



LAC LA BICHE COUNTY VISITOR FRIENDLY ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN

FINAL REPORT - JANUARY 30, 2018

expedition
MANAGEMENT CONSULTING

January 30, 2018

Brendan Newman
Alberta Culture and Tourism
Destination Development Branch
6th Floor, Commerce Place
10155 - 102 Street NW
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4L6

Dear Mr. Newman:

Please find enclosed the Final Lac La Biche County Visitor Friendly Assessment and Action Plan. It was a pleasure working with you and the Committee from Lac La Biche County. We are looking forward to learning about all of the enhancements to visitor friendliness that the destination achieves over the coming years.

If you have any questions or require clarification on the attached report, please feel free to contact me at 780-266-7888.

Sincerely,



Justin Rousseau, Managing Director
Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Overview

Expedition Management Consulting Ltd. was commissioned to undertake a Visitor Friendly Assessment of Lac La Biche County from July, 2017 to January, 2018. The main objective of the assessment was to analyze how the destination presents itself to visitors – its ambience and visual appeal, wayfinding and signage, customer service, public services and amenities, and visitor information services. Based on this assessment, a practical action plan was developed that will lead to tangible improvements in the visitor friendliness of Lac La Biche County.



Situational Analysis

With more than 100 lakes and 70% of Alberta's Class A beaches spread across 12,570 square kilometers, Lac La Biche County is a favoured destination for visitors seeking outdoor and water-based experiences in northern Alberta. Although there is no single organization that has complete jurisdiction over tourism development, tourism is recognized as an opportunity to diversify and grow local economies by many businesses, not-for-profit and governmental organizations.

Tourism Supply

Tourism in Lac La Biche County is built on the businesses, services and amenities that support the visitor experience. Much of the tourism supply also serves residents and the shadow population of temporary workers, which is a win-win for local businesses that rely on sales to leisure and business travellers, as well as residents. Additionally, when the County invests in visitor friendly initiatives, they are also investing in services and infrastructure that benefits residents.

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Lac La Biche County's tourism supply offers visitors a wide variety of attractions and experiences, many of which are related to the area's rich culture and nature-based assets. A wide variety of accommodations, restaurants and services support tourism, while unique festivals and events enhance the visitor experience.

Current Target Markets

Lac La Biche County has not yet completed a detailed market analysis to define its target markets; however, taking into account the destination's tourism supply and current visitation trends, we propose the County target:

Outdoor-oriented Alberta families drawn northeast to connect with nature and their family and friends at the uncrowded parks, lakes and beaches in Lac La Biche County.

Competitive Advantage

Lac La Biche's competitive advantage is its uncrowded yet accessible parks, lakes and beaches that offer family-friendly, outdoor experiences for Albertans, primarily from the Edmonton region and northeast Alberta.

Visitor Friendly Assessment

In July and August of 2017, the assessment team spent multiple days in Lac La Biche County experiencing the destination from a visitor's point of view. Each team member focused on their area of expertise, but also took a holistic view of the tour and commented on all five visitor friendly categories. Upon completion of the tour, the assessment team evaluated the visitor friendliness of the region using five key assessment categories:

1. Overall Ambience/Community Visual Appeal
2. Wayfinding and Signage
3. Public Services/Visitor Amenities
4. Quality of Service/Professionalism
5. Visitor Information



Our team also conducted a digital and online presence assessment of the destination. A Google search analysis was completed, followed by detailed reviews of the regional tourism website, County website, Mission Site website and the social media accounts linked to these sites.

Action Planning

Within each of the five assessment categories, specific initiatives were developed (81 in total) that will improve the visitor friendliness of Lac La Biche County. With input from the Committee, each initiative was assigned a priority and cost rating, along with an initiative lead and timeline for completion.

Top 10 Action Items

The following action items have been identified as the top priorities.

1. Improve the maintenance of downtown Lac La Biche and main street areas (i.e. repaint faded road lines, weed removal, street sweeping, etc.).
2. Develop a plan to improve safety and alleviate real or perceived risks to personal safety in downtown Lac La Biche.
3. Establish a public art policy and program that would enhance the visitor experience through the addition of more art in tourist areas (main streets, attractions, facilities).
4. Develop a plan to enhance the pedestrian friendliness of streetscapes with widened sidewalks, traffic calming measures, street furniture, decorative lighting, landscaping, etc.
5. Develop a consistent and comprehensive signage program (vehicular and pedestrian) for the County that includes directions to key amenities, facilities and services.

6. Ensure the Visitor Guide and Fun Map is available at local attractions and businesses. All other tourism information and maps should be consistent with the Fun Map in their use of symbols and language.
7. Consistently apply Lac La Biche County's theme in development standards, signage programs and visitor information.
8. Develop a Public Information Strategy for the County that is coordinated with visitor information. This would include orientation maps and information panels/kiosks at existing pull out areas along major highways.
9. Enhance the County's attractiveness to the VFR market by developing a hospitality ambassador program, adding familiarization tours for residents, and encouraging local tourism operators to offer referral rewards/discounts for residents who bring their family and friends with them.
10. Develop a Tourism Program Plan that will facilitate more daytime and evening entertainment options for visitors. The plan should also address the need for increased festivals and events, destination animation, and public programming related to local culture and history.

Next Steps

There are a number of key initiatives that the County should consider moving forward. Below is a brief timeline describing activities that should occur within the next year.

Strategic Priorities Within the Next 12 Months

1. Obtain commitment from County Council, Plamondon and District Community Development Society, and the Chamber of Commerce to work to improve visitor friendliness.
2. Establish a Visitor Friendly Working Group to lead the implementation of the Action Plan.
3. Begin implementation of the action plan. Particular focus could be directed towards the "quick wins" in order to achieve successes early and help build momentum.
4. Evaluate action plan initiatives and re-align priorities at the end of year 1.

Conclusion

The Visitor Friendly Assessment provides valuable information to Lac La Biche County; a practical action plan, and a starting point to improve visitor friendliness. With this plan in hand, Lac La Biche County can begin to enhance all aspects of its visitor friendliness, including ambience and visual appeal, wayfinding and signage, customer service, public services and amenities, and visitor information. The successful implementation of this plan will ensure that Lac La Biche County continues to be a destination of choice for tourists seeking outdoor, nature-based experiences, and will significantly contribute to the growth of the local tourism industry.



01

INTRODUCTION

01 INTRODUCTION

What is Visitor Friendliness?

Being visitor friendly is about more than having friendly local residents. It's about the look and feel of a community—its warmth, attractiveness and welcoming feel, how easy it is for visitors to find their way around, and how well they are treated. Visitor friendliness contributes to creating positive, memorable experiences for visitors. Visitor friendliness also ripples throughout a community, enhancing the quality of life for residents and encouraging community pride (Visitor Friendly AB).



What is a Visitor?

The Alberta Government Visitor Friendly Guide defines a visitor as follows:

"A visitor is someone who visits your community for reasons other than commuting to work or school, or for routine visits such as conducting sales or service calls, household grocery shopping and appointments. Not all visitors to your community will be tourists. You may find that the majority of your visitors are locals coming into town for shopping, appointments or community events. Being visitor friendly will encourage locals to support your community rather than driving to major centres. This will help keep money in the community."

The Guide identifies "types" of visitors as follows:

Day-use Visitors (same day trips)

- Do not stay overnight
- Come to your community from more than 40km away
- Come to your community:
 - a) for a specific attraction, activity or event or,
 - b) by stopping en route to another destination
- May require services related to travel (service stations) and food and beverage (lunch, supper or light groceries)
- May look for shopping and retail services or public amenities like picnic areas, walking trails or public washrooms

Overnight Visitors En Route to Somewhere Else

- Stay overnight, likely arriving in the evening and departing in the morning. They don't necessarily visit attractions.
- Require support facilities and services including accommodation, service stations, food and beverage services.
- May look for food and beverage services that are open in the evening, and possibly some evening activities.

Multi-day Visitors

- Stay for one or more nights. They visit attractions and participate in activities or events in the area.
- Could be visiting for the weekend.
- Require support facilities and services including accommodation (e.g. hotel, bed and breakfast, campgrounds), food and beverage services that are open in the evening, evening activities, retail shopping and craft outlets, travel services (gas stations, sewage dump stations, grocery stores), picnic areas, walking/biking trails, events and festivals.



Project Objective

The objective of the project was to complete a visitor friendly assessment for Lac La Biche County. This assessment analyzed how the municipality presents itself to visitors – its ambience and visual appeal, wayfinding and signage, customer service, public services and amenities, and visitor information services. Based on this assessment and input provided by the Committee, a practical action plan for the County was developed. This action plan has action items that will lead to tangible improvements in the visitor friendliness of Lac La Biche County.

