

# 2024-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN



**COCHRANE**  
*Tourism*



# LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Cochrane Tourism respectfully acknowledges that we are situated on the traditional territories of the peoples of Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprising the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), as well as the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations). Cochrane is also home to Otipemisiwak Métis Government of the Métis Nation within Alberta District 4. This land is the traditional home and traveling route for many Indigenous Peoples, including the Blackfoot Confederacy, Tsuut'ina, Stoney Nakoda, and Métis, whose histories, languages, and cultures continue to influence our vibrant community.



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# BACKGROUND

*2024 marks a significant year for the Cochrane Tourism Association (CTA). The organization has worked tirelessly for the past six years under the leadership of Executive Director Jo-Anne Oucharek to establish Cochrane as a visitor destination.*



## Significant achievements include:

- **Developing and maintaining a strong membership base of 90+ partners.**
- **Working with regional hotels to establish a DMF fund, designed to fund the DMO via revenues from the visitor economy.**
- **Creation of a Tourism Mentorship Program that facilitates the development of tourism experiences. The initiative is in its fourth year and has supported 24 businesses.**
- **Support of tourism businesses during Covid-19 shutdowns. This support included sitting on a task force to address challenges, advocating for tourism businesses at various levels of government, and working with businesses 1:1 to help them identify resources and opportunities to pivot offerings.**
- **The creation of a carefully curated visual and written content library that captures the essence of our community. This asset will prove invaluable for communications for years to come.**
- **Acting as the lead advisory partner to Travel Alberta in identifying Cochrane as part of a new Tourism Development Zone.**

These achievements have positioned Cochrane as an emerging destination. The provincial tourism authority (Travel Alberta), as well as the current Minister of Tourism and Sport (Minister Schow), have acknowledged the potential for tourism growth in the area. The Tourism Development Zone discovery report suggests potential tourism spending in our area between 2022 and 2035 will total \$147 million.

At this precipice, the CTA has recognized the importance of evolving strategically to establish Cochrane as a place to visit while ensuring a net positive for our community. It is with this intention we have strengthened our mission and vision, and developed an organizational pledge that incorporates the values of collaboration, community-focused, welcoming, genuine, and forward-thinking.





# FOUNDATIONS

*The foundation of our organization includes a familiar mission and vision statement. As our strategy broadens to encompass tourism growth, we have also included guiding principles and a new community pledge.*



## VISION

*Invite guests from our backyard and around the world to experience Cochrane's genuine character, welcoming visitors as locals.*

## MISSION

*Champion the development of a community-focused tourism ecosystem through innovation, collaboration, and creative marketing while acting as stewards for our residents, land, visitors, and economy.*

## OUR PLEDGE: COMMUNITY- FOCUSED TOURISM PLACEMAKING

*As we invite more value-aligned guests to this area, our role as the destination management organization is to be stewards for the community, environment, culture, and economy. We pledge to support the creation of memorable experiences and engage in placemaking while telling the stories of our unique identity and local characters.*

# OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

*As we work towards growing more opportunities for our community through tourism, we will follow three guiding principles.*



1

Respect our sense of place and identity as the stewards of community, culture, economy, and environment.

2

Take a collaborative approach by inviting, engaging, and nurturing intentional relationships as part of an interconnected network of community stakeholders.

3

Our community lives here, and so do we. We commit to encouraging tourism that provides an exceptional experience for visitors while preserving our small-town feel and offering a positive impact for all.





# PATHWAYS

*Pathways integrate our vision, mission, and guiding principles, providing the framework for our organization's actions. Each pathway leads to multiple priorities, shaping our annual action plan.*

## PATHWAY ONE: EXPERIENCE ECOSYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

Tourism Destination agencies recognize that the work of marketing a place is strengthened significantly when they also participate in the development and management of that place. Work will continue with the development of tourism experiences. The term “experience ecosystem” has been selected to acknowledge how all the various contributors to the tourism industry are interconnected, and make up one experience for our visitors. A tourism eco-system includes tourism businesses and the people within them, special events, natural environments, transportation, residents, and cultures.

