

## **Regional Tourism Offices of Ontario**

### **Tourism in Ontario: Building the Foundations for Success**

In 2009 the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport began to lay the groundwork that would lead to the development of the regional tourism model. Thirteen new regional tourism organizations (RTO's) began operations in 2010 as a key recommendation of the Discovering Ontario Report. The RTO model was a major step in linking, strengthening and synchronizing the efforts of industry including operators, municipalities, destination marketing organizations, sector organizations and the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation, with the goal of growing Ontario's annual twenty billion dollar a year tourism economy. Over the past three years Ontario's RTO's have worked diligently to better understand the rapidly evolving tourism landscape within each region with the objective to create sound operating foundations and to make investments in programs to significantly enhance visitation and yield by concentrating on four fundamental tourism pillars; marketing, product development, workforce and industry training and investment attraction, in the context of their unique regional realities.

To further advance the regional model, Ontario's RTO's worked with the Ministry to establish province wide *Standards for Success* and *Key Performance Indicators* (KPIs). This significant, precedent setting, cooperative undertaking of the MTCS and RTO's is timely as the model matures to a provincial powerhouse that is set to execute, measure and move the needle forward. The productive phase of the investment is now just beginning...

With Ontario's tourism economy growing by \$4B (\$20 to \$24 billion) over the last 2 years, the Ministry of Tourism's ongoing investment in the sector on a number of levels, including the 40 million dollar annual contribution to RTO's, is already showing the results. Based on the early success of a collaborative approach, now is the time to synchronize our assets - from the operator right through to the CTC - to leverage our brand power both domestically and in the US, which will increase the rate of economic growth. The RTO's continue to play a key role in the synchronization imperative, creating that ever important link, or last mile, to the DMO's and operators in order to address the consumer's critically important and growing need for fulfillment or path to purchase.

### **RTO7: BruceGreySimcoe**

BruceGreySimcoe (RTO7) has been working directly with operators, owners, stakeholders and destination marketing organizations on a number of key initiatives through the Partnership Funding program. In addition, RTO7 collaborated with a local school board on a work force development initiative.

- **Signage Projects**

(Partnership Fund Partner: Municipality of Northern Bruce Peninsula)

Working with nine organizations, RTO7 created consistent tourism wayfinding signage across BruceGreySimcoe. In Northern Bruce Peninsula alone, 47 cycling route markers were installed along the Lighthouses North Cycle Trail, providing cyclists with accurate trail markings, and diverting them from the highly trafficked Hwy 6 to safer, quieter roads to fully enjoy and explore Bruce County communities. RTO7 will continue to invest in improved tourism wayfinding signage, providing roadside messaging that is both attractive and consistent to visitors. In addition, this

creates a uniform branding of the region, linking the three counties together as a tourism destination. The signage enables visitors to easily travel and access specific points of interest, enhancing their visitor experience.

- **Cycling Research/Development & Marketing**

(Partnership Fund Partners: County of Grey and the Township of Oro-Medonte/County of Simcoe)

Grey County, the Township of Oro-Medonte, and RTO7 worked together to build the foundation for the development of region-wide cycling. Through joint consumer research, development of new cycling itineraries and testing of internet marketing strategies, the first steps have been taken for the future development and marketing of cycling across BruceGreySimcoe. By working together collaboratively (rather than individually) this project yielded stronger results, enabling the partners and BruceGreySimcoe to capitalize on this emerging tourism opportunity in the coming year.

- **International Travel Trade (ITT) Development Around Georgian Bay**

(Partnership Fund Project Partners: Georgian Bay Destination Development Partnership (GBDDP), RTO12 and RTO13)

RTO7 partnered with the GBDDP and RTOs 12 and 13 to develop a three-year Market Development Plan to evaluate the potential market for the International Travel Trade around Georgian Bay, plus build awareness within the marketplace for Georgian Bay as an international destination. The project included educational workshops for operators and tourism organizations interested in investigating this market's potential. This partnership was unique as it brought together three RTOs, the GBDDP (a tourism organization representing DMOs and the industry), and the OTMPC.

- **Development of a Digital Image Database**

(Partnership Fund Partner: Ontario's Lake Country)

Ontario's Lake Country and its members partnered with RTO7 to develop a database of over 2500 images of area tourism experiences and attractions from all four seasons. The images appear in new and ongoing promotional campaigns (print, website, broadcast commercials, etc.) to visually showcase the region and attract potential visitors to Ontario's Lake Country. The database has resulted in saved time and money - previous images were often stock photography, which did not accurately portray the beautiful assets of Ontario's Lake Country.

- **Tap Into Tourism Career Day**

(In collaboration with the Bluewater District School Board (BWDSB) and the Bruce-Grey Catholic District School Board)

In late November 2013, RTO7 hosted over 250 Grade 11 and 12 hospitality and tourism students from across Grey-Bruce at a full day careers forum. The forum focused on careers and post secondary education in the tourism sector. This pilot project involved the BWDSB, the Bruce-Grey Catholic District School Board, tourism organizations, operators, youth employment agencies, Ontario colleges and universities and students, teachers and guidance counselors from 13 schools across the region. The day's agenda included presentations, workshops and exhibits on career opportunities. The feedback received was very positive and, as a result, RTO7 is exploring a

repeat of this pilot project within Simcoe County.

The above initiatives have fostered stronger stakeholder relationships, led to cross promotion through collaboration with DMOs and other RTOs, created awareness of the BruceGreySimcoe brand and developed focused, region-wide projects and marketing efforts in partnership with stakeholders. A strong working relationship with the region's school boards means continued opportunity for future tourism career-related events. RTO7 continues to market the region and its assets through the consumer website, [brucegreysimcoe.com](http://brucegreysimcoe.com), its microsites and social media pages. Brand awareness continues to grow, mainly through the use of online advertising. Staff is able to reach more stakeholders by attending industry events throughout the region, including conferences, brochure swaps, AGMs, familiarization tours, workshops and more to establish and maintain positive working relationships. Through these and future initiatives, RTO7 looks forward to working in partnership with these and others to promote BruceGreySimcoe and its tourism assets.

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