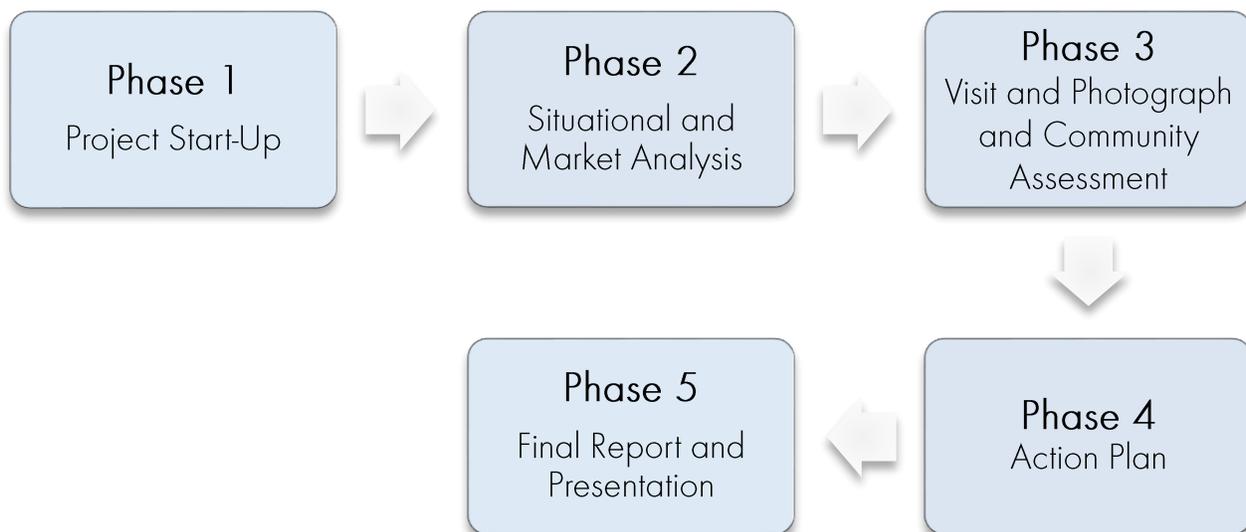
Project Team Members

The Visitor Friendly Assessment Committee was established in the summer of 2017 for the purpose of providing input and direction to the project. Below is a list of committee representatives:

Visitor Friendly Assessment Committee	
Organization	Representatives
Lac La Biche Mission Historic Society	Jennifer Mueller
Lakeland Interpretive Society	Shirley Klyne, Alyssa McIntyre
Community Futures	Gene Wesley, Michele McDougall
AFCA Plamondon	Daniel Carrier
Lac La Biche County	Carl Kurppa, Gordon Shaw
Alberta Culture and Tourism	Brendan Newman
Consultant Team	
Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.	Justin Rousseau (Project Lead), Maxwell Harrison with assistance from Pankaj Nalavde, Bob Robertson, Marliss Weber

Project Process

The Visitor Friendly Assessment project had five, interconnected phases, including Project Start-Up, Situational and Market Analysis, Visit and Photograph and Community Assessment, Action Plan, and Final Report and Presentation.



About This Document

Section 2 of this document contains the findings from the situational and market analysis, while Section 3 describes the key findings from the visit and photograph tours and digital and online presence assessment. Section 4 contains the action plan, and Section 5 outlines the next steps and conclusion.





02

SITUATIONAL AND MARKET ANALYSIS

02 SITUATIONAL AND MARKET ANALYSIS

This section provides a brief snap shot of Lac La Biche County, including a summary of visitor activities, attractions, accommodations, festivals and events, visitor information, shopping, transportation and other services. The purpose of this section is to provide a sense of what the destination has to offer visitors. Section 3 goes on to provide a more detailed assessment of visitor friendliness.

Regional Overview

Lac La Biche County is a municipal district located in northeast Alberta. It is a relatively new rural municipality, having been established in 2007 through the amalgamation of the Town of Lac La Biche and Lakeland County. The County's largest community, the Hamlet of Lac La Biche, is located about 220 km northeast of Edmonton and 290 km south of Fort McMurray.



Lac La Biche County spans 12,570 square kilometers and has a residential population of 8,544 people, most of whom live in the southern third of the County in the hamlets of Lac La Biche (pop. 2,682), Plamondon (pop. 348) and Beaver Lake (pop. 527), as well as the smaller hamlets of Hylo (pop. 31) and Venice (pop. 22) and on rural subdivisions (i.e. Lakeview Estates) or farms. The County is adjacent to four Aboriginal communities: Beaver Lake Cree Nation, Heart Lake First Nation, Kikino Metis Settlement and Buffalo Lake Metis Settlement. The area has strong French-Canadian roots with Plamondon designated in 2013 as the first Bilingual Community in Alberta. The County is also home to other cultural groups, including Cree, British, Italian, Lebanese, Metis, Russian and Ukrainian.¹

Oil and gas is the major economic driver in the region, and Lac La Biche County is positioned as the gateway to the South Athabasca Oil Sands. The oil and gas industry is a catalyst for other industries, including tourism and hospitality, construction, transportation, warehousing, and professional services. Agriculture has long been a key industry, and the southern part of the County is home to large and small cattle and grain operations. The County's post-secondary institution is Portage College, which serves the region and has its main campus in the Hamlet of Lac La Biche.²

The Hamlet of Lac La Biche is the second oldest established settlement in Alberta and water had much to do with its development. Water provided critical transportation routes during the fur trade and, over the past two centuries, water has been equally critical to growth in agriculture and oil and gas. Water is also very important to tourism in Lac La Biche County.

Tourism in Lac La Biche County

Welcoming by Nature; Your Playground of Opportunity.

The Hamlet of Lac La Biche was described in a July 1919 issue of The Edmonton Bulletin as “Edmonton’s newest summer resort,” equipped with two hotels, a brand new main street, picturesque islands, pebbly or sandy beaches, and whitefish and pickerel.³ Water and water-based recreation continue to be a primary draw with over 100 lakes and 70% of Alberta’s Class A beaches in the region.⁴ Visitors also come to hike, bike, ride off-highway vehicles (OHV), bird watch, and visit cultural attractions, festivals and events. Visitors stay in hotels, campgrounds, cabins, summer or secondary homes, and in the homes of family and friends.⁵ They eat at restaurants and cafes and buy food at farmers’ markets, u-picks and grocery stores. They pick up items from local retailers and spend money on gas and supplies. The amenities and services consumed by the 175,000 visitors to the Lac La Biche region each year touch on many industries, including hospitality, retail, agriculture, environment, telecommunications and government. As a result, tourism in Lac La Biche County is driven by the independent and collective efforts of private, public and not for profit enterprises.



Organizations Impacting Tourism

There is no single organization that has complete jurisdiction over tourism planning, development, marketing or the delivery of visitor experiences. This is particularly the case in Lac La Biche County where visitors take in amenities and services delivered by private operators (e.g. rentals, campgrounds), municipal and provincial governments (e.g. trails, boat launches, campgrounds, natural areas), and not-for-profit organizations (e.g. events, museums). Figure 1 below provides a summary of key organizations that impact tourism in Lac La Biche County. A full description of these organizations can be found in Appendix A.

Figure 1. Organizations Impacting Tourism

Organization	Impacts
Businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide front-line visitor services (e.g. accommodation, food and beverage). • Operate tourism businesses and provide experiences. • Represented by the Lac La Biche & District Chamber of Commerce.
Community Futures Lac La Biche	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not-for-profit organization providing financial and business services to entrepreneurs in Lac La Biche County. • Promotes the region for investment, relocation and tourism. • Maintains laclabicheregion.com
Travel Lakeland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Destination marketing organization (DMO) in Northeast Alberta. • Publishes a travel guide, attends consumer tradeshows and industry events.
Travel Alberta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial marketing organization. • Provides free and cooperative tourism marketing opportunities. • Free tourism multi-media library.
Alberta Culture and Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial ministry supporting tourism development. • Offers a host of programs, services, research and statistics that support Alberta's tourism industry.
Alberta Environment and Parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manages and operates provincial parks and recreation areas. • Plans for and regulates the use of public lands.
Municipal Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shapes the strategic direction for tourism in the region. • Invests in community amenities, services, programs and events that benefit residents and visitors.

Tourism-Related Planning

Tourism is recognized as an opportunity for Lac La Biche County to diversify and grow its economy. The municipality, tourism stakeholders and the business community have invested in plans and initiatives that will have a positive impact on local tourism (see Figure 2). As these plans are implemented, the results shape the visitor experience in Lac La Biche County. See Appendix B for a detailed description of these plans.

Figure 2. Tourism-Related Plans



Tourism Supply

Tourism in Lac La Biche County is built on the amenities and services offered by private, public and not-for-profit enterprises. Many of these amenities and services also serve residents and the shadow population of temporary workers, which is a win-win for local businesses that rely on sales to leisure and business travelers, as well as residents. Additionally, when the County invests in visitor friendly initiatives, they are also investing in services and infrastructure that benefits residents.

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The following summary of the tourism supply in Lac La Biche County is primarily based on the tourism asset inventory and other secondary research. This summary focuses on Lac La Biche County, but does include key assets located in the wider region that are important to tourism.

