

Surfing Tourism Destination Feasibility Study, Kincardine, Ontario



Prepared for:

Regional Tourism Organization 7 and the
Municipality of Kincardine

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With support from the Regional Tourism Organization 7 (“RT07”), the Municipality of Kincardine has engaged urbanMetrics inc. (“urbanMetrics”) to undertake an assessment of the feasibility of developing and marketing Kincardine as Ontario’s premier surfing destination. urbanMetrics has been retained to conduct an evaluation, including:

- **Background research/literature review** – regarding surfing participation and travel patterns amongst Canadians in order to validate our own primary market research;
- **Enthusiast engagement** – including an online survey and discussions with existing surfers in Ontario;
- **On-site field work** – in order to identify and assess the market demand and appeal of surfing in Kincardine, particularly in comparison to other popular surfing destinations; and
- **Marketing Plan** – to develop an integrated surfing product strategy for Kincardine, including recommended improvements and strategies to further promote surfing and leverage waterways assets.

FINDINGS

Although the surfing opportunities in the Great Lakes are not widely known at the present time, there has been a long history of the sport in the Great Lakes region, and there has been a growing interest in surfing and other related activities in recent years. Kincardine boasts some of the best surf conditions anywhere in the Great Lakes, and has the potential to establish the community as a top-of-mind surfing destination, which offers truly unique experiences, unmatched elsewhere in Ontario.

Lake Huron, and more specifically Kincardine, is the most popular surfing destination in the Great Lakes region based on the results of our online survey research. The popularity of Kincardine illustrates that there is already a high familiarity with Kincardine as a surfing destination amongst existing surfers. Its popularity can be attributed to the surfing conditions (swell sizes, weather/seasonality, consistency of waves, water temperature, wave frequency, and accessibility) and nearby amenities, in which Kincardine compares favourably with other competitive surfing destinations in the Great Lakes region, and elsewhere in Canada.

Online market research has also been used to identify the demographic profile of a typical surfer¹:

¹ The primary market research for this study has been conducted using an online survey tool. It is important to note that the results of the online survey can’t be considered projectable or statistically valid, given the sampling size and the survey respondents. However, the data obtained through this primary research has been valuable to inform our study findings and recommendations.

Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents	
Age	30 - 39 years of age (52%); 20 - 29 years of age (18%)
Gender	Males; Females (54% male)
Marital Status	Married (53%)
Employment Status	Full-time (73%)
Household Income	\$100,000 - \$124,000 (18%); \$50,000 - \$74,000 (16%)
Educational Attainment	University certificate or diploma (45%); College, CGEP or equivalent (31%)

SOURCE: urbanMetrics inc.

It is important to note that the demographic profile of a typical surfer aligns well with the target audiences which have been identified through RT07 Consumer Insight Research.

Market research has also been used to identify surfing participation and preferences, travel trends, effective marketing channels, and characteristics of the surfing market in the Great Lakes region. The key findings are summarized below:

- Surfing (long and short board) and stand up paddleboarding are the two most popular types of surfing activities.
- Surfing in Kincardine is somewhat limited by seasonality and variable wave conditions, but the largest waves are typically during the spring and fall.
- In terms of surfing conditions, Kincardine compares well other popular surfing destinations during the peak seasons, with waves up to 10 feet.
- Most existing surfers identify themselves as either beginner or intermediate skill level.
- The majority of existing surfers prefer destinations that are closer to home and more convenient to access – with day trips being the most popular type of surfing excursion.
- The preferred accommodations amongst surfers while on trips include private cottages and staying with friends/family, although the recent competition demonstrated that hotels are also popular.
- Access to complementary attractions and businesses is much more convenient in Kincardine compared to other popular surfing destinations in Canada. The most popular activities amongst existing surfers include:
 - Hiking;
 - Swimming;
 - Shopping; and
 - Dining.
- The Internet and word-of-mouth recommendations are the most important resources used when planning a surfing excursion.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the unique nature of surfing in the Great Lakes region, promoting surfing in Kincardine would help to create a unique beach culture that would distinguish the local area. The promotion of Kincardine as Ontario's premier surfing destination would also help to establish a unique brand identity for Station Beach. The promotion of surfing would also provide an opportunity to establish partnerships with nearby communities in BruceGreySimcoe (e.g. Wasaga Beach and Sauble Beach) and contribute to the development of a diverse campaign to establish the region as Canada's premier beach destination. Based on the findings of our market research we have concluded that:

- Any marketing initiatives to promote Kincardine as Ontario's premier surfing destination should focus on the primary surfing activities, which includes surfing (long and short board) and stand up paddleboarding.
- It is critical to identify other complementary attractions and businesses that would help to draw more surfers to Kincardine. The proximity and accessibility of complementary attractions and businesses in Kincardine should be actively marketed.
- The combination of the prime wave conditions during peak season, along with the proximity of the downtown core to Station Beach, both contribute to make Kincardine one of the best surfing destinations in Canada.
- Ensuring that surfers who visit Kincardine have a memorable experience is also critical given the importance of word-of-mouth recommendations.
- Online channels should be the focus of future marketing initiatives.
- A good starting point for marketing Kincardine as Ontario's premier surfing destination would be the most popular surfing organizations amongst existing surfers in the Great Lakes region, including Great Lakes Surfers and FreshCoast.
- There should also be a focus on target audiences in nearby markets, including the Greater Toronto Area, recognizing the preference for convenient access and limited travel time (i.e. day trips).

