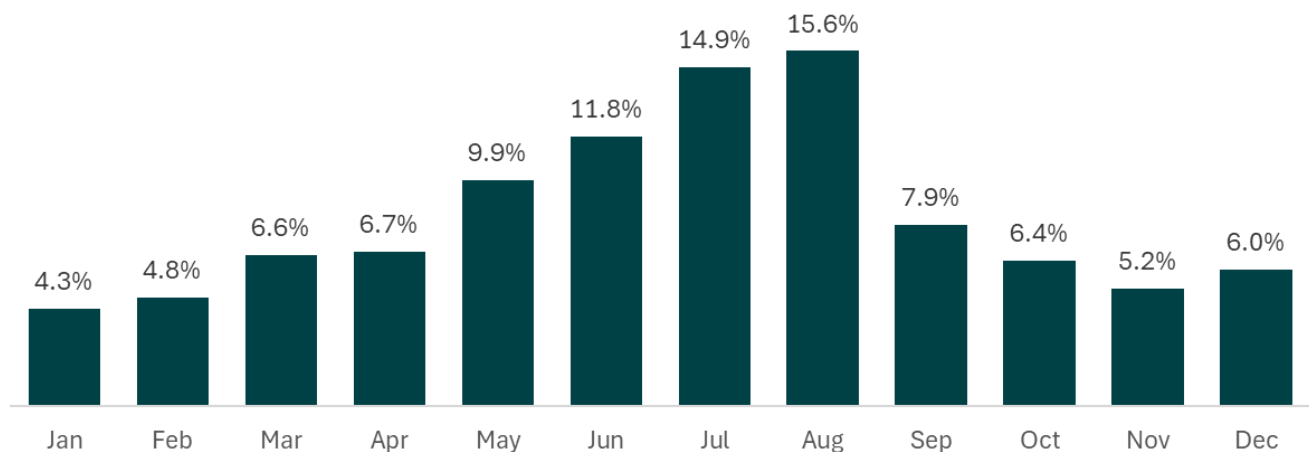
The Thompson Okanagan is characterised by distinctive landscapes that range from deserts and arid grasslands to abundant valleys, lakes, forested highlands, and alpine meadows, and by hot, dry summers and relatively mild winters. The region's diverse environment, cultural heritage, and mosaic of communities have contributed to a range of distinctive experiences and activities. These range from wine and culinary tourism to soft and extreme nature-based adventure, and from extensive golf and winter opportunities to Indigenous cultural tourism, diverse festivals and events, and wellness opportunities.

## B. Tourism Seasonality (Economic / Social - MST)

### B.1. Distribution of tourism demand by month (% of annual total)

In 2025, the number of trips to the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Region reached 7.2 million. It represented a year-over-year growth rate of 2.8% compared with 2024. The chart below shows the monthly distribution of visitation. In general, the region is a summer destination, with most trips occurring between June and August, accounting for 42% of total trips. January and February are the months with the least participation, with 4.3% and 4.8%, respectively.

B.1.1 Monthly Distribution of Trips as a Percentage of Annual Total, 2025



Source: Adapted from Environics Analytics (2026). DIP: Destination BC [Thompson Okanagan]. ROVE+DOMO.

### B.2. Seasonality of tourism employment (% of tourism jobs that are short-term or seasonal)

Employment in Thompson Okanagan does not follow a clear seasonal pattern throughout the year. However, the chart below shows a slight increase in the number of employees during the summer months in 2023, 2024, and 2025. This is followed by a modest and consistent decline in the fall months. In 2025, employment was lowest in May. A decline in employment is also visible in the other two years, although the largest drop occurred in different months in each case.

Conversely, April 2025 shows a notable spike in employment. A similar increase can also be seen in 2023 and 2024, but the jump in 2025 was considerably larger, even exceeding the levels observed during the summer season in the previous years. Over the longer term, this pattern is likely associated with visitation trends, but it may also reflect the use of temporary employment during the summer season.

Peak month

**April**

40,500 Jobs

Slowest month

**May**

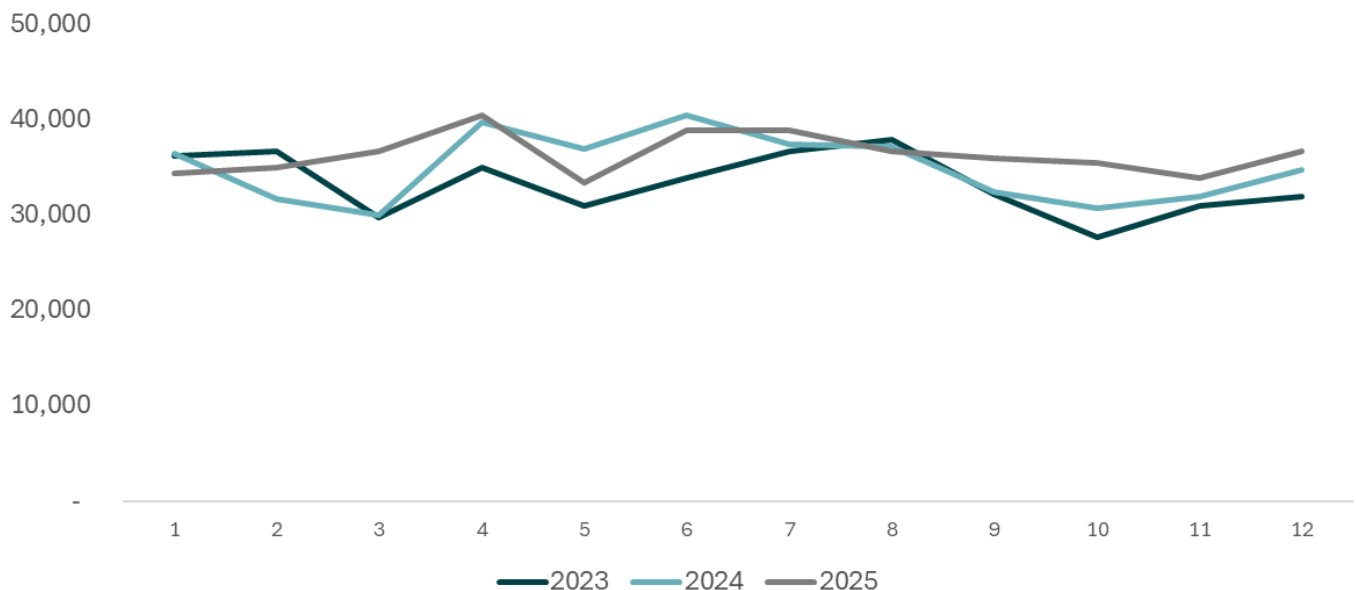
33,500 Jobs

Year-over-year growth

**4.0%**

avg across all months

### B.2.1 Monthly Tourism and Hospitality Employment Tracking (Job Volume), 2023–2025



Source: Adapted from go2HR (April, 2026). BC tourism and hospitality employment tracker, from <https://www.go2hr.ca/research/employment-tracker>

## C. Employment (Economic / Social – MST)

### C.1. Tourism employment as a share of total regional employment (%)

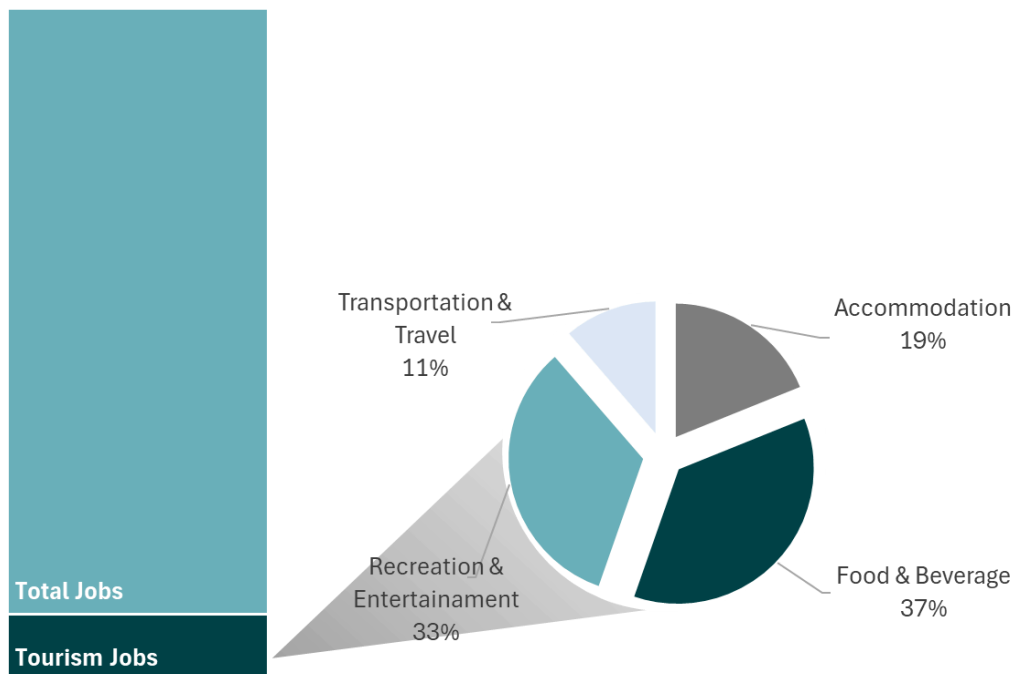
According to the 2025 Labour Force Survey (LFS) for the Thompson Okanagan region, total employment reached 310,600, representing 10.5% of provincial employment and ranking third among all regions. As shown in the previous section, the number of tourism jobs in 2025 ranged from 33,500 to 40,500, with an average of 33,800 jobs throughout the year. This represents 10.9% of all jobs in the region.<sup>1 2</sup> Figure C.1.1 highlights that the largest tourism employment industry was Food and Beverage Services, which

<sup>1</sup> Note that the information on total jobs and jobs in the tourism sector comes from different sources. However, both sources refer to the Labour Force Survey, a monthly household survey conducted by Statistics Canada. Therefore, there may be some variation in the estimation methodology.

<sup>2</sup> The contribution of each economic activity was extrapolated using available information from go2HR, which combines employment data for the Thompson Okanagan and Kootenay regions.

accounted for 37% of employment, followed by Recreation and Entertainment at 33%. Accommodation represented 19% of tourism jobs. Notably, this means that accommodation alone contributed 1 in every 5 tourism jobs. Finally, Transportation and Travel Services accounted for 11% of jobs in the tourism sector.

### C.1.1 Distribution of Tourism Jobs by Sector, 2025



Source: Adapted from go2HR (April, 2026). BC tourism and hospitality employment tracker & BC Stats. (2024). Labour Force Survey (LFS) earnings and employment trends, monthly data tables (March 2024) [Data set]. Government of British Columbia.

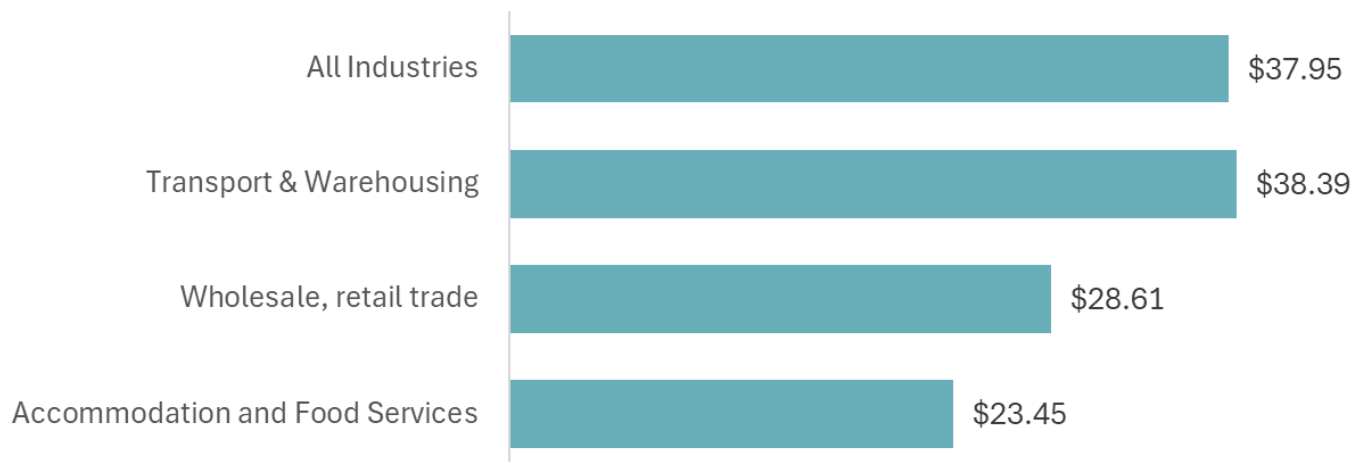
### C.2. Average tourism wage compared to regional average (ratio or %)

The average hourly wage in British Columbia in 2025 was approximately \$37.95, the highest in Canada, while the national average was \$36.40 per hour. The closest provinces on this measure were Ontario and Alberta, at \$37.72 and \$37.35, respectively.