Transportation

Highways

The vast majority of visitors to Lac La Biche County travel by personal vehicle. The County has an excellent network of paved highways that connect the region with Edmonton International Airport (243 km southwest) and the cities of Edmonton (220 km southwest) and Fort McMurray (290 km north). The Hamlet of Lac La Biche is intersected by three major arterial roads: Highways 36, 55 and 881. These are direct routes connecting Lac La Biche with the South Athabasca Oil Sands to the north, Cold Lake to the east, and Wabasca to the northwest.

Airports

Lac La Biche County is a 2.5 hour drive (243 km) from the Edmonton International Airport. The airport has car rental providers, as well as bus services connecting the airport to Edmonton and onward to the Hamlets of Lac La Biche and Plamondon. The County has a municipal airport located approximately 3 km west of the Hamlet of Lac La Biche. The airport serves charter flights, primarily for industry and air ambulance (e.g. Alberta Central Airways Ltd.). It is also the Air Tanker Base for firefighting in northeast Alberta.

Rail

Lac La Biche County has the only rail line in northeast Alberta, contributing to the County's position as a distribution hub for companies with operations in Wabasca, Conklin and Cold Lake. The rail line does not have passenger service.

Bus Service

Greyhound offers regularly scheduled service from Edmonton with stops in the Hamlets of Lac La Biche and Plamondon. Red Arrow has routes to northeast Alberta (e.g. Bonnyville, Smoky Lake, Cold Lake, Fort McMurray), however there is no stop in Lac La Biche County. Ebus has scheduled services from Edmonton to Fort McMurray with stops at camps and communities en route. Bus services are primarily used by residents and workers.

Accommodation

Lac La Biche County has a large supply of accommodations, including front and backcountry campgrounds, cabins, tipis, hotels and motels.

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Hotels/motels

As the service centre for the County, the Hamlet of Lac La Biche has seven hotels and motels with over 500 rooms. Plamondon has two hotel/motels with a total of 32 rooms. Business as opposed to leisure travel dominates overnight stays in hotels and motels.

Cabins and B&Bs

There are two bed and breakfasts and approximately ten properties offering cabin accommodation. Cabins are rustic or full-service and are in ranch, park or remote settings. Cornerstone Ranch near Whitefish Lake offers tipi accommodation and Lakeland Expedition Rentals offers ice fishing cabins/huts on the ice.⁶ Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park offers comfort camping in 15 cabins; 10 of which are open year-round with full services.



Campgrounds

The Lac La Biche region has over 1,300 campsites and cabins.⁷ Campsites include non-serviced and powered sites, front and backcountry sites, and tent and pull-through RV sites.⁸ Campgrounds are owned and/or operated by public, private or non-profit enterprises, and the majority are located on or near lakes with boat launches, beaches and swimming areas.

One campground is located in the Hamlet of Lac La Biche (Diesel's Owl Hoot Cabins and Campground) and six campgrounds are within 20 km of town. Four of these campgrounds are private, non-profit or municipal (Knights of Columbus Grounds, Spruce Point Resort, Young's Beach Campground and Fork Lake Campground) and two are in provincial parks (Beaver Lake and Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Parks).

There are an additional eight campgrounds 50 to 60 km from the Hamlet of Lac La Biche. Four of these campgrounds are located in Lakeland Provincial Park and Recreation Area (Ironwood Lake, Touchwood Lake, Pinehurst Lake and Seibert Lake campgrounds); the other four are also on lakes (North Buck Lake (2), Heart Lake and Kikino Silver Birch Resort on Whitefish Lake). Crow Lake Provincial Park has a campground 180 km north of Lac La Biche.

There are two campgrounds just north of the Hamlet of Plamondon: Camp 3F Group Camp is 2 km northeast of town; and Plamondon Whitesands Resort is 11 km away on the western shores of Lac la Biche.

Lakeland Provincial Park and Lakeland Provincial Recreation Area are destinations for visitors looking to camp in the backcountry. The provincial park has 16 designated backcountry camping areas with a total of 38 campsites. The adjacent recreation area has an additional five backcountry camping areas with a total of nine campsites. The backcountry sites are accessible by hiking trail and/or canoe.

Food and Beverage

The Hamlet of Lac La Biche has familiar restaurants for visitors looking for comfort food on the go (e.g. A&W, Subway, KFC, Taco Bell). Visitors looking for something a little different can find Lebanese options, including at 881 Grill, Taras Pizza and Bill's Burger Baron. For casual dining, visitors can check out Mac's Grill, Frogger's Pizza, Tom's Pizza and Steakhouse, or the Pelican Restaurant and Bar. Visitors looking to catch the game can head to Tara's at the Bold Centre, Rocky's Pizza & La Bones Sports Bar, or Boston Pizza. In the summer months, visitors can try The Saucenator - a local food truck with a saucy twist.

Shopping and Services

The Hamlet of Lac La Biche is the County's retail and service centre. It has all of the basic amenities visitors need. Visitors can pick up food and supplies at familiar grocery stores like IGA and Extra Foods, and at the local Lac La Biche Your Independent Grocer. Visitors can find familiar banks like ATB, CIBC, Scotiabank, and Servus Credit Union; and there are several gas stations, auto repair shops and car washes. They can find outdoor supplies for hunting, fishing, camping, ATVing, boating and paddling at Lac La Biche Sporting Goods. Fields is a classic small town department store with clothing and supplies; and main street has additional local stores like Four Seasons Clothing, High Point Clothing and Modern Wears. The weekly Farmers' Market, which runs from March to December, is where visitors can find local arts and crafts, homemade preserves, local meats and garden produce.

The Hamlet of Plamondon has a Co-op for groceries, gas and sporting goods; and there is one auto repair shop (CS Auto) in town. Servus Credit Union and ATB offer banking services. Visitors can enjoy garden produce, home baked goods and local honey at the Plamondon Farmers' Market on Saturdays in summer. Visitors can also check out the Creative Edge, a local boutique.

Attractions and Experiences

Lakes and Water-Based Recreation

The County's lakes and beaches are the primary attraction for visitors, in particular Lac la Biche. Visitors can access the lake from McArthur Park in the Hamlet of Lac La Biche. The recently installed 200-foot floating dock enhances access to the lake during boating season. Visitors can also enjoy the lake from the popular Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park. The park encompasses nine islands in Lac la Biche; including Churchill Island which has a 300-year-old old-growth boreal forest. Visitors can rent canoes, kayaks and stand up paddleboards in the park's main campground area. The park's white-sand beaches are a draw for beach recreation and the many sand bars are great for wading and swimming far out into the lake. Visitors also come to sail, power boat and water ski. It should be noted that blue-green algae blooms are increasingly becoming a problem on Lac la Biche. Blooms occur regularly and prevent visitors from accessing the lake for swimming.

The County's lakes and beaches are the primary attraction for visitors, however blue-green algae blooms are a problem.



There are over 20 lakes in the region that attract anglers for a variety of sport fish, including northern pike, walleye, perch, burbot, and whitefish. For visitors seeking a fishing lodge experience, there are five lodges benefiting tourism in the region, including Plamondon Whitesands Resort with boat rentals and fishing gear; Grist Haven Fishing Lodge; and the acclaimed Winefred Lake Lodge, 200 km north of Lac La Biche on Winefred Lake. In addition, Reel Angling Adventures offers charter fishing tours to various lakes in the region.

For visitors looking for a wilderness paddling experience, Lac La Biche County boasts Alberta's only backcountry canoe circuit. The 38-km circuit in Lakeland Provincial Park takes about three days to complete. There are canoe carts at portages on the main circuit and backcountry campsites en route. In good weather the water is flat and an easy paddle; if it is windy the water can become choppy.⁹ Visitors looking to rent canoe and camping gear can make arrangements with Lakeland Expeditions located in the Hamlet of Lac La Biche.

Trails

The Lac La Biche region has more than 250 km of trails and is a popular destination for riders of off-highway vehicles and snowmobiles. The Northeast Alberta Trails Map published by TrailNet is an excellent resource for motorized and nonmotorized users.¹⁰ Lakeland Provincial Park and Recreation Area has 45 km of multi-use trails. Alberta Parks offers printed and online trail maps for Lakeland as well as for Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park. The latter has well maintained walking and biking trails to viewpoints, beaches and old growth forest. There is also a trail that extends from Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park to the Hamlet of Lac La Biche.

Cultural Attractions

The County's cultural attractions make for great day trips from nearby campgrounds and other accommodations. Visitors can learn how the fur trade shaped Canada as a nation at Lac La Biche Mission. This national historic site on the shores of Lac la Biche has an interpretive centre and several historic buildings, including the fully restored 1894 convent. Visitors can further explore European settlement and First Nations history and culture at Lac La Biche Regional Museum and Discovery Centre, Portage College Museum of Aboriginal Arts and Artifacts, Plamondon Museum, and Rich Lake and District Pioneer Museum. Visitors of all faiths can tour the Al Kareem Mosque, built in 1958 as the cornerstone of the region's Lebanese community.



Visitors of all faiths can tour the Al Kareem Mosque, built in 1958 as the cornerstone of the region's Lebanese community.