Promoting surfing in Kincardine not only has the potential to establish a unique brand identity and beach culture, but it also provides an opportunity to increase spending and visitation at other nearby businesses. A strong connection between the waterfront and the main street helps to enhance visitor experiences. Furthermore, the peak seasons for surfing are typically during the spring and fall, which provides an opportunity for Kincardine to increase visitation during the shoulder seasons.

While it is important to recognize that the market potential for surfing in Kincardine is limited due to seasonality, surfing in the Great Lakes region is a niche sport/recreational activity, which provides an opportunity to increase spending and visitation amongst visitors to BruceGreySimcoe. The frontier aspect of surfing provides an opportunity to advertise Kincardine as a distinctive destination, which offers truly unique, captivating experiences that can't be matched elsewhere in Ontario.

Based on our study finding and conclusions, a number of strategic actions have been identified as part of the marketing plan to promote Kincardine as Ontario's premier surfing destination:

Strategy	Description	Expected Outcome(s)	Cost	Responsibility
Safety Devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Flotation devices in case of an emergency in the water > First-aid station located close to the pier in case of injury 	Improved safety would help to encourage greater participation in surfing, particularly from new surfers and those who are unfamiliar with surfing in Kincardine.	\$	Municipality of Kincardine
Signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > More signage to indicate potential dangers (e.g. current and undertow) > New sign on the pier that reiterates potential dangers; > Any additional safety considerations specific to surfers. > Install tourism directional signage to guide visitors towards Station Beach 	Safety and awareness of potential dangers should be improved, particularly as more surfers are attracted to Kincardine. Improved safety features and information will help improve the visitor experience and ensure the surfers are familiar with important safety considerations.	\$\$\$	Municipality of Kincardine
Local Surf Forecaster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > A local surf forecast > A local information source who confirms surf conditions; and > Helps to communicate to other surfers when a prime surf day is happening/upcoming 	This should help to increase visitation amongst existing surfers. One of the biggest challenges for all surfers in the Great Lakes region is trying to accurately predict when surf conditions will be optimal - but our research indicates that surfers are willing to travel longer distances if they can guarantee good wave conditions.	\$	Local surfers/retailers; Municipality of Kincardine
Improved Webcam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Upgrades to existing webcams > Improve functionality to allow users to zoom in and out > Provide multiple camera angles that allows you to see the lines of the waves 	An improved webcam that allows surfers to check live surf conditions in Kincardine, along with a local surfing forecast, would help to attract more surfers to Kincardine from abroad.	\$	Yacht Club; Kin Surf Co.; Municipality of Kincardine
Equipment Rentals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Expansion of existing board rental business, or establishment of additional board rental businesses > Greater variety of equipment (i.e. surf (long and short), SUP, various sized wetsuits, etc...). 	Surf board and wetsuit rentals make it more accessible and affordable for individuals to try surfing for the first time. Actively encouraging visitors to try surfing would help to increase the market for surfing in the Great Lakes region, particularly recognizing that most people can't stop once when they catch the "surfing bug".	\$	Private Partner (e.g. Pam Rantz)
Comprehensive Surf Guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Establishment of a comprehensive surf guide > Primary, central source of information about surfing in Kincardine > Available in print and online > Focus on Internet, recognizing the Internet is the most popular resource for planning trips amongst existing surfers and other visitors to RTO7 	The development of Surf Guide would help to organize and consolidate all of the information and resources related to surfing in Kincardine. The development of Surf Guide would help to communicate to visitors that Kincardine is indeed a surfing hotspot that is unmatched elsewhere in the Great Lakes region.	\$\$\$	Municipality of Kincardine; Kin Surf Co.
Annual Competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Continuing to host an annual surfing competition (e.g. in partnership with Eastern Surfing Association) 	Strategy to raise the profile of Kincardine as a surfing destination and improve the awareness of surfing in the Great Lakes region in general. The event provides opportunities to engage local businesses (e.g. West Shore Lakeside Surf Shop and Bruce Steakhouse) and support the local economy in Kincardine. There are also opportunities to engage corporate sponsors to provide prizes and other assistance for the competition. An annual competition would allow the municipality to attract visitors who may not have already been to Kincardine. There is also potential for significant media coverage related to competition, which helps to improve the image and general awareness of Kincardine as a genuine surfing destination.	\$	West Shore Lakeside Surf Shop; Eastern Surfing Association; Municipality of Kincardine; Corporate Sponsors (surfing companies); RTO7
Beach Clean-Up Event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Organizing a beach clean-up event <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Participation from both surfing enthusiasts and local residents > Provides partnership opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Local business (e.g. West Shore Lakeside Surf Shop) > Corporate sponsors (e.g. Volcom) 	This type of event would also help to create an even more welcoming atmosphere for surfers in Kincardine, by establishing a connection with local residents and a way of giving back to the community. A beach clean-up event would not only help to make the beach more attractive for surfers/local residents, but also help further to establish a community atmosphere built around surfing.	\$	Municipality of Kincardine; Shoreline Cleanup; Corporate Sponsors (surfing companies); RTO7
Surf Camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Establishment of a surf camp for children > Opportunity to introduce surfing to new audiences and increase the market size <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Ideal to teach young children the basics of surfing/paddleboarding, etc. as large waves wouldn't be required until they are older/more advanced 	To help attract more visitors and improve the awareness of Great Lakes surfing. Teaching children to surf at young ages is a strategy to introduce new surfers to the sport, helping to increase the size of the potential market for surfing in Kincardine in future years.	\$	Municipality of Kincardine; Corporate Sponsors (surfing companies); Private Partner (e.g. Great Lakes Surfers)

SOURCE: urbanMetrics inc.