Although tourism wages were not available by detailed industry, the following chart presents wages for economic activities closely associated with the tourism sector. Accommodation and Food Services had an average hourly wage of \$23.45, while Wholesale and Retail Trade and Transport and Warehousing recorded average wages of \$28.61 and \$38.39, respectively. Relative to the provincial average, this means that for every \$1.00 earned by the average worker in British Columbia, workers in Accommodation and

Food Services earned \$0.62, workers in Wholesale and Retail Trade earned \$0.75, and workers in Transport and Warehousing earned \$1.01.

#### C.2.1 Average Hourly Salary by Industry, 2025



Source: Adapted from BC Stats. (2026, April). Labour Force Survey (LFS) earnings and employment trends monthly data tables [Data set]. Government of British Columbia.

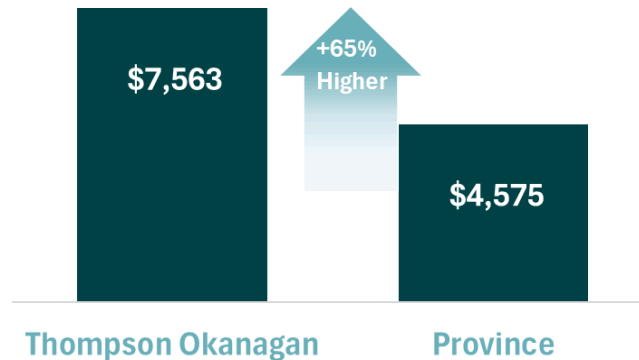
## D. Economic Benefits (Economic – MST)

### D.1. Tourism visitor expenditure per resident

In 2025, the tourism industry generated \$5.1 billion in spending in the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Region.<sup>3</sup> Since 2022, spending has grown at an average annual rate of 7.3%. Over the same period, the region's population reached an estimated 700,000 residents in 2025, with an average annual growth rate of 1.3%. Based on these figures, tourism spending was equivalent to approximately \$7,563 per resident in 2025. Compared with \$4,575 per resident for the province, this suggests that tourism plays a more significant role in the Thompson Okanagan economy than it does across the province as a whole. Therefore, the Thompson Okanagan region relies more on tourism than the province overall.

<sup>3</sup> The Thompson Okanagan tourism region comprises the following regional districts: Central Okanagan, Columbia-Shuswap, North Okanagan, Okanagan-Similkameen, and Thompson-Nicola. It should be noted that while portions of the Columbia-Shuswap and Thompson-Nicola districts technically lie outside the tourism region's boundaries, they have been included in their entirety to maintain data integrity and prevent inaccuracies.

#### D.1.1 Expenditure per resident, 2025

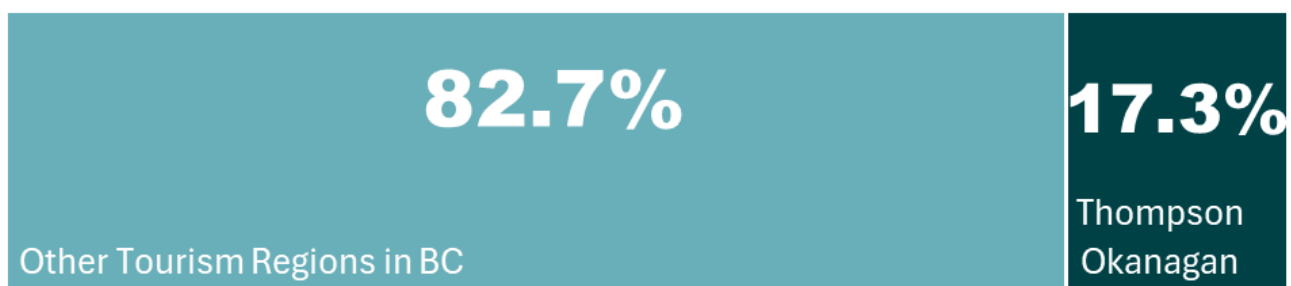


Source: Adapted from Destination Canada, Lodging Aligned Spend Reporting, [Feb-2025].  
 Republication or other re-use of this data without the express written permission  
 of Destination Canada is strictly prohibited. & Government of British Columbia.  
 (Mar-2026.). *Population estimates.*

## D.2. Tourism share of regional GDP (%)

In 2024, the tourism contribution to the provincial economy was around 3%. This was a GDP of around \$8.0 billion dollars according to Destination BC. For the tourism region of Thompson Okanagan, the information is more recent, from 2022, with a GDP of \$1.3 billion. This amount would be around \$1.39 billion in 2024, nearly 17.3%<sup>4</sup> of the Province's Tourism Economic Value.

#### D.2.1 Regional Share of Provincial Tourism GDP



Source: Destination BC. (2024, February). *2024 value of tourism snapshot.*  
<https://www.destinationbc.ca/content/uploads/2024/02/2022-Value-of-Tourism-Snapshot.pdf>

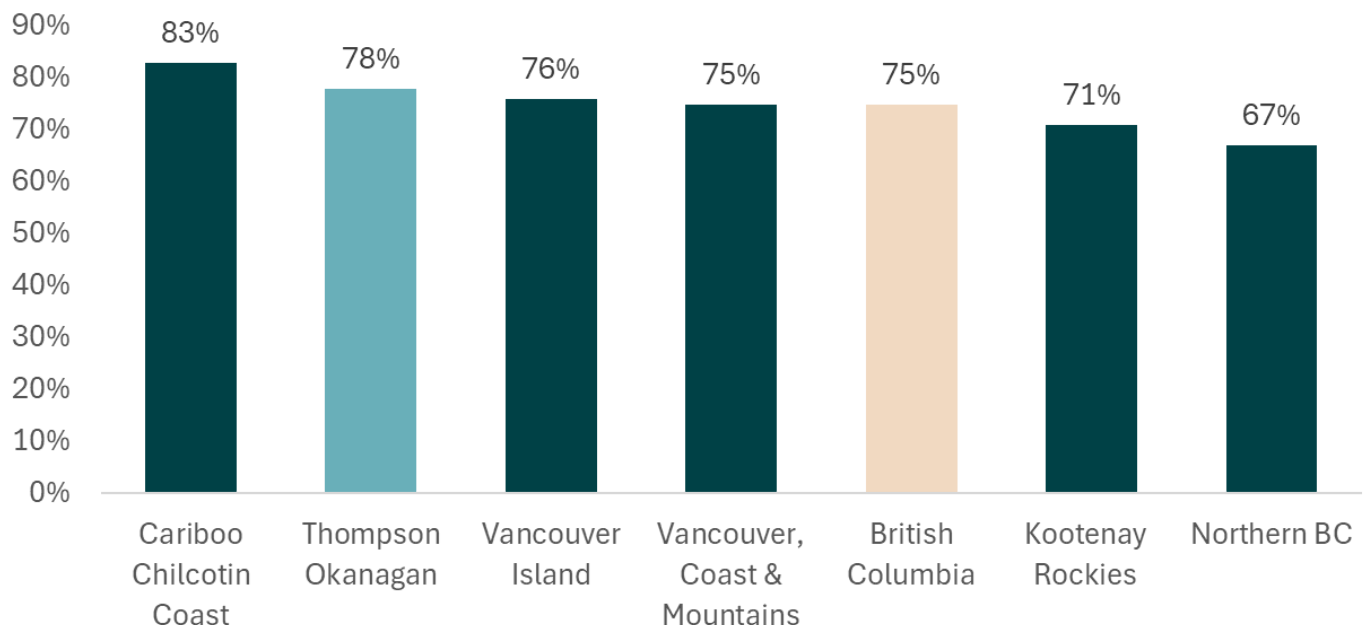
<sup>4</sup> This is an author estimation based on studies published by Destination BC, where 2024 GDP for the province and in another publication showed 2022 GDP for Thompson Okanagan region. So the process was to use the CPI to update the Thompson Okanagan GDP. Assuming that there was not an important structural change in the economy and there were not different methodologies used by each estimation.

## E. Local Satisfaction (Social – MST)

### E.1. Percentage of residents who agree that tourism has a positive impact

In general, residents in British Columbia believe the positive impacts of tourism in their communities outweigh the negative ones. In fact, 75% of residents interviewed agree or strongly agree with this statement. In the Thompson Okanagan region, this sentiment is slightly higher than in most other regions, with 78% of interviewed residents supporting the statement. This positive outlook has remained consistently higher than the provincial average for the past three years.

E.1.1 The positive impacts of tourism in their communities outweigh the negative ones  
(% Strongly Agree / Agree)



Source: Adapted from Destination BC. 2025 Resident Perceptions of BC's Tourism Industry, February 2026  
<https://www.destinationbc.ca/research-insights/type/resident-research/>

### E.2. Tourism-related complaints or negative perceptions (proxy)

The resident sentiment data for 2025 serves as a perception based proxy for tourism related complaints, particularly regarding overtourism and community capacity. Unlike a formal complaint log, this metric captures the “silent” negative sentiment of the local population in the region throughout the seasonal cycle as captured by Destination British Columbia in their annual resident perception survey.

Summer Peak Pressure: Summer (June–August) represents the highest concentration of potential negative sentiment, with 43% of Thompson Okanagan residents perceiving tourism levels as “Too many”. This is notably higher than the provincial average of 37%, indicating that regional pressure points—likely related to

infrastructure strain or environmental concerns—are felt more acutely in the Thompson Okanagan during this window than in other parts of BC.

**Shoulder Season Stability:** Conversely, Fall and Spring demonstrate a high level of community acceptance, with 69% of residents in both seasons stating tourism levels are "Just the right amount". This suggests that "complaint-adjacent" sentiments are low during these periods, as visitor volumes align better with community capacity.

**Winter Under-utilization:** In the Winter months, negative perception shifts from "too many" to a sense of missed opportunity, as 39% of residents feel there are "Too few" tourists. This indicates that the community may be more receptive to—rather than complaining about—increased tourism activity during the December–February period.

#### E.2.1 Resident perceptions on the amount of tourism in the Thompson Okanagan.

|                                                      | Total 2025 | Thompson Okanagan |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------------|
| <b>Perceptions on Amount of Tourism in Community</b> |            |                   |
| <b>Winter (Dec – Feb)</b>                            |            |                   |
| Too many                                             | 6%         | 7%                |
| Just the right amount                                | 58%        | 55%               |
| Too few                                              | 36%        | 39%               |
| <b>Spring (Mar - May)</b>                            |            |                   |
| Too many                                             | 9%         | 6%                |
| Just the right amount                                | 72%        | 69%               |
| Too few                                              | 19%        | 25%               |
| <b>Summer (Jun - Aug)</b>                            |            |                   |
| Too many                                             | 37%        | 43%               |
| Just the right amount                                | 53%        | 48%               |
| Too few                                              | 10%        | 10%               |
| <b>Fall (Sep - Nov)</b>                              |            |                   |
| Too many                                             | 7%         | 5%                |
| Just the right amount                                | 68%        | 69%               |
| Too few                                              | 24%        | 26%               |

Source: Destination BC. 2025 Resident Perceptions of BC's Tourism Industry, February 2026

<https://www.destinationbc.ca/research-insights/type/resident-research/>

## F. Energy Management (Environmental – MST / SEEA)

### F.1. Visitor Transport Mode Share (Indirect Energy Proxy)

BC Hydro and FortisBC publish aggregate consumption data provincially, but sector-by-sector consumption at the regional (Thompson Okanagan) level is not publicly released. NAICS-disaggregated electricity data at sub-provincial scale is treated as commercially sensitive by the utilities. While this data may not be available we do track the share of visitors by air transport and transportation is the dominant form of energy use for the tourism sector. This section estimates the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions attributable to visitor travel to and from the region for the 2024 calendar year, based on a total volume of 6,531,000 visitor trips and the most recent data available.