Events

Annual events in the region attract both residents and visitors. The Hamlet of Lac La Biche hosts two significant events. The event of the summer is the Lac La Biche Pow Wow & Fish Derby. Visitors can take in First Nations and Metis singing and dancing, and can experience life by the lake with a fish fry, stand-up paddle boarding and demonstrations by forest firefighting water bombers. There is also live music, a midway, art show and sale, parade and ball tournament. The event of the winter is the Festival of Speed, which hosts the Western Canadian Ice Racing Championships, Motorbike and Quad Championship, and the Snowmobile Drag Races. There is also a horse and sleigh rally, snowmobile trail rally and aircraft fly-in. The On The Pond hockey tournament is also held on Lac La Biche Lake when winter conditions permit. This one-day tournament attracts up to 28 teams from across northern Alberta.

The Hamlet of Plamondon is home to two power-sport events. Plamondon Mud Bogs is held each June, attracting three to four thousand attendees over the two days. It is a Canadian Mud Racing Organization-sanctioned mud bog event with amateur and professional mud races, children's activities and a midway. The Boreal Biker Family Motorcycle Rally and Rock Concert is held in August. This event has a motorcycle show and shine, soapbox races, stunt rider show, bike rodeo, and live music.

Kikino Metis Settlement hosts the Kikino Silver Birch Rodeo & Celebration Days. This three-day event in August features chuck wagon and chariot races, a rodeo, talent show, midway rides, nightly steak suppers and fireworks over Whitefish Lake.

Hyllo-Venice Harvest Days in August celebrates the harvest with a horticultural show, lawn tractor obstacle course, petting zoo, pony rides and live entertainment. There is even a pig catch.

Lac La Biche Mission also hosts special events. The Canada Day celebration is very popular, attracting approximately 1,500 people annually (2000 people came to the 150 Canada Day event in 2017).

The Bold Centre, Lac La Biche Golf and Country Club, and Portage College also hold events that draw visitors (e.g. tournaments and concerts).

Visitor Information Centre

The Visitor Information Centre (VIC) is located in the lower level of McArthur Place in the Hamlet of Lac La Biche. The VIC is part of the Lac La Biche Regional Museum and Discovery Centre.¹¹ Staff provide travel counselling services to visitors and the VIC offers brochure distribution for tourism operators.

Emergency and Protective Services

Lac La Biche County is supported by various law enforcement entities including Peace Officers, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Alberta Sheriffs, Conservation Officers, Alberta Fish and Wildlife Officers, and the Alberta Commercial Vehicles Enforcement Team. The Lac La Biche and Plamondon Fire Districts provide fire and water rescue services. The William J. Cadzow Health Care Centre provides medical services to the region.

What Do We Know About Current Visitors to Lac La Biche County?

The Lac La Biche region welcomes an estimated 175,000 visitors each year, with the majority arriving in the summer months. The region primarily attracts visitors from northern Alberta and the Edmonton region. This parallels findings on visitation throughout northern Alberta in which residents of the north account for 44% of all visits to the Alberta North Tourism Region; and Edmonton and area residents account for 25%.¹² Additionally, 97% of overnight stays at both Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park campground and Beaver Lake campground were done by Albertans (the majority of which were from northern Alberta and the Edmonton region).¹³ Approximately 43% of the 914,000 overnight visits to northern Alberta are for the primary purpose of visiting family and friends. 29% of overnight visits are for the purpose of a pleasure trip. 59% of all overnight visits are spent in the homes of friends and relatives, whereas 18% are spent in campgrounds and RV parks.

Traveling to visit family and friends is a significant driver for travel to northern Alberta. In fact, "Visiting Friends and Relative (VFR) represents a considerable share of all tourism in Alberta."¹⁴ The VFR market accounts for 45% of all in-province trips by Albertans, and VFR is the main reason for more than half of Canadians traveling to Alberta from other provinces.

Research on the VFR market in Alberta indicates that residents use their personal experience to determine what to do when friends and family visit from out of town. Planning is typically a joint effort between the hosting resident and their guests. While most hosts are involved in trip planning (80%), very few hosts plan activities in advance of their guests' arrival (15%). More often plans are made once guests arrive (23%) or both before and after guests arrive (41%).¹⁵ Given that planning happens in the destination and is relatively spontaneous, *resident hosts rely on personal experience* to inform decisions on where to go and what to do with guests.

In 2015, Community Futures Lac La Biche conducted an online survey of residents and visitors to gather information on their travel in the region. There were 125 responses to the resident survey and 31 responses to the visitor survey. The findings provide some general insights on the County as a whole.

Resident Survey (N = 125)

The vast majority (91%) of respondents indicated that outdoor activities and nature are the best aspects of the Lac La Biche region. Most (93%) had been to Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park, followed by two-thirds (65%) having visited Lakeland Provincial Park. Trails appear to be a draw for resident respondents with 87% indicating they had used the trails; 77% had hiked on the trails; 39% had rode motorized all-terrain vehicle on the trails; and 20% had biked on the trails. Lac La Biche Pow Wow Days and Fish Derby was by far the most frequented event by respondents (75%), followed by Canada Day (46%), Winter Festival of Speed (40%), On The Pond Hockey Tournament (32%), and the Kikino Metis Celebration and Rodeo (22%). Nearly all resident respondents (96%) indicated they would invite others to come and experience these festivals and events. Overall, resident respondents indicated they would recommend the region to others (98%) and know where to tell visitors to get information about the region (98%).

These findings suggest that residents of Lac La Biche County have first-hand experience with outdoor activities, natural attractions and events in the region - and these are the places and experiences they are likely to share with visiting family and friends.

Visitor Survey (N = 31)

77% of respondents indicated their main interest when selecting a destination was outdoor activities and nature. 75% had heard about the region from their family and friends, and 30 out of 31 respondents used the Internet to help plan their trip (TravelAlberta.com was the most popular website with 58% of respondents using it). Notably, 68% of respondents classified themselves as “independent” travellers who prefer not to use tour guides. These findings are indicative of Fully Independent Travellers (FIT). FIT’s are visitors who plan their trip themselves and tend to travel on their own (i.e. not as part of a tour group).¹⁶ FIT’s often travel by car or other independent means and book vacation components on their own (e.g. accommodation, transportation, activities). Visitors tended to stay in the region for 3 – 6 days (42%) or 1 – 2 days (39%). When overnighing, respondents most often used campgrounds (29%) or stayed with their family (26%).

“Virtually all hosts want to showcase the local flavour of their town. While this varies for each location, the key is showing the guest what the host’s town is all about.”

“Engage residents to be familiar and comfortable with a variety of experiences, and refresh their knowledge of current events and activities happening at specific times where they can invite people, and know that things are happening during their guests’ visits.”

– Visiting Friends and Relative Study (2016)

94% of respondents said they received adequate guidance as to what the region offers, and were able to find out about experiences and events that were happening in the region. 100% found the region welcoming, and 90% said the people of the region helped create a more enjoyable visit. 30 out of 31 respondents found their experiences enjoyable and memorable, and 100% of respondents would visit the Lac La Biche region again, in addition to recommending the region to others.

100% of respondents said they would visit the Lac La Biche region again.

What Inspires Visitors to Choose Lac La Biche County?

“The Lac La Biche County tag line is Welcoming by Nature, because the region provides a wide variety of outdoor recreational activities for local residents and visitors to take part in...including recreational water use (motor and non-motorized use), fishing, hunting, all-terrain vehicles (ATV) trail access, camping, golfing, beaches, a variety of museums and trails.”¹⁷ Outdoor activities are a driver for tourism in Lac La Biche County, so what do we know about Canadians who seek outdoor activities while on a trip?

The Travel Activity and Motivation Survey (TAMS) conducted in 2006 was co-funded by provincial and national governments to examine the activities and travel habits of Canadians on overnight trips in Canada. The findings tell us that the outdoor activities Canadians pursue while at home are the very activities they tend to do on overnight trips in Canada (e.g. those who bird watch at home, bird watch

while on a trip). Those who pursue nature-oriented activities (e.g. hiking, paddling, wildlife viewing, wilderness activities) and sportsman activities (e.g. hunting, fishing) seek destinations where camping is available. Canadians who pursue boating and swimming tend to stay at public and private campgrounds or lakeside resorts; and seek destinations with a variety of activities for children. Anglers value solitude and isolation on a trip; as do Canadians who ride off-highway vehicles or snowmobiles while on holidays. The latter seek unstructured trips and most often stay in public and private campgrounds and wilderness settings. Common to all Canadians who pursue outdoor activities while on an overnight trip is the desire to take a break from their daily environment, create lasting memories and enrich family relationships.¹⁸

Visitors seeking outdoor experiences that create lasting memories and strengthen family bonds share some of the travel behaviours and preferences with Alberta's primary target markets: Free Spirits and Cultural Explorers.