Our priorities in this pillar are:

- 1. Visitor Event Development:** Work with community organizations and event producers to support community events that welcome visitors. Role: Guide/Partner
- 2. Accommodation management and development:** Support DMF members to increase off-season occupancy, support DMF members to increase membership, advocate for new boutique and unique accommodations, and work to include vacation rentals as part of accommodations options. Role: Lead/Advocate
- 3. Export Ready Preparation:** Encourage and offer support to local businesses to become export-ready. Role: Lead/Guide
- 4. Major Project Advocacy:** Advocate and guide major projects including the Nordic ski track, cultural centre, and river access strategy. Role: Advocate
- 5. Tourism Experience Mentorship Program.** Complete the 2024 Cohort, and prepare for the 2025 cohort. Role: Lead/Guide
- 6. Partnership Program:** Review partnership benefits and connect with and invite new tourism partners. Role: Lead



## PATHWAY TWO: COMMUNICATION

Communication remains a critical role for the Cochrane Tourism Association. Communication encompasses familiar visitor marketing and visitor education in the form of storytelling. It includes advocacy on behalf of our partners, and raising awareness of the Cochrane Tourism Association amongst local stakeholders. Finally, communication includes fostering a sense of community pride amongst our residents.

Our priorities in this pillar are:

1. **Update Website:** Update the website to a) diversify the audience reach b) improve the user experience c) mitigate the risk of website crash. Role: Lead
2. **Community Outreach:** Increase awareness of the CTA with residents, business community, and policy-making organizations, and increase resident awareness of experience opportunities in Cochrane. Role: Lead
3. **Adjust the visitor communications strategy:** adjust the visitor communications strategy to diversify the audience and support partners by increasing the profile of the entire destination. Includes adjustment of content, social media, and paid advertising. Role: Lead
4. **Increase earned media.** Role: Lead
5. **Export Ready preparation:** Create communications materials and welcome travel trade fam tours to Cochrane. Role: Lead

## PATHWAY THREE: CONNECTIVITY

The connectivity pathway encompasses two definitions of connectivity. The first is a literal definition, where connectivity refers to transportation; access to, in, and around the destination. The second definition refers to the social connectivity of our community, tourism stakeholders, visitors, and culture.

Our priorities in this pillar are:

1. **Connect our partners:** Create opportunities for partners to connect socially to foster opportunities for collaboration. Role: Lead
2. **Connect our community, participate in cross-organizational efforts:** Participate in initiatives that include multiple community organizations working towards a common goal. Role: Partner or advocate
4. **Access to Cochrane:** Encourage and support access to Cochrane including airport access, and public access (trains). Role: Advocate
5. **Access around Cochrane:** Advocate for principle-aligned access around Cochrane including trails, public transport, and shared transport. Role: Advocate

# DEFINITIONS

*This page breaks down important terms and ideas we use to talk about tourism in our area, making them easy to understand. We explain these terms because they're key to how we work together and grow tourism.*



## What is the experience ecosystem?

The experience ecosystem represents the interconnectedness of the various stakeholders in tourism and specifically includes:

- **Businesses including:**
  - Accommodations: hotels, inns, cabins, retreat centres, vacation rentals, camp & RV sites, geodomes, glamping tents
  - Tour operators
  - Activity operators and Guides
  - Attractions
  - Food and Beverage providers
  - Special event venues
  - Retail
- **Built environment**
- **Natural environment:**
  - Trails
  - Public parks
  - Viewscapes
  - Watersheds
  - Wildlife
- **Transportation and access**
- **Special events**
- **Resident sentiment**
- **Community culture(s) (which we also refer to as “the feeling”)**

## Who is part of our community/ stakeholders?

- **Host community residents**
- **Residents of Îyârhe (Stoney) Nakoda community of Mîni Thnî**
- **Visitors**
- **Business community**
- **Regulatory bodies & frameworks**
- **Tourism organizations - national, provincial, and local**

- **Host community organizations that impact ecosystem infrastructure or provide visitor experiences or special events:**

- |                           |                                      |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| • Bike Cochrane           | • Community Futures                  |
| • Ag Society              | • Cochrane Business Network          |
| • Cochrane Lions Club     | • Glenbow Ranch Society              |
| • Rotary                  | • Bighill Creek Preservation Society |
| • Sport organizing bodies | • Cochrane Library                   |
| • SLS Centre              | • Community Associations             |
| • Chamber of Commerce     |                                      |
| • CEAC                    |                                      |
| • Innovate Cochrane       |                                      |

## What is our ‘place’?

The political boundaries of Cochrane do not define the entire place guests will be attracted to. Our place is located on the eastern slopes of the Canadian Rocky Mountains. It includes a portion of the Bow River, sprawling ranchlands representing our western heritage, the northern foothills including crown land, and Îyârhe (Stoney) Nakoda community of Mîni Thnî.