### Input Assumptions

#### F.1.1 Visitor volume and mode share assumptions

| Parameter                     | Value     | Unit            | Source                                  |
|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Total visitor trips (2024)    | 6,531,000 | trips/year      | TOTA Dashboard, 2024                    |
| Car / ground share            | 80%       | % of trips      | Assumption based on visitor origin data |
| Air share                     | 15%       | % of trips      | Proxy: YLW + YKA + YYF pax data         |
| Bus / other share             | 5%        | % of trips      | Residual assumption                     |
| Avg car distance (one-way)    | 300       | km              | Vancouver/Calgary to Kelowna approx.    |
| Avg flight distance (one-way) | 700       | km              | Typical domestic short-haul             |
| Avg vehicle occupancy (car)   | 1.8       | persons/vehicle | Statistics Canada travel survey avg.    |

Passenger data proxies are aggregated from the three primary commercial airports serving the Thompson Okanagan region: YLW (Kelowna International Airport), YKA (Kamloops Airport), and YYF (Penticton Regional Airport)

#### F.1.2. Emission factors by transport mode

| Mode                    | Emission factor                  | Basis                      | Source                                                                 |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Private car (gasoline)  | 150 g CO <sub>2</sub> e / veh-km | Vehicle-km                 | ECCC National Inventory Report                                         |
| Domestic short-haul air | 180 g CO <sub>2</sub> e / pkm    | Passenger-km (incl. RF x2) | ICAO Carbon Emissions Calculator (ICEC) v13, 2024 + IPCC RF multiplier |
| Bus / coach             | 27 g CO <sub>2</sub> e / pkm     | Passenger-km               | ECCC NIR 2024 / Transport Canada GHG Emissions Report                  |

## Results — Default Scenario (Car 80% / Air 15% / Bus 5%)

### F.1.3. Estimated annual transport emissions by mode

| Mode         | Visitor trips    | Round-trip dist. (km) | Emissions (t CO <sub>2</sub> e) | Emissions (Mt CO <sub>2</sub> e) | Share of total |
|--------------|------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Car / ground | 5,224,800        | 600                   | 261,240                         | 0.261                            | 51.1%          |
| Air          | 979,650          | 1,400                 | 246,872                         | 0.247                            | 48.3%          |
| Bus / other  | 326,550          | 400                   | 3,527                           | 0.004                            | 0.7%           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>6,531,000</b> | —                     | <b>511,639</b>                  | <b>0.512</b>                     | <b>100%</b>    |

In summary, Air travel accounts for only 15% of trips but generates 48.3% of total emissions, highlighting the significant carbon savings potential in shifting mode share toward ground or rail alternatives.

This indirect proxy remains the primary metric for energy tracking until such time as utility providers release sector-specific consumption data for the Thompson Okanagan region.

| Total transport emissions              | Per-trip average                      | Highest-emission mode       |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>0.512 Mt CO<sub>2</sub>e / year</b> | <b>78.3 kg CO<sub>2</sub>e / trip</b> | <b>Air (48.3% of total)</b> |

## F.2. Electricity Emissions Factor

### Regional electricity carbon intensity (g CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh):

**9.9 g CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh**

source: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/climate-change/data/electricity>

The Electricity Emissions Factor represents the greenhouse gas (GHG) intensity of the power grid used by tourism operators within the Thompson Okanagan region. For the current reporting period, this intensity is recorded at 9.9 g CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh. This metric is derived from the British Columbia provincial grid, which is approximately 98% renewable, primarily supported by large-scale hydroelectric generation and a growing portfolio of wind and other clean energy projects (McMaster et al., 2020).

Transitioning to such low-carbon electricity is critical for mitigating climate impacts and preserving the unique ecosystems that drive regional tourism (Arévalo et al., 2025). This figure places the Thompson Okanagan among the jurisdictions with the lowest electricity-related carbon footprints globally, providing a significant baseline advantage for local sustainable tourism initiatives.

While many global tourism destinations struggle with Scope 2 emissions (indirect emissions from purchased electricity), the Thompson Okanagan possesses an inherent competitive edge. This metric works as a Structural Decarbonization Advantage for several reasons:

- **Low Entry Barrier for Green Operations:** Regional operators—from boutique wineries in the South Okanagan to major ski resorts in the North Thompson—achieve a world-leading carbon profile for their electrical use simply by being connected to the regional grid.
- **Electrification as a Primary Strategy:** Because the electricity is already clean, the most effective way for tourism businesses to reduce their total carbon footprint is through electrification. This aligns with the "Look West: Tourism Sector Action Plan" (March 2026), which prioritizes the completion of a provincewide "Electric Highway" and a \$118 million investment in public charging infrastructure.

This 9.9 g factor provides a verifiable data point for TOTA members to market the region as a low-carbon destination to increasingly climate-conscious international travelers.

## G. Water Management (Environmental – MST / SEEA)

### G.1. Peak-season water demand relative to annual monthly average (%)

Because comprehensive municipal water accounting for the 2025 calendar year is traditionally finalized and released in July—well after this report's April publication deadline—the following analysis utilizes verified 2024 production data to establish a reliable baseline for the region's seasonal water footprint.

#### The Liquid Proxy: Mapping Tourism Footprints and Seasonality

This report recognizes that the Thompson-Okanagan region is situated on the traditional, unceded territories of the Syilx Okanagan, Secwépemc, and Nlaka'pamux Nations. We acknowledge the Syilx Water Declaration and the inherent jurisdiction of Indigenous peoples over the waters of their territories. Furthermore, we recognize the critical role of the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) Fishery Department in managing Environmental Flow Needs (EFN)—the essential water required to remain in-stream to support fish populations and ecosystem health. Water management for tourism must be understood within these frameworks of Indigenous law and ecological necessity.

The Thompson-Okanagan water landscape is defined by two distinct seasonal pulses. While urban centers like Kelowna manage a steady heat-driven irrigation rise, mountain resort communities experience a distinct Max-Month Peaking Factor that serves as an Occupancy Proxy—effectively doubling the water load during peak visitor months. This data serves as a Liquid Proxy [Max-Month Peaking Factor], proving that water consumption is the most reliable real-time indicator for regional tourism activity and seasonality in corridors where visitors significantly outnumber residents. This methodology aligns with the UN Tourism MST-SF (Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism - Statistical Framework), providing proxy indicators to track the environmental pressure of visitors while highlighting the infrastructure cost of maintaining the capacity required to support seasonal surges.

This audit utilizes municipal water production data to calculate the Max-Month Peaking Factor.

- Calculation:  $(\text{Peak Month Water Production} \div \text{Average Monthly Water Production}) \times 100$ .
- Baseline: Data is primarily drawn from 2024 municipal water reports.
- MST-SF Alignment: While the MST-SF prefers direct tourism-attributable consumption (liters per visitor night), current municipal reporting does not isolate individual customer types. This audit uses the system-level peaking factor as a proxy for tourism-driven pressure and seasonality impacts, consistent with SEEA-Water standards.

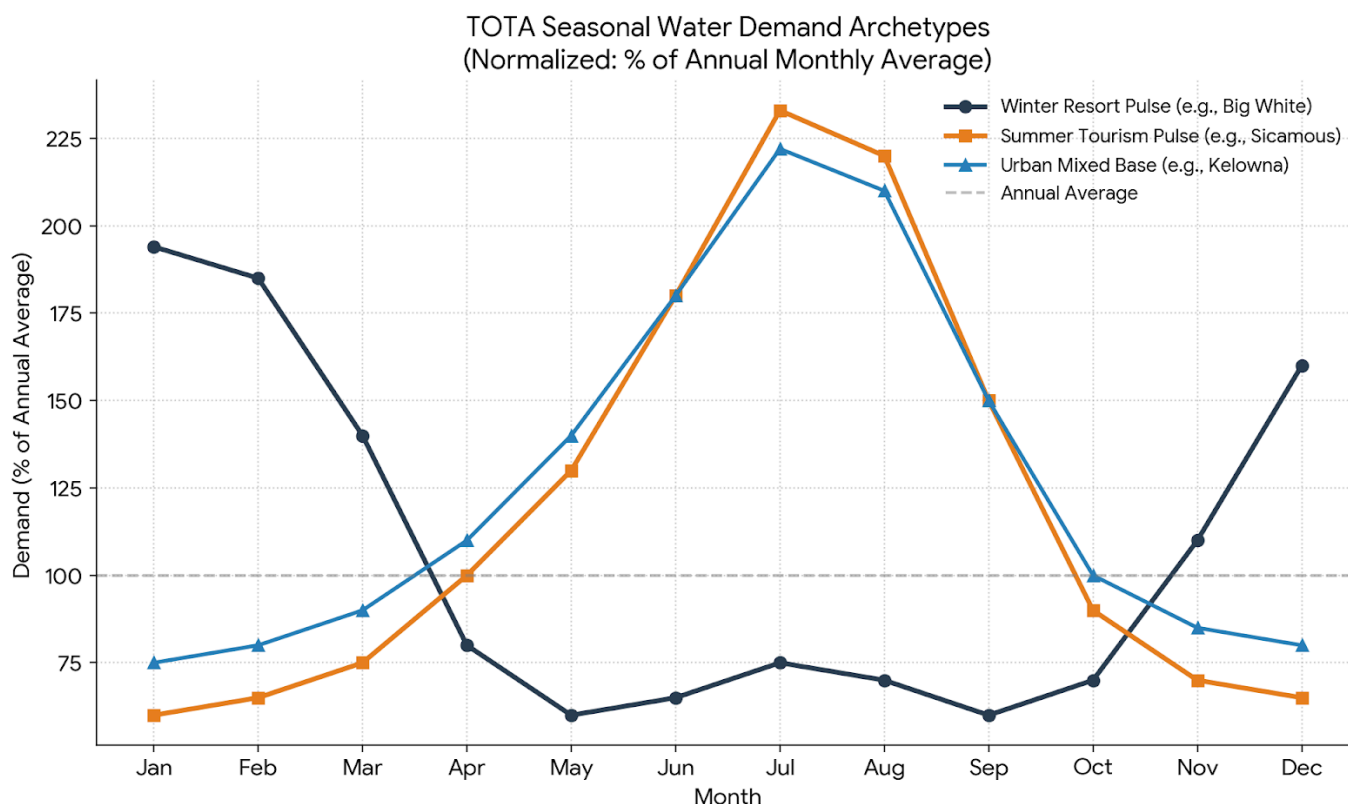
#### Disclosure of Uncertainty & Limitations

- Drought Context: 2024 was a record Level 4 to 5 drought year in the Okanagan Basin. The resulting watering restrictions and extreme evapotranspiration rates likely inflated peaking factors relative to a 3-year rolling average.
- Metering Status: Peaking factors in communities like Osoyoos and Midway are influenced by unmetered residential usage. The Town of Osoyoos is currently implementing a Universal Water Metering Program (2024/2025) to address this data gap.

- Non-Revenue Water (NRW): Reported production data includes system leakage. High ratios in small systems may reflect infrastructure age rather than occupancy.
- Snowmaking: At mountain resorts, winter peaking factors include water diverted for snowmaking, which is not strictly occupancy-driven.

## Part 1: The "Divergent Pulse" (Seasonal Archetypes)

To understand regional water stress, a distinction must be made between the "Tourism Signal" and the "Irrigation Signal."