Target Markets

Travel Alberta identifies Free Spirits and Cultural Explorers as Alberta's primary target markets.¹⁹ The outdoor activities and nature-based experiences found in Lac La Biche County appeal to Free Spirits. These young (and young at heart) travelers look to be active while on vacations - so paddleboard, canoe and kayak rentals, hiking and biking trails, fishing, boating and white-sand beaches are just the types of experiences they seek. Heritage attractions like Lac La Biche Mission and Lac La Biche Pow Wow Days are the types of experiences that appeal to Alberta's second target market, Cultural Explorers. These travellers want to learn about the people and places they visit and like to go beyond a destination's key attractions to discover lesser-known gems. Cultural Explorers are also type of traveller that is most likely to visit rural Alberta.²⁰ No Hassle Travellers have also been found to be highly represented in provincial parks within Lac La Biche County. This EQ type accounts for approximately 35% of overnight visitation at the Beaver Lake campground and the Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park campground.²¹ No Hassle Travellers are escapists who search for relaxation and simplicity. They are attracted to Lac La Biche County's parks, outdoor spaces and museums where they can get away from everyday stresses and responsibilities.

Lac La Biche County has not yet completed a detailed market analysis to define its target markets; however, taking into account the destination's supply and current visitor trends, we propose the County target:

Outdoor-oriented Alberta families drawn northeast to connect with nature and their family and friends at the uncrowded parks, lakes and beaches in Lac La Biche County.

Competitor Analysis

The Village of Wabamun Lake is only 70 km west of Edmonton on Highway 16. The lake is a popular day and weekend trip for residents of the capital region. The Village has a dock, boat launch, playground and spray park at its Waterfront Park; and there are some basic hotels/motels and restaurants in town. The nearby Wabamun Lake Provincial Park has a popular day use area and the campground's 175 sites are often fully occupied on summer weekends. Similar to Wabamun Lake, Pigeon Lake has a provincial park with a day use area, beach, boat launch, and the campground's 160 sites are well frequented in the camping season. The Village at Pigeon Lake is easy to access from the Edmonton region (approximately 100 km southwest of Edmonton) and is located about 1 km from the lake itself. It has a strong commercial hub with shopping, dining, spas and accommodation. Both lakes are within an hour drive from the Edmonton region, and, as a result, can be quite busy, making the further drive to Lac La Biche County appealing to visitors looking for less crowded parks, lakes and beaches.

Lac La Biche County competes for visitors with other lakeshore communities in northern Alberta. The City of Cold Lake is well set up for visitors with powerboats and sail boats, and anglers come for the thriving lake trout population and other sport fish. Visitors can access the lake in town from Cold Lake Marina. Alberta Parks has a number of day use and campground area on the lake, including French Bay and English Bay Provincial Recreation Areas and the north and south shores of Cold Lake Provincial Park. Cold Lake has the appeal of a lake destination with urban amenities; however, it is 300 km from Edmonton and 435 km from Fort McMurray, so a longer drive for visitors from key geographic markets. Bonnyville is slightly farther from Edmonton (240 km) than the Hamlet of Lac La Biche and has 15 lakes within the Municipal District, most of which have quality boat launches and lake access for beach and water-based recreation. The community of Bonnyville is on the shores of Jessie Lake and 13 km from Moose Lake where there is Moose Lake Provincial Park and Franchere Bay Provincial Recreation Area with day use areas, boat launches, and campgrounds. As with Lac La Biche Lake, Moose Lake often has blue green algae in summer months, resulting in advisories by Alberta Health Services for people to avoid contact with affected waters.

Lac La Biche County's Competitive Advantage

What sets Lac La Biche County apart as a destination are its uncrowded yet accessible parks, lakes and beaches that offer family-friendly, outdoor experiences for Albertans, primarily from the Edmonton region and northeast Alberta. With over 100 lakes and 1,300 campsites and cabins, families can set up for the weekend or week, far from the hustle of lakeshore communities closer to Edmonton.

What sets Lac La Biche County apart as a destination are its uncrowded yet accessible parks, lakes and beaches that offer family-friendly, outdoor experiences.



03

VISITOR FRIENDLY ASSESSMENT KEY FINDINGS

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Overview

On July 11 and August 1 and 9, 2017 the assessment team spent full days in Lac La Biche County and experienced the destination from a visitor's point of view. The team navigated its way to various attractions, stopped at the Visitor Information Centre, took in the sights and sounds of Lac La Biche, Plamondon and the Historic Mission Site. During the tours, the team recorded what they saw through photographs and notes. Each team member focused on their respective area of expertise, but also took a holistic view of the tour and commented on all five visitor friendly categories.

Overall the assessment team enjoyed our time in Lac La Biche County. Highlights of our experience include exploring Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park, visiting the fantastic Bold Centre, enjoying drinks at the Café Caché and learning about the history of the region at the Lac La Biche Mission. Our activities included walks along the beachfront and main streets, mystery shopping local businesses and engaging with locals and visitors. Personal vehicle and foot travel were our team's primary modes of transportation to move through the assessment area. We had very good weather on all three days of the assessment.

Upon completion of the tour, the assessment team evaluated the visitor friendliness of the community using five key criteria:

1. Overall Ambience / Community Visual Appeal
2. Wayfinding / Signage
3. Public Services / Visitor Amenities
4. Quality of Service / Professionalism
5. Visitor Information

The information below provides a brief summary of key findings from the visitor friendly assessments. Please see Appendix C for the full assessment.

Overall Ambience / Community Visual Appeal

Key Findings

- The low-rise brick buildings give the Mainstreet in Lac La Biche an “old-town” ambience (see Figure 3). The horticulture program also pleasantly complements the structures.
- There are visible land use issues in the County due to fragmented development patterns. Having commercial and industrial operations adjacent to food options with no screening (such as Boston Pizza on Highway 663, pictured in Figure 4) results in less appealing areas for visitors. There are also no transition zones/structures between industrial, commercial, and retail sites. These land uses tend to conflict and do not encourage tourists to stop along the highway and use the amenities.
- Fragmented development patterns have also led to inconsistent development standards. For example, the Bold Centre’s modern design stands in sharp contrast to the rest of the County’s “old-town” setting, pictured in Figure 5. The Bold Centre is also an example of isolated development that tourists driving along the highway or Mainstreet may miss during their visit.
- Houses along the main highways appeared well maintained and are attractive to visitors. Many properties showed evidence of regular landscaping. The same cannot be said for much of the downtown areas of Lac La Biche and Plamondon. Sidewalks were often cracked, dirty and had large weeds growing out of them.
- The Mainstreet in Lac La Biche caters more to cars than to pedestrians. The wide road, inconsistent and narrow sidewalks, and the lack of adequate street furniture is the cause of this. Mainstreet also features angular parking, which blocks visitors’ views of the shops and buildings behind it (see Figure 6).



Figure 3: The low-rise brick buildings on Mainstreet create an “old-town” ambience.



Figure 4: The industrial operation adjacent to Boston Pizza on Highway 663 makes the establishment less appealing to visitors.



Figure 5: The Bold Centre’s modern look stands in contrast to the rest of the County’s “old-town” aesthetic.



Figure 6: Mainstreet caters more to cars than to pedestrians.

- Lac La Biche has a good network of roads and streets that have immense potential to provide strong linkages between Mainstreet and the Lakeshore, pictured in Figure 7. Despite being only three blocks away, the Lake is only faintly visible from Mainstreet. Developing these linkages would enhance the attractiveness of the downtown area and encourage visitors to stay longer.



Figure 7: Viewing corridors can strengthen the link between Mainstreet and the Lake.

- There was a lack of public art in downtown areas for visitors to enjoy. Many blank building facades would provide excellent canvases for public art (see Figure 8).



Figure 8: Blank building facades like the one above are perfect canvases for public art projects that make downtowns more attractive. If they are left blank, they can detract from the visitor

- The Lakeshore provides visitors with fantastic views in a well maintained, outdoor environment. The clean benches, low-cut grass and bright frisbee golf stations create a space that is equally attractive to residents and visitors (see Figure 9).
- Many of the houses fronting onto the Lakeshore are well maintained, which enhances the visitor experience along Lakeshore Trail.



Figure 9: The Lakeshore provides a space that is equally attractive to residents and

- Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park offers magnificent views, along with excellent recreational and tourism opportunities. The Park's roads, trails, campgrounds and beach areas are very well maintained.
- The banner system applied to street lights is used effectively and is attractive to look at, pictured in Figure 10. Although, the main streets of Lac La Biche and Plamondon were missing banners. The banner system should be applied consistently throughout the County.



Figure 10: The banner system is attractive, but needs to be applied consistently throughout the County.

- The Lac La Biche Mission had unique character buildings that appeared to be in good condition, pictured in Figure 11. The site was well kept overall and very inviting to visitors.



Figure 11: The Lac La Biche Mission had unique character buildings and was very inviting to visitors.

- There is no consistent visual theme throughout the County. The mix of historic "old-town" structures and modern buildings tends to fragment the visitor's experience of a place.
- Broken and barred windows, damaged awnings and worn paint throughout the Mainstreet area creates an unwelcoming and neglected appearance (see Figure 12).