Political boundaries include the heart of our place - the town of Cochrane, towns like Cremona, Water Valley, and Sundre. The eastern section of the MD of Bighorn, parts of Rocky View County and a southern section of Mountain View County.

Notable geographical features include the Big Hill and the valley below it, the outline of the Canadian Rockies on the horizon, the Ghost Lake Reservoir, and the Bow River. Notable natural spaces include Glenbow Ranch Provincial Park, The Cochrane Rancho Historic Site, Big Hill Springs Provincial Park, and numerous quiet forested areas.



Our history also defines us. We are made up of Indigenous and settler communities. We know the first people were in this place for thousands of years before European arrival. Our history includes hunters, gatherers, warriors, ranchers, cowboys, farmers, business people, and community builders. Our history includes immigrants, with each decade weaving a more diverse fabric of people.

### What roles do we play as an organization?

**Advocate** - In this role the Cochrane Tourism Association uses its voice and relationships to influence outcomes but it is not directly involved in the planning, funding, logistics or execution. This can be through communications, education, connecting stakeholders, and building relationships with decision-makers. This role is shared between the operations team and the board of directors.

**Lead** - Primary organization, responsible for planning, funding, logistics and execution. This role is the responsibility of the operations team, with guidance from the board of directors.

**Partner** - Share some responsibilities with another stakeholder, which can include planning, funding, logistics, and execution. This role is the responsibility of the operations team, with guidance from the board of directors.

**Guide** - In this role, the Cochrane Tourism Association provides resources, knowledge, or connections and may transition into an advocate or partnership role. This role is the responsibility of the operations team, with guidance from the board of directors.

### Who are values-aligned guests?

Much like a guest to our home, a values-aligned guest is gracious and responsible. They embody through thought and action the principles of stewardship of our community, culture, economy, and environment. A values-aligned guest wants to stay awhile, or perhaps for just a short time, but they want to engage in experiences that connect them to our community and place.

We have identified the values-aligned guest to be the “Curious Adventurer” as described by Travel Alberta.

Curious Adventurers immerse themselves in the places they travel – leaving time for unplanned encounters and activities that allow them to truly know a destination. For Curious Adventurers, travel is about getting a different perspective on the world. They’re energized by exploring new places and inspired to learn all they can about a destination through its landscapes, authentic culture and the people they meet. Spontaneous and open-minded, they’re fueled by a sense of adventure and discovery, knowing that organic moments can provide their best experiences. They are thoughtful planners, investing time before their trip to help forge deeper connections with a place.

We will target four different curious adventurer personas:

- **“The Local”** This guest is a resident who values connecting with their community and social circles through experiences. They welcome visiting friends and relatives to the area.
- **“The Daytripper”** This guest is a Regional or transit guest. They may be travelling less than 80 km, staying for a short while or stopping in on the way to somewhere else.
- **“The Explorer”** This guest is a traveller from afar - they may come from outside Alberta or International markets. This guest is looking for more traditional vacation activities, and accommodations will be required. They may use Cochrane as an Alberta destination hub.
- **“The Leader”** This guest is the decision maker or planner for a group of travelers. This can include sports teams, corporate guests accessing experiences, wellness or family groups engaging in a retreat, wedding guests, or travel trade professionals.

### Geographic Locations:

Alberta, Canada, US, UK, Germany

### What is Export Ready?

Export-ready refers to businesses that are prepared to work with the travel trade. Export readiness includes a high standard of experience, various tiers of pricing, polished communications materials, standardized offerings and schedules, and professional communication.

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[cochranetourism.ca](http://cochranetourism.ca)