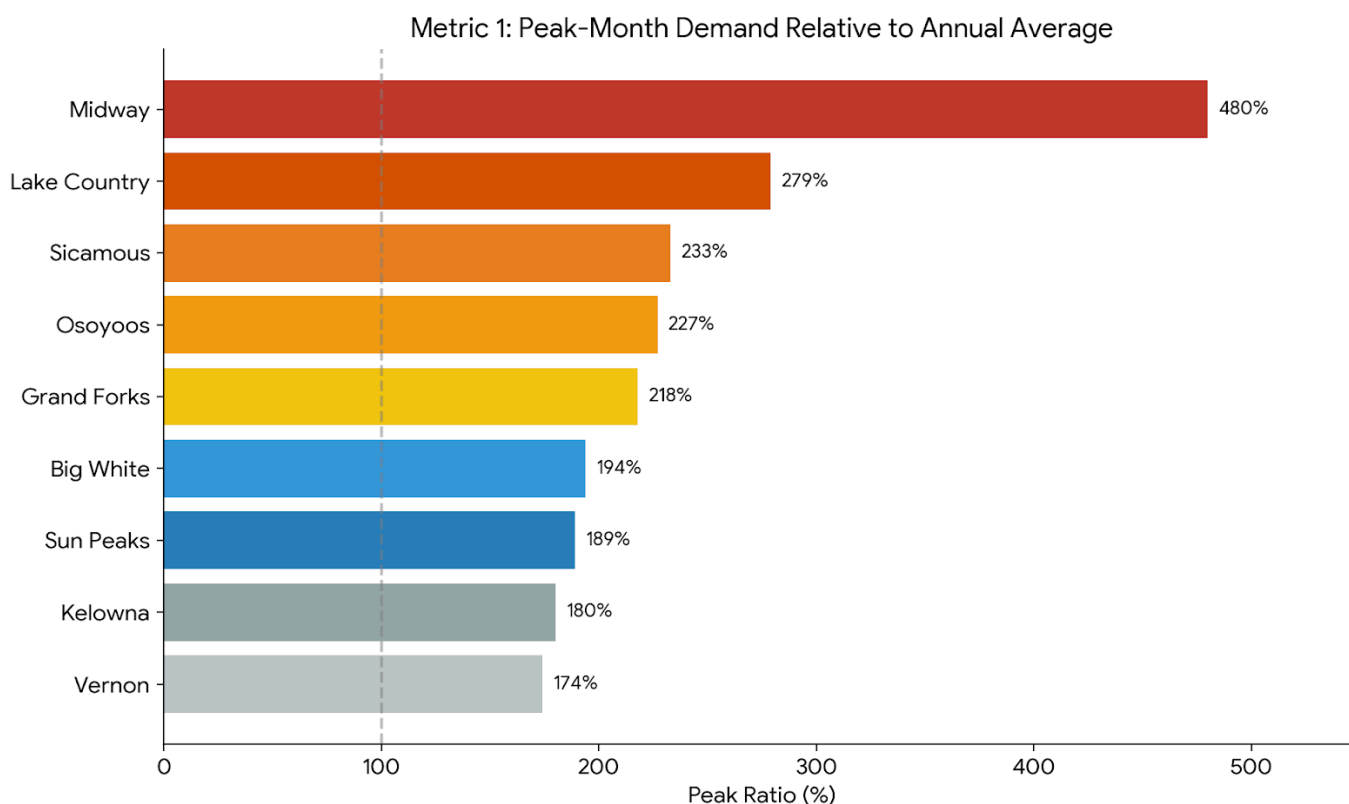
G.1.1 This chart illustrates representative archetypes within the TOTA region. The Winter Resort Pulse represents consolidated data from Big White and Sun Peaks, while the Summer Tourism Pulse (Sicamous) and Urban Mixed Base (Kelowna) serve as characteristic examples of tourism-intensive and irrigation-heavy systems.

- Winter Resort Pulse (e.g., Big White & Sun Peaks): In the absence of summer irrigation, demand peaks in mid-winter. This is a pure measure of Beds Occupied.
- Summer Tourism Pulse (e.g., Sicamous): Features a massive peak in July (233%) and August. This represents a "compounded peak" where high tourism occupancy coincides with the peak of the irrigation season.

- Urban Mixed Base (e.g., Kelowna): Shows a similar summer increase to the Summer Tourism Pulse but is slightly less extreme (222% in July). Tourism impact is present here but is largely masked by general residential irrigation.

## Part 2: Peak-Month Demand / Annual Monthly Average – The Utility Stress Indicator

The Peak-Month Demand / Annual Monthly Average metric reveals which utilities face the most extreme seasonal volatility, necessitating significant "over-sizing" of infrastructure to meet brief peaks.



G 1.2. This ranking provides a representative cross-section of TOTA municipalities categorized by infrastructure stress levels. Ratios shown are illustrative of broader sub-regional archetypes (Extreme, Summer Pulse, Resort Pulse, and Urban Baseline).

- The "Extreme" Outlier: Midway leads the region with a staggering 480% ratio, meaning their peak summer usage is nearly five times their annual average.
- High Summer Stress: Lake Country (279%), Sicamous (233%), and Osoyoos (227%) all show significant infrastructure strain due to the combined force of tourism and arid agriculture.
- Winter Resort Standards: Big White (194%) and Sun Peaks (189%) demonstrate a consistent doubling of demand during the ski season.

- Urban Hubs: Kelowna (180%) and Vernon (174%) remain at the lower end of the stress scale, as their larger, diverse populations provide a more stable baseline that helps absorb seasonal surges.

### Part 3: Strategic Annotations

#### 1. The Winter Resort Pulse (Occupancy Correlation)

In mountain resorts like Big White and Sun Peaks, water demand is a reliable proxy for visitor occupancy because summer irrigation is negligible. However, a per-visitor consumption intensity coefficient must account for water used in snowmaking, which typically occurs earlier in the season (Oct–Dec).

#### 2. The Masking Effect in Urban Hubs

In larger cities like Kelowna, the tourism impact is statistically secondary to the dominant seasonal driver: residential irrigation. Outdoor irrigation drives over 70% of peak summer volume, creating a masking effect where the tourism occupancy signal is buried within the much larger residential spike.

#### 3. The Midway Anomaly (Infrastructure Over-Sizing)

The Village of Midway exhibits the highest volatility in the region with a 480% Peak-Month Demand / Annual Monthly Average ratio. This reflects extreme infrastructure stress caused by intensive outdoor irrigation and potentially high non-revenue water (leakage), rather than visitor activity alone.

#### 4. Summerland: Peaking Factor Burden on Fixed Storage

The District of Summerland presents a precarious seasonal curve due to total reliance on an upland watershed. Agricultural irrigation accounts for over 80% of total system volume in summer, creating a binary load profile where the system must be sized for absolute maximum capacity while relying on a "fixed bucket" of reservoir storage.

This audit establishes the Max-Month Peaking Factor as a defensible proxy for mapping tourism footprints and seasonality. While data limitations prevent the calculation of exact liters per visitor night, the correlation between regional demand and seasonal occupancy provides a scientifically grounded framework for tourism sustainability. By acknowledging the constraints of the 2024 drought year and the ongoing transition to universal metering in communities like Osoyoos, this report provides a roadmap for infrastructure planning that respects both visitor needs and Indigenous water governance.

### G.2. Basin drought or water stress classification during peak tourism season

This section operationalizes environmental monitoring by utilizing provincial hydrometric data to define the tourism operating context. In 2025, this context was characterized by high geographic variability and a severe late-season intensification of drought conditions. These metrics align with the UN Tourism MST-SF framework for measuring sectoral "risk exposure" to environmental conditions.

The British Columbia Drought Level (0 through 5) serves as the primary indicator of regional water stress. As illustrated in the following table, 2025 data demonstrates that risk exposure is highly localized; while the

Okanagan Basin experienced a mid-summer reprieve, the Similkameen faced "Critical" Level 4 conditions throughout the entire peak visitation window.

| 2025 DROUGHT LEVELS AT A GLANCE |        |        |        |       |        |        |        |       |        |        |        |        |       |        |                                            |        |       |        |        |        |       |       |        |        |        |  |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------------------------------------------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--|
| Drought Levels:                 |        | 0      |        | 1     |        | 2      |        | 3     |        | 4      |        | 5      |       | *      | Not updated outside of core drought season |        |       |        |        |        |       |       |        |        |        |  |
| BASINS                          | 15-May | 22-May | 29-May | 5-Jun | 12-Jun | 19-Jun | 26-Jun | 3-Jul | 10-Jul | 17-Jul | 24-Jul | 31-Jul | 7-Aug | 14-Aug | 21-Aug                                     | 28-Aug | 4-Sep | 11-Sep | 18-Sep | 25-Sep | 2-Oct | 9-Oct | 16-Oct | 23-Oct | 30-Oct |  |
| Lower Thompson                  | *      | 2      | 2      | 2     | 3      | 2      | 2      | 2     | 2      | 2      | 1      | 1      | 1     | 0      | 0                                          | 0      | 1     | 1      | 2      | 2      | 2     | 2     | 1      | 2      | 1      |  |
| North Thompson                  | *      | *      | *      | 0     | 1      | 1      | 2      | 2     | 2      | 2      | 1      | 1      | 1     | 1      | 0                                          | 0      | 1     | 2      | 2      | 3      | 3     | 2     | 2      | 2      | 2      |  |
| South Thompson                  | *      | *      | *      | 0     | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1     | 2      | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1     | 0      | 0                                          | 0      | 1     | 1      | 2      | 2      | 3     | 2     | 2      | 2      | 2      |  |
| Bridge                          | *      | *      | *      | 0     | 1      | 1      | 2      | 2     | 2      | 1      | 2      | 2      | 2     | 2      | 2                                          | 3      | 2     | 1      | 2      | 2      | 0     | 0     | 0      | 2      | 1      |  |
| Nicola                          | *      | 1      | 2      | 2     | 2      | 1      | 2      | 2     | 3      | 3      | 3      | 3      | 3     | 3      | 3                                          | 3      | 3     | 3      | 3      | 4      | 4     | 3     | 3      | 3      | 2      |  |
| Okanagan                        | *      | 1      | 1      | 1     | 2      | 2      | 2      | 2     | 3      | 3      | 2      | 1      | 1     | 1      | 0                                          | 1      | 2     | 3      | 3      | 3      | 3     | 4     | 3      | 3      | 2      |  |
| Similkameen                     | *      | 1      | 2      | 2     | 2      | 3      | 3      | 3     | 3      | 4      | 4      | 4      | 4     | 4      | 4                                          | 4      | 4     | 4      | 4      | 4      | 4     | 4     | 4      | 3      | 2      |  |

Source: <https://droughtportal.gov.bc.ca/>

Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) traditionally serves as the hydrological "savings account" for the region. In 2025, this account reached its lowest balance in recorded history, with the April 1st provincial average at 63% of normal. This record low created a fragile baseline. Due to the chronic drought persisting since Fall 2022, the limited 2025 melt was largely absorbed by deep-soil moisture deficits rather than refilling reservoirs or sustaining streamflows. Consequently, the surface-level recovery observed in the Okanagan during August was temporary, leading directly to the rapid escalation back to Level 4 by mid-October as subsurface reserves were non-existent.

The "Hydrological Squeeze" occurs when peak tourism visitation (July/August) coincides with the period of lowest natural streamflow. In 2025, three distinct risk profiles emerged:

- **Sustained Critical Stress (Similkameen):** This basin entered Level 4 on July 10th and remained there through late October. Tourism operations in this corridor faced the region's most severe regulatory and environmental pressure, with no recovery window during the peak season.
- **The "False Recovery Pattern" (Okanagan):** An atypical drop in drought levels during mid-August provided temporary relief for tourism aesthetics and irrigation. However, the subsequent spike to Level 4 in October confirms that underlying basin health remained critical despite surface-level improvements.
- **Delayed Intensification (South Thompson):** This area remained at lower stress levels (1–2) through much of the summer, but faced a sharp escalation to Level 4 by October. This late-season squeeze impacts the fall shoulder season and limits the window for environmental recovery before the winter freeze.

This monitoring framework moves tourism planning from a growth-centric model to a capacity-aware approach based on the 2025 environmental baseline.

- **High-Precision Reporting:** Using the high quality provincial data allows TOTA to report on the state of the destination with geographic precision.
- **Expanded Risk Windows:** The 2025 data proves that peak summer is no longer the sole window of risk. Late-season drought (Sept/Oct) is emerging as a significant threat to basin recovery and Environmental Flow Needs (EFN).