Figure 12: Broken and barred windows, damaged awnings and worn paint creates an unwelcoming and neglected appearance.

- For the most part, the County has an inconsistent identity leading to an incoherent product offering. As an example, the dark red brick colour of the Scotiabank was out-of-place alongside the light coloured paneling of the building next store (see Figure 13).



Figure 13: The County has an inconsistent identify leading to an incoherent product offering.

Wayfinding / Signage

Key Findings

- Highway signage along the main entryways to Lac La Biche County are clear and direct. The green and blue highway signs are used throughout the province and are immediately recognizable for most visitors. However, many of the signs direct visitors away from the downtown area towards campgrounds, parks or other amenities, pictured in Figure 14. More needs to be done at the main entryways to draw visitors into the downtown to explore and spend.



Figure 14: Signs along Highway 36 are recognizable for visitors. They often direct visitors away from downtown, rather than drawing them in.

- Signage to public parking is not well marked throughout the County, particularly for motorhomes and large vehicles.

- The large wooden “Welcome” signs are visually appealing and give visitors a feel for the culture of the area. Unfortunately, there are two different “Welcome” signs along the Highway 36 entrance with different tag lines, pictured in Figure 15. This is confusing for visitors.



Figure 15: The wooden “Welcome” signs are visually appealing for visitors. Having two different signs along Highway 36 is confusing for visitors.

- Signage to the VIC and Museum effectively directs visitors, pictured in Figure 16. The blue sign with the “?” symbol is utilized throughout the province and is recognizable for visitors.
- Signage with both English and French language instructions highlight the region’s French-Canadian history, pictured in Figure 17. Dual-language signs could be put in place throughout the County to strengthen this link.
- All public amenity, parking restriction, destination or place signs need to be evaluated as part of the development of a comprehensive wayfinding strategy for the County. These route and destination signs need to be clear and easily recognizable for tourists and residents and display visual features that clearly connect services to the County. Clear directions to amenities and services need to be established, such as how to get to the lake, where to park your vehicle and/or trailer, how to get to RV waste disposal sites, how to get to recreation facilities and how to get to the local health centre. For several examples of successful wayfinding strategies, see Appendix D.
- Wayfinding signage throughout the County is lacking a consistent visual identity. This situation can be improved by developing branding guidelines and adhering to them.



Figure 16: Signage effectively directs visitors to the VIC and Museum.



Figure 17: English and French signage highlights the region’s French-Canadian history.

Public Services / Visitor Amenities

Key Findings

- The Lac La Biche Museum is a beautiful building that fronts onto the lake and is nearby the scenic McArthur Park, pictured in Figure 18. This location is a key tourist attraction.
- The Visitor Information Centre (VIC) is currently located in the basement of the Museum building. The VIC needs to be moved to an above-ground location that is easily accessible for visitors. The current plan to move the VIC to the Jubilee Hall building on the corner of 100 St and 101 Ave should be followed through on.
- Clean public washrooms were available at key tourist locations (e.g. Museum, McArthur Park, Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park, etc.). Access to public washrooms is highly prioritized by visitors, so maintenance and cleanliness standards should be maintained. The changing stations are also valued by visitors, pictured in Figure 19.
- Waste bins in Plamondon and Lac La Biche were readily available and well maintained. The combo waste/recycling design is a nice touch and is sure to be appreciated by visitors (see Figure 20). There is room for improvement, though, as some garbage bins in McArthur Park had a worn appearance and were and missing bags.
- The County has a high number of restaurants, including well-known chains such as Boston Pizza, Subway, A&W and KFC. Fast food restaurants do appeal to some visitor segments, however there is limited food options that cater to other visitors (e.g. nice sit-down restaurants with unique or local food offerings).



Figure 18: The Lac La Biche Museum is a key tourist attraction.



Figure 19: Public washrooms were clean and well maintained. The changing stations are valued by visitors.



Figure 20: The combo waste/recycling bins are attractive, and the style is consistent throughout the County. Garbage bins in McArthur Park could be improved, however.

- The Café Caché in Plamondon and the Eats and Sweets Café in Lac La Biche are fantastic establishments that draw visitors in and diversify food options during the morning and afternoon (see Figure 21).



Figure 21: Café Caché and Eats and Sweets Café draw visitors in and diversify food options.

- The County has a strong supply of accommodations, especially hotels/motels and campsites. Recognizable and trusted brands such as Ramada, BCMI and Canalta encourages visitors to stay.
- A noticeable gap in accommodations are niche properties like B&B's, guesthouses and lodges. These types of accommodations appeal to FIT travellers and Cultural Explorers because they often showcase the spirit and culture of a destination in ways that other accommodation options do not.
- The nature of Lac La Biche County as a destination is that it is primarily accessed by vehicle. This includes private vehicles, motorhomes and fifth-wheels. As such, the availability of public parking is a key amenity in determining the visitor friendliness of the community. There is ample street parking for single vehicles throughout the County, but limited space for motorhomes and larger vehicles. Without large enough parking areas that are clearly marked, these visitors will pass through downtown areas, rather than stopping and shopping.
- Fuel stations are located at the west, south and east entrances to Lac La Biche. This is particularly visitor-friendly for FIT travellers.
- In the Hamlet of Lac La Biche, visitor access to the lake is limited. There are also limited services available for boaters.
- There is a lack of programming, activities and entertainment options that would draw visitors into the communities during the day and at night.
- The stories behind the artifacts at the Mission museum are not evident when visitors are self-guided through the site.
- There is a lack of experiential programming and events at the Mission Site to attract visitors.

- The Mini-Parc Héritage in Plamondon is a wonderful attraction, but the barb-wire fences, locked gate and warning sign are not visitor-friendly (see Figure 22). More should be done to welcome visitors into this attraction.

Figure 22: Barb-wire fences, locked gates and warning signs are not visitor-friendly.



- The Paul Richard Memorial Spray Park is a new and wonderfully maintained amenity that visitors would love to use just as much as residents, pictured in Figure 23. Although, there is a lack of signage and visitor information available about this amenity. More can be done to leverage this spray park as an attraction to draw people into the waterfront and downtown area.



Figure 23: The Paul Richard Memorial Spray Park is a new and wonderfully maintained amenity.

- The Lifejacket Loaner Station along the waterfront in Lac La Biche is very good (see Figure 24). Visitors can borrow lifejackets at no cost and return them when they are finished with them. This is a very visitor-friendly amenity and should be continued and expanded (if visitor volumes warrant it).



Figure 24: The Lifejacket Loaner Station is very good.

Quality of Service / Professionalism

Key Findings

- Customer service in the community received mixed reviews with some businesses doing very well and others needing improvement. Most businesses could provide information on where to find visitor amenities (e.g. VIC, washrooms, restaurants) and what to do in the community (e.g. sightseeing, hikes, trails). Other businesses were not aware of local tourism information and could not provide any. One business in Plamondon refused to let non-paying customers use their washrooms and did not allow pictures to be taken inside their establishment.
- Encouraging a customer-centric approach among service staff, facilitating the distribution of visitor information at all businesses, and generally encouraging a “visitor economy” mindset in the County (i.e. valuing tourism as a central part of the economy) will be important if the destination seeks to enhance the visitor experience and increase visitor spending.
- Many businesses’ either had no web site, or their web site was very poor. As more and more people investigate businesses online before visiting, this concern should be addressed. Web sites do not have to be expensive to build (there are many templates available), but should be professional looking, provide useful information about the business and should be mobile friendly). Increasingly, people are using sites such as Yelp and Google reviews when making a decision about frequenting a business. Business owners will need to incorporate monitoring these sites into their marketing activities.

Visitor Information

Key Findings

- The folding “Fun Map” is a great information tool for visitors to use, pictured in Figure 25. The text is clear and major attractions and amenities are identified using expanded bubbles. This helps to reduce cluttering on the map. Recreational and tourism activities are also identified using cartoon drawings that really “pop” off the page. All major attractions, amenities and businesses should have this map in stock and freely share it with visitors.



Figure 25: The folding Fun Map is a great information tool for visitors to use.

- Tear-away maps are also available at some businesses, however these were found to be too “busy.” The large amount of information on the map can be off-putting to some visitors and makes it difficult to consume the needed information.
- The Lac La Biche Region Visitor Guide is another great information resource for visitors. The guide is well designed and contains a lot of information about the region.

- Lac la Biche lake is one of the main attractions to the County during the summer months. Unfortunately, blue-green algae blooms occasionally occur, which can present a health risk to humans and animals. Although there is a small sign along the waterfront with helpful information, it is not clear if the water is safe to swim in or not. A more prominent advisory sign should be added to let visitors know if the lake is safe to swim in.
- The hours of operation for the public washrooms near the VIC and lakeshore were not clear, pictured in Figure 26. Signs had conflicting hours of operation, or had no hours at all.



Figure 26: Washroom signs had conflicting hours of operation or no hours at all.

- There are no destination maps or visitor information available at highway pull-outs before visitors reach the community, pictured in Figure 27. Tourists often pull over at such stations to help them get their bearings and find attractions or visitor amenities.