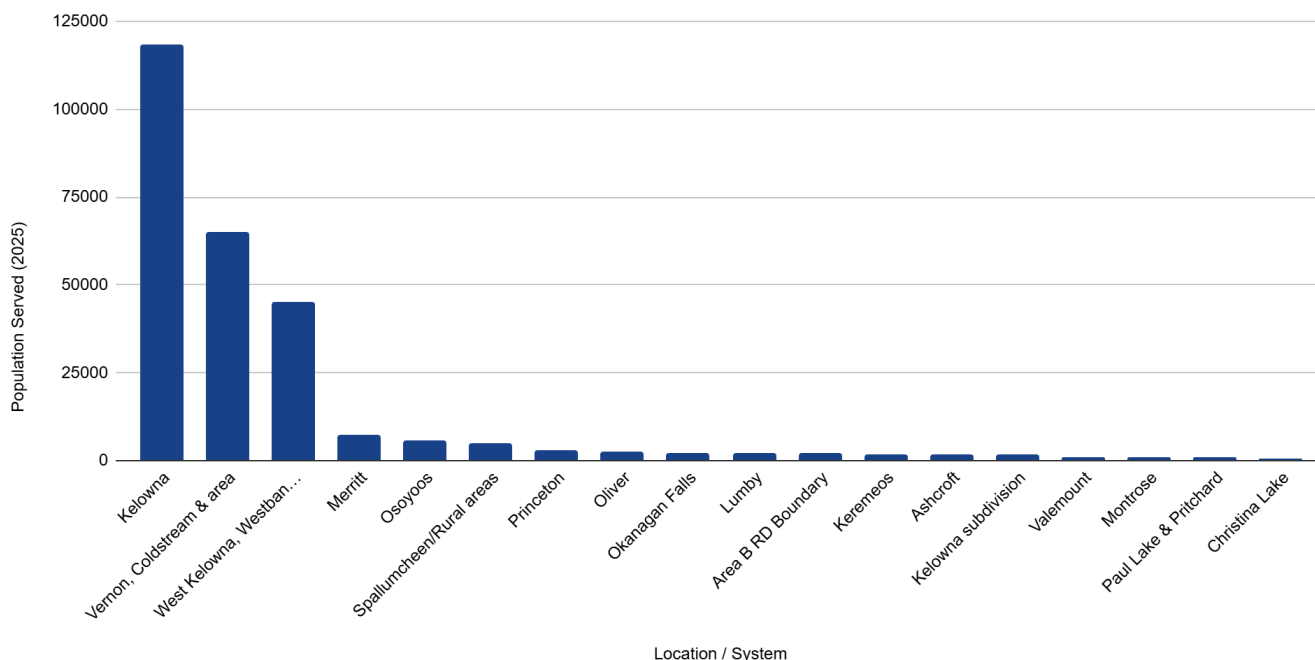
- **Sustainability Mandates:** Monitoring these cumulative drought pulses provides the necessary evidence for future development approvals and the implementation of water-neutral infrastructure requirements.

## H. Wastewater Management (Environmental – MST / SEEA)

### H.1. Wastewater treatment coverage and treatment level (destination-wide)

The Thompson Okanagan region now hosts approximately 653,300 residents, representing 11.5% of British Columbia's population. As population centres expanded during 2025, the region's infrastructure rose to meet the challenge through modernization. Kelowna wastewater infrastructure now serves over 118,500 residents which is over 80% of the Kelowna system and saw the launch of the Water Street Lift Station to serve the downtown core. Vernon saw the biggest increase in the region to serve 65,000 people up from the previous 44,500 served by the Vernon Water Reclamation Centre. At the edge of the regional boundary, the Columbia Pollution Control Centre was modernized and upgraded to reduce pollutants entering the Columbia River.

H.1.1. Population Served (2025) vs. Location / System



## H.2. Wastewater system stress during peak tourism periods (proxy)

# I. Solid Waste Management (Environmental – MST / SEEA)

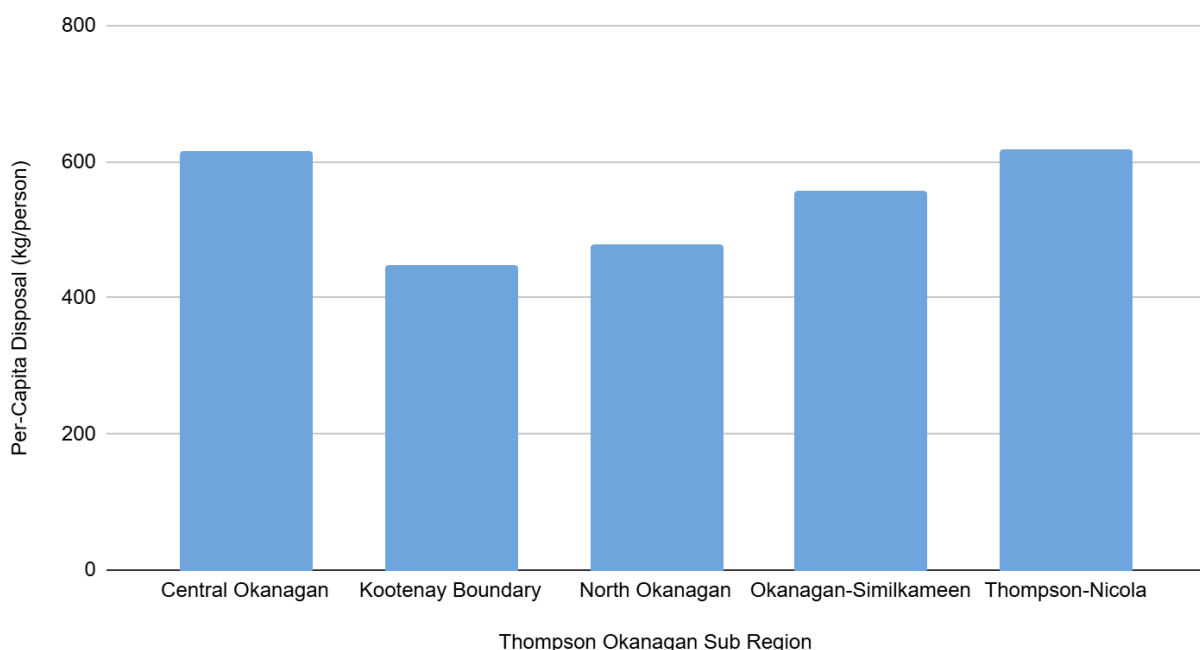
## I.1. Solid waste generated per capita (destination-wide proxy)

This section evaluates solid waste generation as a primary pressure indicator for destination sustainability, using Regional District per-capita landfill disposal rates (kg/person/year) as a proxy for overall system pressure. Measured across the North Okanagan, Central Okanagan, Okanagan–Similkameen, Thompson–Nicola, and Kootenay Boundary, these rates reflect the combined impact of residents, businesses, and visitors.

While the Central Okanagan remains the highest producer among these jurisdictions, it continues a downward trend toward the 2026/27 provincial target of 460 kg/person. The provincial average for 2023 was 481 kg/person, a notable decrease from 2012 levels despite a slight increase from the 2016 low.

This proxy methodology aligns with the UN System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) waste accounts, which support using waste generation intensity as a pressure indicator when tourism-specific data is unavailable. However, several caveats apply to these figures. The data represents total regional waste from residential, commercial, institutional, and construction sectors; it is not an isolated measurement of the tourism industry. Furthermore, while population estimates for some districts like the

### I.1.1 Per-Capita Waste Disposal by Thompson Okanagan Sub Region (2023)



East Kootenay and Squamish-Lillooet are adjusted for tourist populations, reporting must avoid specific

per-visitor or per-tourist-night claims as the data does not allow for accurate disaggregation. Finally, readers should note the standard 12-to-18-month time lag in comprehensive data availability.

## **I.2. Waste diversion and management readiness**

This section evaluates waste diversion and management readiness as a qualitative response indicator, tracking the destination's institutional capacity to manage waste pressures through policy, infrastructure, and community-led innovation during 2025. Management capacity is anchored by robust regulatory frameworks mandated across all regional districts under the provincial Environmental Management Act, which requires the maintenance of Solid Waste Management Plans (SWMP). While individual districts tailor their approach, the Thompson–Nicola Regional District (TNRD) serves as a leading example of specific enforcement through its expanded Mandatory Recyclable Material Bylaw, which remained active throughout 2025 to prohibit cardboard, residential packaging, electronics, batteries, and appliances from landfills. Similar regulatory standards are maintained across the region, such as the North Okanagan's 0% threshold for regulated materials in mixed refuse and the Columbia Shuswap's updated Solid Waste Disposal Tipping Fee & Regulation Bylaw implemented in 2025.

Strategic infrastructure developments further enhanced the region's management readiness in 2025. Following a successful pilot program, the Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO) transitioned its AI-powered recycling technology to a permanent program in February 2025. This system uses truck-mounted smart cameras to identify non-recyclables in real-time, helping to reduce curbside contamination, which had previously decreased by 23% during the pilot phase. Additionally, the North Okanagan launched a new commercial drywall recycling program at the Greater Vernon Diversion & Disposal Facility, while the Columbia Shuswap Regional District prioritized capital initiatives including a \$300,000 expansion of the Salmon Arm Landfill.

The Okanagan Forest Task Force (OFTF) represents a critical community-led response to waste pressures falling outside formal municipal collection. As of the end of 2025, this volunteer-driven organization has removed a cumulative total of over 1.3 million pounds of debris from the Okanagan backcountry since 2016. In 2024 alone, the group removed approximately 255,184 pounds of material, a momentum that continued into 2025 with cleanups in high-pressure corridors such as Beaver Lake Road and Postill Lake Road. This work is often supported by institutional collaboration, such as when the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS) waived disposal fees for a 129,200-pound cleanup near Okanagan Falls.

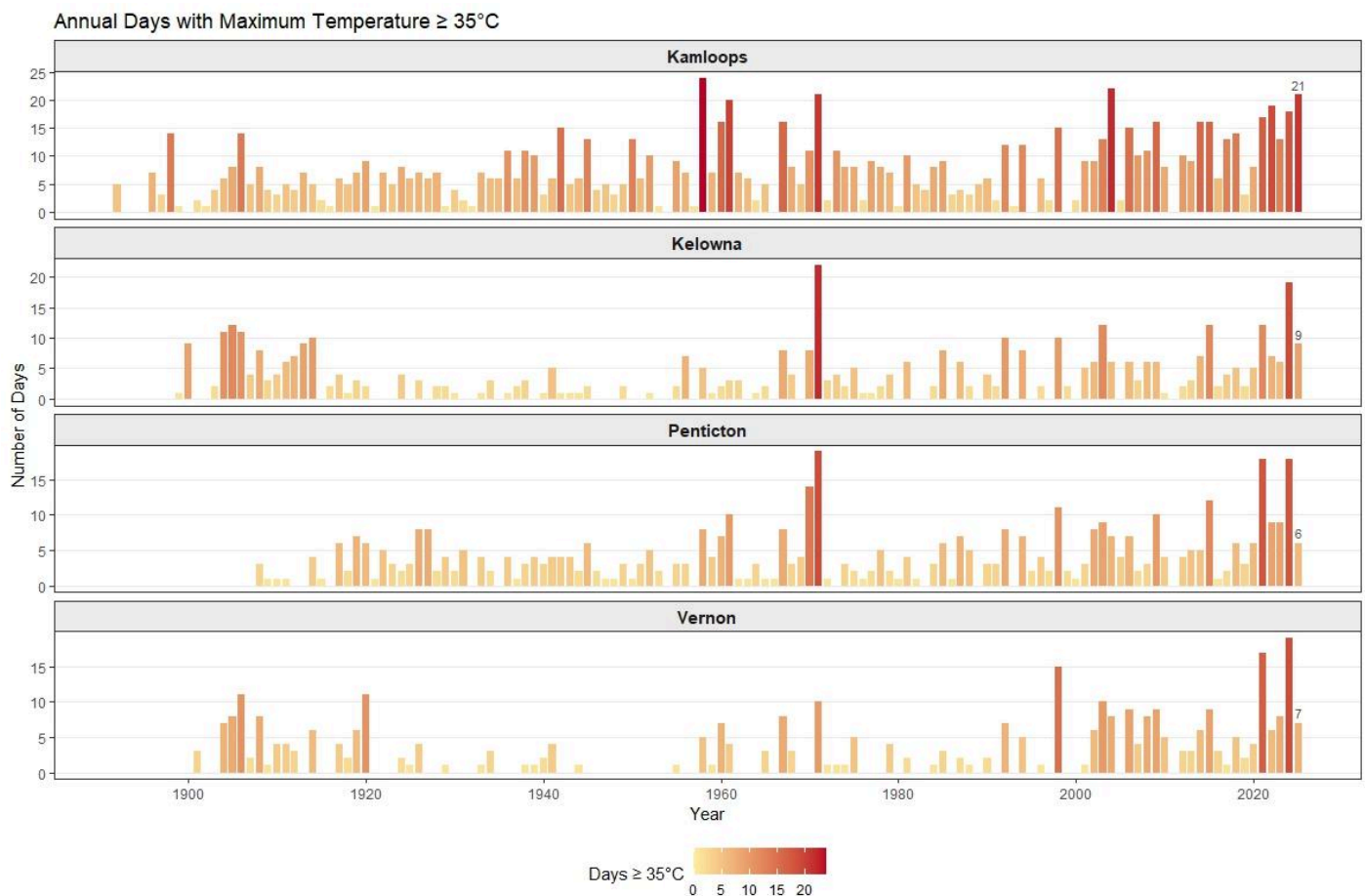
Finally, regional districts utilized 2025 to develop long-term strategies, including a comprehensive review of the RDOS Solid Waste Management Plan and active public consultations in the Kootenay Boundary for new zero-waste initiatives. The North Okanagan maintained a long-term strategic target of 350 kg/person per year throughout 2025, following a recorded low of 453 kg per resident in 2024. These combined efforts reflect a proactive institutional response consistent with the Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST) framework by documenting the destination's capacity to handle waste through technological adoption, community partnerships, and updated regulatory planning.