Figure 27: Visitor information is lacking at pull-outs entering the community.

- Visitor information at the VIC is poorly organized and much of the information is for other destinations across the province (e.g. Banff, Drumheller, Jasper). This makes it challenging to find local information because it is hidden within the brochure racks amongst hundreds of pamphlets not related to the region (see Figure 28).

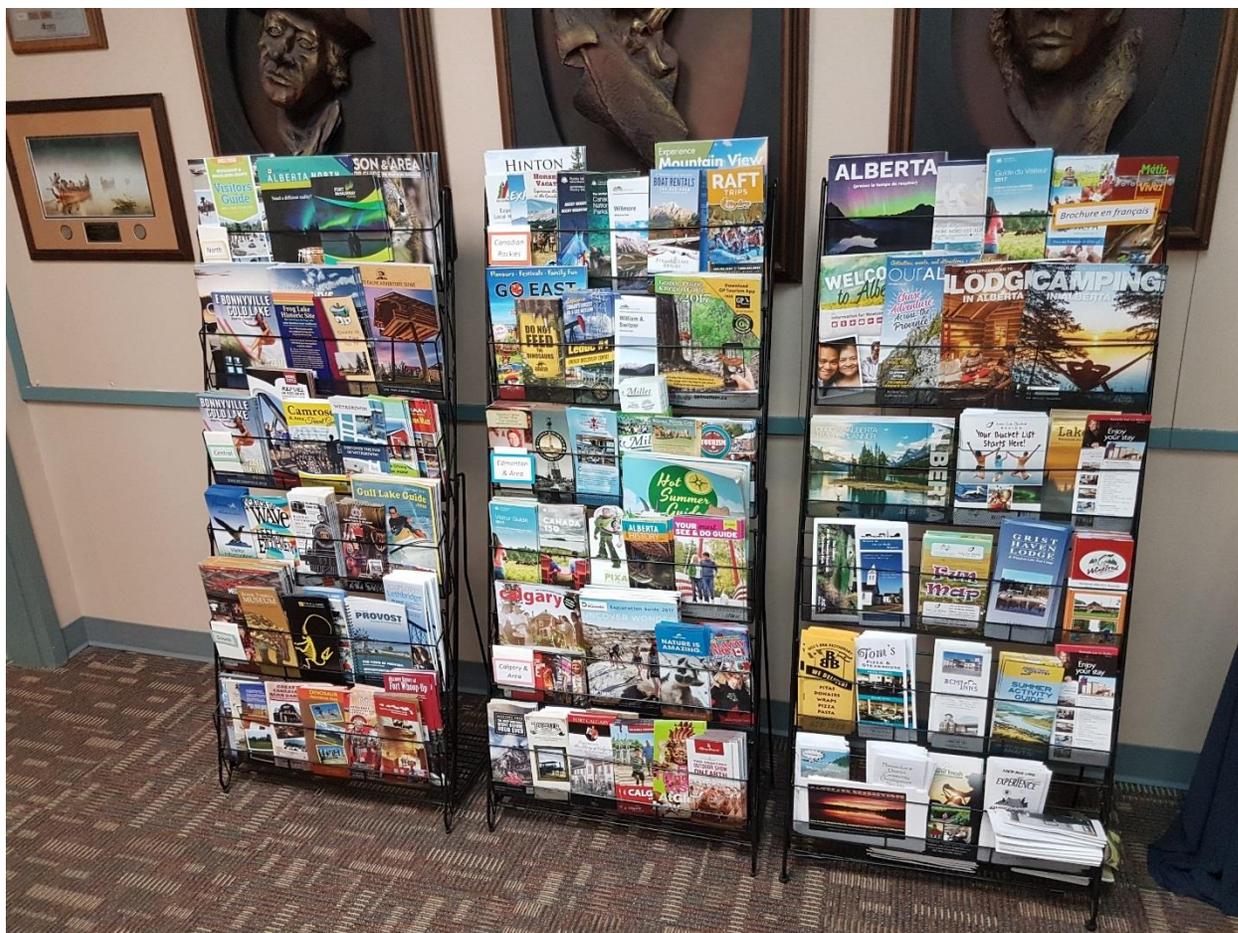


Figure 28: Visitor information about the region is hidden amongst pamphlets for other destinations.

- The Wi-Fi at the VIC was fast and open to the public (no password required). Access to the Internet is an increasingly important visitor information service. Public Wi-Fi access should be expanded to other attractions and amenities in the County.
- Reviews of the VIC staff were mixed. A member of our assessment team received informed and helpful information from a courteous staff member, while two other members of our assessment team had a less positive experience. A staff member did not offer us helpful information and had to Google answers to basic visitor questions.
- Tourism information at the Mission site is limited.

Digital and Online Presence Assessment

Our team conducted a digital and online presence assessment of the region. The information in Figure 29 provides a summary of key findings. See Appendix E for a detailed description.

Figure 29. Digital and Online Presence Assessment

Websites		
laclabicheregion.com		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent images • Highly ranked in Google searches • Text is well-written and good length • Useful information • Not mobile-friendly • Misdirected link ("Looking for an Active Vacation")
laclabichecounty.com		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacks visitor information • Needs a "visitors" link • Lack of images
laclabichemission.com		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-written text • Clear visitor information • Missing navigation link to return to the home page • Website design could be updated
Travel sites		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited information on Alberta travel sites (e.g. Travel Alberta)
Social Media		
Facebook	/LLBtourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good use of images • Too much hashtag usage • Needs a more consistent content schedule • Writing could be more experiential • Low engagement
	/laclabichecounty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resident-focused content • Follow best practices on Facebook (see Appendix E)
Twitter	/llbtourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent images • Good engagement • Amplifies tourism voices in the region • Grammar needs improvement • Content schedule is slow
	/laclabicheco	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crossposting from Facebook • Low engagement • Lack of images • Lack of followed accounts
Instagram	/llbtourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fantastic experiential writing • Excellent images • Good engagement • More hashtags would enhance searchability
YouTube	/LLBtourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good video content of life in the region • Content is dated • More updated content needed



04

ACTION PLAN

04 ACTION PLAN

The action plan is organized in a way that will encourage the ongoing development of key initiatives. Within each assessment category, initiatives have been developed that speak to observations stemming from the community assessment portion of the project. Attached to each of the initiatives is a suggested priority rating, order of magnitude cost, recommended lead and estimated timeline for completion. The criteria for priority ratings, costing and timeline are described below.

Priority Criteria

- Low Priority (L) There is moderate benefit to strengthening visitor friendliness, and because of phasing considerations, cost, organizational readiness, or relative importance in relation to other initiatives, these initiatives are deemed a lower priority **at this time**.
- Medium Priority (M) There is a considerable benefit to strengthening visitor friendliness, however; because of phasing considerations, cost, organizational readiness, or relative importance in relation to other initiatives, these initiatives are deemed a lower priority than high priority items **at this time**.
- High Priority (H) There is a strong benefit to strengthening visitor friendliness and because of phasing considerations, cost, organizational readiness, or relative importance in relation to other initiatives, these initiatives are deemed a high priority **at this time**.

Cost Criteria

- Low Cost (L) Less than \$5,000
 Medium Cost (M) \$5,000 - \$10,000
 High Cost (H) Over \$10,000

Timeline

Abbreviation	Timeframe
ST	Short Term (Within 3 years)
MT	Medium Term (3-5 years)
LT	Long Term (Over 5 years)

Quick Wins



A blue star indicates that an initiative is a "Quick Win." Quick wins are initiatives that can be implemented within a year or two, have a high probability of success and have a relatively low cost.

Establishment of a Visitor Friendly Working Group

It is recommended that the County develop a Visitor Friendly Working Group to lead the implementation of the Action Plan. This group should be struck within 60 days of the approval of the Final Visitor Friendly Assessment Report and should be comprised of key stakeholders that will be involved in Action Plan implementation. It is recommended that local business owners be encouraged to participate in the Visitor Friendly Working Group. The working group should assign project leads for each initiative, review project phasing, review suggested prioritization and begin implementation.

Future Planning, Evaluation, and Reporting

A key component of the success of the Action Plan will be the evaluation of its initiatives. The plan should be reviewed quarterly, at which time priorities should be re-evaluated and a discussion of any variances should occur. If new projects are added (or old projects removed) as the plan progresses, this should be done by weighing the relative priority of all projects in the plan. The action plan should be updated on a yearly basis; therefore, the third quarter evaluation period will set the stage for the updated version of the plan. In the fourth quarter, the updated plan should be formalized, and a draft approved by the end of the year.

Project Leads

The Action Plan identifies organizations and departments responsible for leading initiatives. Please see below for a list of these organizations.