## J. Climate Action (Environmental / Economic – MST)

### J.1. Number of climate-related disruption events affecting the tourism region annually

For the Thompson Okanagan, hot days over 35 degrees C are increasingly becoming the rule, not the exception as you can see in the trend graph below. Historically, record-breaking heat prior to 2000 was almost exclusively linked to El Niño events. However, we are now frequently seeing extreme temperatures during La Niña phases—years that have traditionally been known for their cooling effects. The entire summer of 2025 was spent in some form of drought which continues from the fall of 2022.

#### J.1.1 - Days over 35 degrees



Source: Sandra Schira, BSc. and MSc., Okanagan Basin Water Board, Water Science Specialist <https://obwb.ca/indicators/>

#### J.1.2 - Record of drought level - 2025

| 2025 DROUGHT LEVELS AT A GLANCE |        |        |        |       |        |        |        |       |                                            |        |        |        |       |        |        |        |       |        |        |        |       |       |        |        |        |  |  |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--|--|
| Drought Levels:                 |        | 0      | 1      | 2     | 3      | 4      | 5      | *     | Not updated outside of core drought season |        |        |        |       |        |        |        |       |        |        |        |       |       |        |        |        |  |  |
| BASINS                          | 15-May | 22-May | 29-May | 5-Jun | 12-Jun | 19-Jun | 26-Jun | 3-Jul | 10-Jul                                     | 17-Jul | 24-Jul | 31-Jul | 7-Aug | 14-Aug | 21-Aug | 28-Aug | 4-Sep | 11-Sep | 18-Sep | 25-Sep | 2-Oct | 9-Oct | 16-Oct | 23-Oct | 30-Oct |  |  |
| Lower Thompson                  | *      | 2      | 2      | 2     | 3      | 2      | 2      | 2     | 2                                          | 2      | 1      | 1      | 1     | 0      | 0      | 0      | 1     | 1      | 2      | 2      | 2     | 2     | 1      | 2      | 1      |  |  |
| North Thompson                  | *      | *      | *      | 0     | 1      | 1      | 2      | 2     | 2                                          | 2      | 1      | 1      | 1     | 1      | 0      | 0      | 1     | 2      | 2      | 3      | 3     | 2     | 2      | 2      | 2      |  |  |
| South Thompson                  | *      | *      | *      | 0     | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1     | 2                                          | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1     | 0      | 0      | 0      | 1     | 1      | 2      | 2      | 3     | 2     | 2      | 2      | 2      |  |  |
| Bridge                          | *      | *      | *      | 0     | 1      | 1      | 2      | 2     | 2                                          | 1      | 2      | 2      | 2     | 2      | 2      | 3      | 2     | 1      | 2      | 2      | 0     | 0     | 0      | 2      | 1      |  |  |
| Nicola                          | *      | 1      | 2      | 2     | 2      | 1      | 2      | 2     | 3                                          | 3      | 3      | 3      | 3     | 3      | 3      | 3      | 3     | 3      | 3      | 4      | 4     | 3     | 3      | 3      | 2      |  |  |
| Okanagan                        | *      | 1      | 1      | 2     | 2      | 2      | 2      | 2     | 3                                          | 3      | 2      | 1      | 1     | 1      | 0      | 1      | 2     | 3      | 3      | 3      | 3     | 3     | 2      | 2      | 2      |  |  |
| Similkameen                     | *      | 1      | 2      | 2     | 2      | 3      | 3      | 3     | 3                                          | 4      | 4      | 4      | 4     | 4      | 4      | 4      | 4     | 4      | 4      | 4      | 4     | 4     | 4      | 3      | 2      |  |  |

Source: <https://droughtportal.gov.bc.ca/>

## J.2. Growth in electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure (% annual change)

The 437 unique locations identified at the close of 2025 represent a mature "Electric Highway" network with the following sub-regional distribution:

- Okanagan Valley: 263 locations (Central, South, and North)
- Thompson & Nicola: 106 locations (Kamloops, Merritt hubs)
- Boundary & Similkameen: 24 locations (Hwy 3 and Princeton corridors)
- North Thompson: 11 locations (Little Fort to Valemound)
- Shuswap: 27 locations
- Resorts & Rural: 6 locations (Big White, Sun Peaks)

The 14.7% growth in unique charging locations facilitates the decarbonization of tourism mobility by expanding infrastructure into rural gateways like Manning Park and Little Fort, reducing "range anxiety," a primary barrier to low-emission travel in mountainous terrain.

While the metric reports on 437 unique locations, the port density (number of plugs per station) increased significantly in 2025. Major hubs in Merritt and Kamloops transitioned from 2-4 ports to 8-12 ports per site, effectively doubling the region's total vehicle-handling capacity even when the location count grew at a more modest rate.

At the 2025 year-end, approximately 95% of the network was verified operational. Temporary maintenance (indicated by "wrench" status on mapping tools) was largely concentrated in the Thompson-Nicola corridor, representing a transition phase for hardware upgrades.

### J.2.1. - Number of Charging locations in the TOTA region

|                                       | 2024 Year-End | 2025 Year-End | Annual Change (%) |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|
| <b>Total Public Charging Stations</b> | 381*          | <b>437</b>    | <b>+14.7%</b>     |

Source: PlugShare Database (Human-verified audit).

\*The 2024 baseline of 381 is derived from historical regional growth trends and the 2024 NRCan/PlugShare data for BC Interior, which saw a provincial port growth of approximately 24.6% in 2024.

## K. Accessibility (Social / Institutional – MST)

### K.1.TOTA's Access & Inclusion Program

TOTA aims to make the Thompson Okanagan a world-renowned accessible destination. Our strategy is led by an Access & Inclusion Liaison, Sonja Gaudet, a retired 3 X Paralympic Gold Medalist. Sonja uses her long-time lived experience as an active wheelchair user, to inform the tourism industry throughout the Thompson Okanagan region, through initiatives that address low vision, hearing loss, and sensory requirements, with a strong focus on wheelchair accessibility.

This strategic approach includes:

- **Built Environment Consultations & Recommendations**
  - Direct assessments of physical spaces.
  - Follow-up report of the accessibility feature recommendations required to improve universal access.
- **Outdoor Experience Consultations & Recommendations**
  - Direct assessments of outdoor spaces.
  - Follow-up report of the accessibility feature recommendations required to improve universal access.
- **Synergizing Partnerships**
  - Accessible & inclusive travel trade companies
  - Adaptive outdoor service providers
  - Community & provincial support agencies
  - BC Parks
- **Resource Support**
  - Event and conference presentations
  - Funding opportunities
  - Content creation
  - Web accessibility

Within the built environment and outdoor experience sectors, TOTA focuses on creating and improving key accessible features in these services, products, & experiences:

- |                               |                             |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ● Visitor Centres             | ● Cultural Attractions      |
| ● Accommodations              | ● Trail Systems & Amenities |
| ● Wine & Culinary Experiences | ● Transportation            |
| ● Museums & Art Galleries     | ● Tour Operators            |
| ● Nature & Science Centres    |                             |

Measuring and quantifying accessibility in tourism is complex and very subjective because it moves beyond a "one-size-fits-all" checklist. Accessibility is not binary, accessible vs inaccessible, rather a dynamic relationship between a person's specific needs and the environment they wish to experience. Attempting to count accessible and inclusive experiences or use a "check-mark" system, often fails because "access and inclusion" means something different to every visitor.

This approach is problematic for three reasons:

1. **Trust Deficit:** When a business labels itself "accessible" but a user arrives to find a single step at the entrance, it destroys trust.
2. **Inaccuracy:** A "pass/fail" metric doesn't account for the "Accessibility Chain"—if the hotel is accessible but the sidewalk to get there is broken, the experience is a failure.
3. **Liability Fears:** Many businesses under-report their accessibility because they are afraid of "getting it wrong" or being sued if their "accessible" tag doesn't meet a specific user's unique need.

Instead of trying to count how many experiences are accessible, TOTA's approach advocates for "Accessible Feature Transparency". This empowers the user to be the expert in their own lives. The goal is not to give a destination or a single experience a grade, but to provide detailed information of its accessible features so every individual, regardless of age, size, or ability, can determine their own path. TOTA aims to respect traveler autonomy by replacing subjective labels and percentage ratings with concrete data, measurements, surface types, photos, etc., of the key accessible features present in a specific experience via 3D Google Access & Inclusion Virtual Video Tours and Accessible Experience Mapping / AccessNow App.

Accessibility is governed by the Accessible British Columbia Act (2021) and the 2024 BC Building Code updates. These requirement updates were shaped by extensive province-wide consultations, but the current scope primarily impacts new construction.

- **Mandatory Power Doors:** Required at all primary entrances and accessible washrooms.
- **Elevators:** Standard in most new 2 and 3 story buildings.
- **Universal Washrooms:** Must include adult-sized changing spaces.
- **Adaptable Housing:** Designing residential units to support "aging in place" and temporary injuries.

The more significant challenge lies in encouraging business owners and tourism operators to invest in retrofitting historic and existing indoor and outdoor spaces, to ensure that environments and experiences are truly inclusive. National and provincial funding is available to support accessibility renovations and retrofits. TOTA assists stakeholders with the application process through our consultation and recommendations reports; additionally, we aim to employ a student annually to secure small lump sum federal grant funds for businesses to undergo accessibility upgrades.

Using the following statistics, TOTA aims to increase stakeholder awareness of the accessible travel demographic and the significant impact these travelers have on regional tourism revenue:

- Approximately 19% to 20% of the Canadian population is aged 65 or older.
- Approximately 27% of Canadians aged 15 and older live with one or more disabilities.

- 40%+ of the global population have a loved one in their immediate circle of family & friends
  - This demographic and their travel companions have a significant impact on business revenue.
  - When accessible features are not in place, an experience becomes a "deal-breaker" for the whole group.

The accessible tourism market contributes 25% of total tourism spend and are highly loyal to destinations and experiences that meet their accessibility needs.

### **Conclusion: Forging a Path of Access, Inclusion & Autonomy**

The Thompson Okanagan region stands at a pivotal juncture in its evolution as a premier travel destination. By shifting the focus from a "check-box" mentality to one of "Accessible Feature Transparency", the region is moving beyond mere compliance and toward true inclusivity. Led by the lived experience of Paralympic champion Sonja Gaudet, TOTA's strategy acknowledges that accessibility is not a static metric, but a dynamic relationship between the traveler and the environment.

### **Summary of Strategic Impact**

- **Empowerment through Data:** By utilizing tools like 3D Virtual Tours and the AccessNow App, the region empowers travelers to be the experts of their own needs, replacing subjective labels with concrete, reliable data.
- **Economic Resilience:** Understanding that people with disabilities and their companions represent 25% of total tourism spend, accessibility is no longer a "niche" concern—it is an economic imperative. Addressing "deal-breaker" barriers ensures the region captures a loyal, high-value demographic.
- **Bridging the Gap:** While the *Accessible British Columbia Act* and updated building codes provide a foundation for the future, the region's success depends on the willingness of current operators to retrofit existing spaces and bridge the "trust deficit" through honest, descriptive mapping.

Ultimately, the goal for the Thompson Okanagan is to create an uninterrupted accessibility chain. From the moment a traveler researches a winery to the moment they navigate a mountain trail, the availability of clear information ensures that the region's beauty is available to everyone, regardless of age or ability. By fostering these partnerships and investing in the built environment today, the Thompson Okanagan is securing its reputation as a world-renowned destination that truly welcomes the world.

***True accessibility moves beyond binary checklists and arbitrary ratings. It is defined by a commitment to transparency that empowers ALL visitors to make their own informed choices.***

## L. Governance (Institutional – MST)

### L.1. Existence and currency of a regional tourism sustainability framework

The Thompson Okanagan region continues to maintain a robust and current governance framework for sustainable tourism, characterized by international integration and formalized strategic planning. The foundation of this framework remains the regional strategy, [Embracing Our Potential](#), which establishes sustainability as a core pillar for all regional tourism development and destination management activities. As a member of the UN Tourism International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (INSTO) since 2017, the region uses this governance asset to ensure continuity in annual sustainability reporting and global benchmarking.

The reporting framework is technically supported by [Symphony Tourism Services \(STS\)](#), a social enterprise of TOTA. STS provides specialized tourism data and analytical reporting required for the annual INSTO submissions, ensuring that regional monitoring is professionalized, consistent, and grounded in industry-specific metrics.

The regional mandate is further strengthened by active participation in the [Destination Think](#) global sharing network, facilitating the exchange of sustainable tourism solutions and peer-to-peer learning with leading international destinations.

Crucially, the region demonstrates high levels of horizontal governance through leadership and active participation in multi-sectoral committees. This distributed stakeholder network functions as a "Social and Institutional Capital" bridge, ensuring tourism perspectives inform regional resource management. This includes TOTA's chairmanship of the [Okanagan Valley Rail Working Group](#) since its establishment in 2022, focusing on regional transportation infrastructure, and formal representation on the [Access & Inclusion Committee \(A.I.C.\)](#) since its inception in 2023.

TOTA also holds significant leadership roles as one of the 6 Regional Destination Management Organizations (RDMOs) in British Columbia. Through the [BC Regional Tourism Secretariat \(BCRTS\)](#), TOTA collaborates with provincial peers and Destination BC to align sustainability, industry development, and destination stewardship mandates. This involvement includes active participation in the [Tourism Marketing Committee \(TMC\)](#) and its specialized TMC Sub-Committee.

Strategic regional alignment is further supported by participation in the [YKA Link Group](#) (Kamloops Airport). TOTA is active on the [Tourism Emergency Marketing Committee \(TEMC\)](#), ensuring that regional messaging remains accurate and safety-focused.

Additionally, TOTA has maintained representation on the [Okanagan Basin Water Board \(OBWB\) Stewardship Council](#) since 2018 and began technical involvement in the Water Supply and Demand Sub-committee in 2025. Within the Shuswap region, TOTA has been actively engaged with the [Shuswap Trail Alliance \(STA\)](#) since 2018, with a representative serving on the Shuswap Trails Roundtable. TOTA

also maintains a strategic partnership with the [Culinary Tourism Alliance \(CTA\)](#) to drive sector-specific sustainability standards.

TOTA maintains a strong strategic relationship with [Indigenous Tourism BC \(ITBC\)](#) to align regional development with provincial Indigenous tourism priorities. This partnership, combined with ongoing engagement with the Syilx, Secwépemc, and Nlaka'pamux Nations, ensures the sustainability framework respects Indigenous land stewardship and supports the growth of authentic Indigenous tourism experiences grounded in regional heritage and self-determination.

TOTA focuses on confirming and aligning regional activities with the [BC Tourism Emergency Management Framework](#) to ensure effective mitigation and recovery coordination during climate-related events. To operationalize this, TOTA provides real-time updates to visitors via social media and official web channels, ensuring that messaging promotes safe destinations and provides immediate access to relevant emergency information as situations evolve.

The framework is actively operationalized through a suite of data integration projects that inform regional decision-making:

- In partnership with the Culinary Tourism Alliance (CTA) and Destination BC, TOTA delivers the READI Training Program. This 18-hour intensive curriculum assists businesses in the "Valleys and Vineyards" Iconic region to adopt national sustainability standards and prepare for the [Tourism Industry Association of Canada's \(TIAC\) READI™ Stamp](#) criteria.
- The region continues to integrate annual resident perception data provided by Destination BC, allowing TOTA to benchmark local sentiment against provincial averages and historical trends.
- Building on the 2024 Inter-Community Transportation Survey completed in collaboration with UBC Okanagan (UBCO), TOTA is utilizing this data to inform 2025 advocacy for the Valley Rail and other sustainable mobility initiatives.
- The [Biosphere Program](#) continues to serve as the primary methodology for tourism businesses to align with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ensuring that the regional mandate translates into measurable action.

The regional mandate is operationalized through the [TOTA Climate Action Plan \(2023\)](#).

This metric specifically aligns the region's monitoring and reporting framework with the MST standards by addressing foundational institutional arrangements and the professionalization of data collection. By leading regional transportation initiatives, participating in the Access & Inclusion Committee, and utilizing a dedicated reporting arm (STS), the region demonstrates the governance readiness necessary to track and manage economic, environmental, and social tourism indicators effectively within the defined MST measurement areas.

## **L.2. Continuity and transparency of tourism sustainability monitoring**

The Thompson Okanagan region demonstrates advanced monitoring maturity through the consistent and transparent publication of its annual [INSTO Reports](#), with the official record of study reports commencing in 2019. This continuity ensures that regional stakeholders, international partners, and the public have

access to a reliable, multi-year longitudinal dataset. The stability of the regional monitoring framework is underpinned by long-term data partnerships with Symphony Tourism Services (STS), Destination BC, and academic institutions including Thompson Rivers University (TRU) and Okanagan College.

A core strength of the regional framework is the year-over-year continuity of primary indicators, which allows for robust trend analysis of the region's sustainability performance. While maintaining this core baseline, the monitoring process undergoes regular methodological refinement to prioritize fewer, higher-value indicators that offer greater strategic insight into economic, environmental, and social impacts. This evolution is conducted transparently, with changes in data collection methods documented to ensure that long-term comparisons remain statistically valid.

Transparency is further maintained through ongoing collaboration with provincial and regional data providers. By integrating resident sentiment data from Destination BC and technical resource data from the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB), TOTA ensures that its monitoring is not conducted in isolation but is part of a broader, verified data ecosystem. The formal Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with regional colleges and universities provide a stable pipeline for specialized research, ensuring that the "human capital" required for sophisticated monitoring remains consistent across reporting cycles.

This metric specifically aligns with the UN Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST) framework by demonstrating high statistical capacity and monitoring maturity. MST treats the consistency and transparency of data as a core institutional dimension; by maintaining a stable reporting structure and publicly documenting methodological refinements, the region provides the necessary evidence of a mature, reliable monitoring system capable of supporting evidence-based policy.

The 2025 reporting cycle marks the sixth consecutive year of standardized sustainability reporting for the region. Evidence of reporting continuity and data partnership stability is publicly accessible via the TOTA Corporate Website and the UN Tourism INSTO Portal. These historical records serve as the baseline for the region's phased integration of the full MST framework.

---

## M. Indigenous Tourism

### M.1. Indigenous People and Communities

The Thompson Okanagan region continues to be home to 33 First Nations, including the Secwépemc, Syilx, and Nlaka'pamux Nations, alongside Métis and Inuit peoples. These communities remain deeply connected to their territories, with cultural practices, language revitalization, and land stewardship continuing to guide tourism development. In 2025, there has been a notable shift from awareness-building to implementation and activation. Communities are increasingly moving beyond early-stage engagement into experience development, market readiness, cultural interpretation planning, and partnership alignment. There is growing recognition that Indigenous tourism is not just economic development—it is cultural revitalization, land-based education, and governance in action.

#### M.1.1 Legislative Basis for Protection

Momentum continues toward aligning provincial legislation with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). While the Heritage Conservation Act (HCA) has not yet undergone full reform, 2025 saw increased Indigenous engagement in policy discussions, continued advocacy for shared decision-making, and greater alignment between tourism development and land stewardship. Legislative reform remains slower than community readiness, creating friction between development opportunities and regulatory frameworks. There is ongoing need for Indigenous-led governance models within tourism planning

#### M.1.2 Threats to Integrity and Authenticity

Emerging challenges are increased tourism demand placing pressure on culturally sensitive sites, risk of commodification of Indigenous culture without proper protocols, capacity constraints within communities to manage rapid tourism interest, and climate and environmental impacts affecting land-based experiences. To respond and mitigate these challenges In 2025, ITBC and regional partners prioritized:

- Cultural protocol integration into tourism experiences
- Community-led storytelling frameworks
- Training and mentorship to ensure authenticity
- Development of Indigenous-controlled tourism assets

#### M.1.3 Communities

2025 marked a transition toward structured community engagement models, including the Keen and Emerging First Nations (KEFN) Project, which will continue support for communities at early stages of tourism readiness while focusing on investment readiness, governance and decision-making, and opportunity identification, as well as strengthening pathways from interest to development, to market entry. Our Regional Roundtable discussions increased collaboration across Secwépemc, Syilx, and Nlaka'pamux communities which resulted in the creation of shared priorities and regional alignment and strengthened peer-to-peer knowledge exchange

#### M.1.4 Economy

Growth and Development - The region continues to support approximately 72 Indigenous tourism businesses, with incremental growth in cultural experiences, land-based tourism, culinary tourism, and guided tours with storytelling experiences. The Authentic Indigenous ; Indigenous-Owned Designation Program has played a critical role in strengthening market positioning for verified Indigenous tourism operators, enhancing their visibility within an increasingly values-driven travel market. By clearly identifying authentic Indigenous businesses, the program has contributed to building greater consumer

confidence and driving demand for experiences rooted in cultural integrity. At the same time, it has supported operators in aligning with established quality standards, ensuring that the growth of Indigenous tourism continues to be guided by authenticity, respect, and community-led values. The First Welcome Trail is an Indigenous-led initiative developed by Indigenous Tourism BC (ITBC) in partnership with local communities. It reimagines how visitors engage with First Nations territories by connecting travelers to traditional welcome poles, cultural markers, and rich digital storytelling. It is designed as a cultural invitation rather than a standard tourism product, offering respectful, Nation-led pathways to learn about local lands, languages, and histories. Travelers can use the accompanying mobile app to navigate cultural landmarks and listen to rich audio stories. This initiative is currently being piloted across the Vancouver Coast ; Mountains and Vancouver Island regions, with plans for a scalable model for future province-wide expansion.

#### **M.1.5 Youth and Workforce Development**

The Youth Initiative Project emerged as a significant area of success in 2025, with a strong focus on engaging Indigenous youth in meaningful tourism pathways while building clear connections between education and employment opportunities. The initiative has also played an important role in supporting intergenerational knowledge transfer, ensuring that cultural teachings and community values remain central to tourism development. As a result, there has been a notable increase in youth awareness of tourism as a viable and rewarding career, alongside strengthened cultural pride and identity. The project is also contributing to the development of an early-stage workforce pipeline that will support the long-term sustainability of the sector. At the same time, there remains an ongoing need to secure sustained funding and implement long-term engagement strategies to ensure continued momentum and lasting impact.

#### **M.1.6 Food Sovereignty, Stability, and Agri-Tourism**

This project is meant to reinforce cultural revitalization through food. In 2025, Indigenous Tourism BC began advancing a Food Sovereignty and Agri-Tourism Program, grounded in the understanding that land, culture, food systems, and tourism experiences are deeply interconnected. The program is focused on revitalizing Indigenous food systems and traditional harvesting practices, while supporting the development of farm-to-table and land-to-plate experiences within Indigenous communities. It also emphasizes Agri-tourism as a pathway to strengthen food security and build economic resilience at the community level. Looking ahead, this initiative is positioned to create new, culturally-rooted tourism products, support economic diversification, and reinforce cultural revitalization through food, all while contributing to stronger, more self-sustaining community food systems.

#### **M.1.9 Forward Outlook (2026)**

The 2025 fiscal year has positioned the Thompson Okanagan region for strategic growth and deeper impact, with priorities focused on: scaling Indigenous tourism experiences, advancing investment readiness, strengthening cultural integrity frameworks, expanding Indigenous-led tourism infrastructure, and supporting long-term sustainability through food systems and youth engagement

#### **M.1.10 Listening to Learn Project**

In 2025, Indigenous Tourism BC advanced the Listening to Learn Project as a foundational engagement initiative designed to ensure that tourism development across the Thompson Okanagan region and the province is community-informed, culturally grounded, and Nation-driven. This initiative reflects a strategic shift toward listening first and acting second, reinforcing a long-standing commitment to respectful engagement and relationship-building.

##### **Key Objectives**

- Create safe and respectful spaces for Indigenous communities to share perspectives

- Understand community priorities, concerns, and aspirations related to tourism
- Identify barriers to participation in tourism development
- Strengthen trust and long-term relationships between ITBC and communities
- Ensure future programming aligns with community-defined needs and values

Throughout 2025, ITBC facilitated conversations with First Nations across the region, participated in community meetings, roundtables, and on-the-land discussions.

The project gathered qualitative insights on:

- Tourism readiness
- Cultural protection priorities
- Economic development interests
- Youth engagement opportunities

This project complemented and strengthened other initiatives, including:

- Keen and Emerging First Nations (KEFN) Project
- Youth Initiative Project
- Food Sovereignty and Agri-Tourism Program
- The First Welcome Trail Project

#### Key Insights

- Strong desire for community control over tourism narratives and experiences
- Need for capacity-building and long-term support, not short-term projects
- Importance of integrating language, culture, and land-based knowledge
- Interest in tourism as a tool for cultural revitalization and intergenerational learning
- Recognition that tourism must align with community values and governance structures

Some of the challenges have been identified as limited capacity within communities to participate consistently, as well as the need for sustained follow-through to maintain trust and momentum. While the successes and impacts have strengthened relationships and trust across multiple Nations, which provided increased clarity on community priorities and readiness levels, improved alignment between ITBC programming and community needs, as well as established a stronger foundation for future project implementation.

The Listening to Learn Project will continue to serve as a guiding framework for:

- Community engagement strategies
- Program development and refinement
- Policy alignment
- Regional tourism planning

This ensures that Indigenous tourism development remains community-led, culturally respectful, and sustainable over the long term.

Key challenges continue to shape the pace and sustainability of Indigenous tourism development across the region. Many communities are navigating capacity limitations, which can impact their ability to fully participate in and lead tourism initiatives. There is also an ongoing need to carefully balance economic opportunity with the protection of culture, ensuring that growth does not come at the expense of cultural integrity. Legislative frameworks have not always kept pace with the needs of Indigenous-led tourism, creating barriers to advancement and self-determination. In addition, infrastructure gaps—particularly in

rural and remote areas—limit access, visitor readiness, and overall experience development. Finally, the need for sustained funding and long-term program stability remains critical to maintaining momentum and ensuring that progress is both meaningful and enduring.

Key successes over the past year reflect strong, coordinated progress across multiple priority areas. There has been meaningful advancement in KEFN programming, supporting increased community readiness and engagement in tourism development. The continued expansion of the Authentic Indigenous designation program has strengthened market presence and credibility for Indigenous operators, while the ongoing development of the First Welcome Trail is reinforcing a long-term, culturally grounded tourism corridor. Youth engagement has also emerged as a significant achievement through the Youth Initiative Project, helping to build future leadership and workforce capacity. In parallel, the strategic positioning of food sovereignty and agri-tourism has opened new pathways for culturally rooted economic development. Underpinning all of this is a notable increase in regional collaboration and partnerships, creating a more aligned and supportive ecosystem for Indigenous tourism growth.

## Conclusions and Future Outlook

The 2025 reporting cycle continues to support year-over-year data continuity while refining our approach to better balance reporting breadth with depth. This year marks our initial integration with UN Tourism's Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST), organizing our tracking around the core economic, environmental, and social dimensions of destination performance. By adopting this modular methodology, TOTA is focusing baseline resources on high-value, feasible indicators that offer clear strategic insight into regional impacts rather than attempting to track every possible monitoring category. This evolution reflects our ongoing commitment to producing meaningful, evidence-based reporting that can inform practical decision-making across our shared data ecosystem.

Efforts to manage tourism seasonality have progressed through the steady diversification of regional offerings and an increased emphasis on expanding shoulder-season events. However, structural seasonality in employment persists, with peak travel periods driving the majority of tourism jobs and placing unique capacity strains on local community infrastructure. While resident satisfaction remains highly supportive across the region overall, distinct seasonal friction points emphasize the need for integrated regional policies that balance economic benefits with community capacity. Addressing ongoing wage disparities within core hospitality sectors and managing housing pressures remain critical focus areas to ensure the long-term socio-economic resilience of our host communities.

Our environmental metrics continue to adapt to growing pressures from climate-related disruptions and resource volatility. Operating within a challenging backdrop of severe regional drought conditions, the integration of system-level water peaking factors and regional district waste disposal indicators provides a vital operational anchor when direct visitor tracking data is limited. These proxy indicators expose the real-time infrastructure strains facing environmental corridors during peak surges, helping map our sector's geographic footprint.

To mitigate these transit and utility impacts, TOTA is prioritizing electrification strategies that leverage our clean, renewable provincial power grid. Deeper coordination across the BC Regional Tourism Secretariat (BCRTS) and data partnerships with academic institutions will remain essential to address travel emission

imbalances—particularly within air transit corridors—and improve monitoring systems in traditionally data-deficient areas.

Advancements in accessibility and Indigenous inclusion represent vital pillars of our long-term sustainable development. By shifting away from subjective binary checklists toward descriptive accessible feature transparency, the region is actively working to remove true "deal-breaker" barriers and honor traveler autonomy across the complete environment chain.

Concurrently, Indigenous tourism development has achieved meaningful momentum, moving beyond early-stage engagement into active operational implementation and community-led storytelling. Guided by relationship-building initiatives like the Listening to Learn Project, TOTA remains dedicated to aligning regional experience development with the values and governance structures of the Secwépemc, Syilx, and Nlaka'pamux Nations.

Looking forward, the long-term sustainability of the Thompson Okanagan will rely on our ability to remain collaborative, adaptable, and data-driven. This annual report serves as a platform for informed action, demonstrating that economic viability cannot be separated from ecosystem integrity or host community well-being. TOTA remains committed to leading this evolution alongside our stakeholders, translating these broad monitoring insights into balanced, lasting progress for the entire region.

## Sources

Arévalo, P., Ochoa-Correa, D., Villa-Ávila, E., Espinoza, J. L., & Albornoz, E. (2025). Decarbonizing Insular Energy Systems: A Literature Review of Practical Strategies for Replacing Fossil Fuels with Renewable Energy Sources. *Fuels*, 6(1), 12. URL path: <https://doi.org/10.3390/fuels6010012>

BC Stats. (2024). Labour Force Survey (LFS) earnings and employment trends, monthly data tables (March 2024). Government of British Columbia. URL path: <https://catalogue.data.gov.bc.ca/dataset/466ddecd-2701-4e97-84fb-df60bd5aca95>

BC Stats. (2026, April). Labour Force Survey (LFS) earnings and employment trends monthly data tables. Government of British Columbia. URL path: <https://catalogue.data.gov.bc.ca/dataset/466ddecd-2701-4e97-84fb-df60bd5aca95>

British Columbia Ministry of Forests & BC Energy Regulator. (n.d.). BC water portal. URL path: <https://apps.nrs.gov.bc.ca/gwells>

Destination BC. (2024, February). 2024 value of tourism snapshot. URL path: <https://www.destinationbc.ca/content/uploads/2024/02/2022-Value-of-Tourism-Snapshot.pdf>

Destination BC. (2025). Resident perceptions of tourism: Snapshot series – 2024 results. URL path: <https://www.destinationbc.ca/research-insights/type/resident-research>

Destination BC. (2026, February). 2025 Resident Perceptions of BC's Tourism Industry. URL path: <https://www.destinationbc.ca/research-insights/type/resident-research/>

Destination BC Corp. (n.d.). Official Destination BC corporate platform. URL path: <https://www.destinationbc.ca>

Destination Canada. (2025, February). Lodging Aligned Spend Reporting.

Environics Analytics. (2026). DIP: Destination BC [Thompson Okanagan]. ROVE+DOMO.

Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) / Transport Canada. (2024). National Inventory Report / GHG Emissions Report indicators.

go2HR. (2026, April). BC tourism and hospitality employment tracker. URL path: <https://www.go2hr.ca/research/employment-tracker>

Government of British Columbia. (2024). Adaptable dwelling unit illustrative design guide. URL path: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca>

Government of British Columbia. (2025). BC Drought Portal / Hydrometric drought classification index. URL path: <https://droughtportal.gov.bc.ca/>

Government of British Columbia. (2025, May 26). Wildfire Season Summary – Province of British Columbia. URL path:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/about-bcws/wildfire-history/wildfire-season-summary>

Government of British Columbia. (2026). Electricity emissions factor and grid intensity dashboard. URL path:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/climate-change/data/electricity>

Government of British Columbia. (2026, March). Regional population estimates.

Government of British Columbia. (n.d.). Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR). URL path: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-management>

Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada. (n.d.). Indigenous tourism Canada database. URL path: <https://indigenoustourism.ca>

International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). (2024). Carbon Emissions Calculator (ICEC) v13.

McMaster, R., Noble, B., Poelzer, G., & Hanna, K. (2020). Wind energy environmental assessment requirements and processes: an uneven landscape. *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 39(1), 11–23. URL path: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14615517.2020.1815271>

The Nlaka'pamux Nation Tribal Council (NNTC) - <https://nntc.ca/>

Okanagan Basin Water Board. (2020). The Okanagan Flood Story. URL path: <https://okanagan-basin-flood-portal-rdco.hub.arcgis.com>

Okanagan Basin Water Board. (2025). Climate Indicators Dashboard (Sandra Schira, BEd. and MSc., Water Science Specialist). URL path: <https://obwb.ca/indicators/>

Okanagan Nation Alliance. (n.d.). Ali Kwu\_swiwi-Numtax, Ali Kwu\_suknaqinx, Ali Axa/ L/Tmxwula/Xw framework. URL path: <https://www.syilx.org>

PlugShare. (2019). PlugShare EV charging station data index. URL path: <https://www.plugshare.com>

PlugShare Database. (2025). Human-verified audit: Charging locations and port density verification metrics in the TOTA region.

Recycle BC. (2017). Residential packaging and paper recycling. URL path: <https://recyclebc.ca>

The Scw'exmx Tribal Council. <https://www.scwexmxtribal.com>

Shuswap Nation Tribal Council (SNTC). <https://shuswapnation.org>

Statistics Canada. (2022). Canada's national statistical agency travel database. URL path:  
<https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/start>

Symphony Tourism Services & TOTA. (2024). TOTA Dashboard metrics data.

Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association. (2023). TOTA climate action plan report. URL path:  
<https://www.totabc.org/s/TOTA-Climate-Action-Plan-Report-2023-1.pdf>

Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association. (2026). Current and past TOTA INSTO reports index portal.  
URL path: <https://www.totabc.org/committed/insto>

Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association. (2026). TOTA INSTO report destination stewardship blog  
repository. URL path: <https://www.totabc.org/destination-stewardship-blog/insto>

Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association. (n.d.). Tourism Emergency Response Team (TERT) [Internal  
monitoring engine].

Tourism Impact Portal. (n.d.). Welcome to BCRTS metrics portal. URL path:  
<https://tourismimpactportal.com>

Vividcomm. (2025, May 12). Average Canadian water use indicator model. URL path:  
<https://vividcomm.com/2024/12/21/water-consumption-in-canada>

Waste and Recycling – Regional District of Central Okanagan. (2023, July 7). URL path:  
<https://www.rdco.com/en/living-here/waste-and-recycling.aspx>

World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism / UN Tourism). (n.d.). International network of sustainable tourism  
observatories (INSTO). URL path:  
<https://www.untourism.int/sustainable-development/un-tourism-international-network-of-sustainable-tourism-observatories>

World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism / UN Tourism). (n.d.). Measuring the sustainability of tourism  
(MST) framework / Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST). URL path:  
<https://www.untourism.int/tourism-statistics/statistical-framework-for-measuring-the-sustainability-of-tourism>

World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism / UN Tourism). (n.d.). The Glasgow declaration on climate action  
in tourism. URL path:  
<https://www.untourism.int/the-glasgow-declaration-on-climate-action-in-tourism>

---

Current and past TOTA INSTO reports are publicly posted here: <https://www.totabc.org/committed/insto>