Abbreviation	Organization
VFWG	Visitor Friendly Working Group
County	Lac La Biche County
CF	Community Futures
Chamber	Chamber of Commerce
VIC	Visitor Information Centre
MB	Mission Board

1. Overall Ambience/Visual Appeal

Initiatives		Priority/Cost	Lead/Timeline	Notes
1.1	Improve the maintenance of downtown Lac La Biche and main street areas (i.e. repaint faded road lines, weed removal, street sweeping, etc.).	H/H	County/ST	
1.2	Consistently apply Lac La Biche County's theme in development standards, signage programs and visitor information.	H/H	County/ST	Ensure the application of the theme conforms to the Land Use Bylaw.
1.3	Incorporate a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) approach in future land-use and development planning, particularly for downtown areas. Ensure that implementation of CPTED initiatives does not negatively impact visitor friendliness.	H/L	County/ST	 The Edmonton Police Service provides information and training regarding CPTED on their website .
1.4	Develop a plan to improve safety and alleviate real or perceived risks to personal safety in downtown Lac La Biche.	H/H	County, All/LT	This approach will likely need to be multi-disciplinary, and phased over the long term.
1.5	Establish a public art policy and program that would enhance the visitor experience through the addition of more art in tourist areas (e.g. main streets, attractions, facilities).	M/M	County, CF/ ST	Examples of public art include murals and site furnishings. See Lacombe: Alberta's Mural Capital for examples. Grant funding may be available from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts .
1.6	Review and enforce community standards and bylaws to address unsightly premises. (e.g. property maintenance, tree planting, fences, landscaping, industrial screening).	H/L	County/ST	
1.7	Identify non-compliant property owners and work with them to encourage visually appealing, well-maintained properties and screening of industrial areas facing major road corridors.	H/L	County/ST	Particular attention should be paid to properties along highway entrances, main streets and important tourist areas.
1.8	Develop land use policies to ensure visitor areas and facilities are not fragmented by industrial uses.	H/L	County/ST	
1.9	Develop and promote a business façade improvement program to support initiative 1.4 above.	H/M	County/ST	For an example, see the City of Grande Prairie Façade Improvement Program.
1.10	Recognize and celebrate successful storefront improvement initiatives through promotion on the County's web site, newsletters, ribbon cuttings, etc.	M/L	County, Chamber/ST	

1.11	Inventory existing street and site furnishings, and repair/remove damaged furnishings.	M/M	County/ST	
1.12	Inventory main street commercial spaces available for lease and promote the area through trade shows and other economic development initiatives.	H/M	County, Chamber, CF/ST	
1.13	Encourage downtown restaurants to develop patios to help animate downtown areas.	H/L	Chamber, CF/ST	 As of July 10, 2017, it is now easier for licensed venues to offer patio experiences due to fewer restrictions.
1.14	Develop a plan to expand horticulture programs throughout the County (flowers, landscaping, trees) as resources permit. Particular focus should be given to main street in Lac La Biche.	M/H	County/MT	Particular attention should be paid to main street areas. Funding for human resources may be available through the Youth Green Jobs Program: https://goo.gl/zTQgMk
1.15	Explore opportunities to introduce permanent and/or temporary pocket parks along the main streets.	M/H	County/MT	

2. Signage/Wayfinding

Initiatives		Priority/Cost	Lead/Timeline	Notes
2.1	Develop a consistent and comprehensive signage program (vehicular and pedestrian) for the County that includes directions to key amenities, facilities and services.	H/H	All/ST	See Appendix D for examples of successful signage programs. Consider adding dual-language signs to strengthen the community's link to French culture.
2.2	Enforce consistent use of the County's theme in the signage program and visitor information.	H/M	County/ST	
2.3	Add more directional signage directing visitors into downtown areas along the major highway entrances.	H/M	VFWG/ST	There should be signs for McArthur Park and Mini-Parc Heritagé.
2.4	Add more directional signage to RV parking areas near the main streets.	H/M	County/ST	 Refer to the Tourist Orientated Directional Signage program: https://goo.gl/2R1Nix

2.5	Make the southern entry sign to Plamondon more visible. This can be done by moving its location closer to the highway, raising the sign, and/or reducing the number of shrubs in front of the sign.	H/M	County/ST	
2.6	Expand usage of the banner style along Beaverhill Road on banner posts throughout the County.	M/H	County/MT	
2.7	Encourage business owners to replace their sandwich board signs with blade signs that are visible from further away.	M/M	Chamber/MT	
2.8	Develop a wayfinding and signage program for the Mission Site that aligns with the theme of the attraction.	M/H	VFWG/ST	The signage program should be designed to enhance storytelling.
2.9	Add a site map for the Mission Site that is consistent with the theme of the attraction.	M/M	VFWG/MT	The map should be located at the main parking area.
2.10	Improve visibility of highway signage to the Mission Site.	H/M	VFWG/ST	

3. Public Services/Visitor Amenities

Initiatives		Priority/Cost	Lead/Timeline	Notes
3.1	Develop a Tourism Program Plan that will facilitate more daytime and evening entertainment options for visitors. The plan should address the need for increased festivals and events, destination animation, and public programming related to local culture and history.	H/H	VFWG, CF/ST	Work with Alberta Culture and Tourism to explore funding options. The plan should consider ways to increase visitation during the shoulder and off-seasons of Fall, Winter and Spring.
3.2	Increase diversity in programs, activities, entertainment, restaurants and accommodations by promoting business development opportunities in tourism.	H/M	County, Chamber, CF/ongoing	Gaps exist for sit-down restaurants and niche accommodations in the study area (e.g. guest houses, lodges).
3.3	Follow through on the plan to move the VIC to the Jubilee Hall building on the corner of 100 St and 101 Ave.	H/L	VIC/ST	

3.4	Develop a plan to enhance the pedestrian friendliness of streetscapes with widened sidewalks, traffic calming measures, street furniture, decorative lighting, landscaping, etc.	H/H	County/MT	This could occur in stages as part of a 5-year plan. Particular attention should be paid to the main streets. For examples of well implemented streetscaping plans, see the Town of Rocky Mountain House, Town of Banff, and Town of Beaumont.
3.5	Enhance pedestrian connections between main street Lac La Biche and the waterfront/VIC/McArthur Park.	H/H	VFWG, County/MT	This can be accomplished by improving sight lines and walkability between these areas. For examples of well implemented streetscaping plans see the Town of Rocky Mountain House, Town of Banff and Town of Beaumont.
3.6	Replace garbage bins with the combo waste/recycling receptacles throughout the County.	M/M	County/MT	
3.7	Perform an accessibility audit on key visitor attractions/areas and implement required changes to ensure accessibility to visitors with reduced mobility.	H/L	VFWG/ST	
3.8	Work with downtown business owners to expand their hours of operation to align with evening programming and weekend special events (e.g. Pow Wow Days).	H/L	Chamber, CF/ST	
3.9	Examine the need to add RV parking spaces near main street in Lac La Biche.	H/L	VFWG/ST	
3.10	Improve visitor access to the Mini-Parc Héritagé in Plamondon.	M/M	VFWG/MT	
3.11	Review the need for enhanced services for boaters within Lac La Biche.	M/L	County/MT	The need for a marina has been studied by Lac La Biche.
3.12	Consider developing a walking/biking trail that would connect Lac La Biche, the Mission Site and Plamondon.	M/H	County/LT	The trail could match the path of the 100 Old Trail and Range Rd 142A. See the Lac La Biche County Recreation, Parks and Open Space Master Plan.

3.13	Develop an Open Spaces and Trails Master Plan for the County that builds upon the objectives of existing planning (e.g. Lac La Biche County Municipal Development Plan, Plamondon Area Structure Plan, and Plamondon Recreation, Parks and Open Space Master Plan)	M/H	County/LT	The County has included this request for deliberation in the 2018 capital budget process.
3.14	Adjust the exhibition of artifacts in the Mission museum to more effectively provide the stories behind the artifacts to self-guided tours.	M/L	MB/ST	This could be accomplished through additional storytelling panels or a self-guided tour pamphlet that includes story-telling elements.
3.15	Develop more experiential programming and events at the Mission Site to attract more visitors.	M/M	MB/MT	

4. Quality of Service/Professionalism

Initiatives		Priority/Cost	Lead/Timeline	Notes
4.1	Develop and distribute a one-page FAQ document that provides answers to the top 10 visitor questions to local businesses.	H/L	VFWG/ST	★
4.2	Encourage business owners to participate in the upcoming Visitor Friendly Business Program.	H/M	Chamber/ST	Alberta Culture and Tourism is developing a visitor friendly program specifically for business that would provide one-on-one mentorship.
4.3	Work with business owners to incorporate customer service standards into human resource processes and training.	H/L	Chamber/ST	Targeted at service orientated businesses (restaurants, gas stations) and main street businesses.
4.4	Provide customer service training workshops in May of each year for seasonal employees.	H/L	Chamber/ST	★ Targeted at service orientated businesses (restaurants, service stations), tourism operators, and main street businesses.
4.5	Work with business owners to develop simple websites for their businesses and improve existing websites.	H/L	Chamber/ST	

4.6	Provide marketing training for business owners. Travel Alberta offers a suite of workshops that include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Getting to Know Your Best Customer - Building a Basic Marketing Plan - Media Relations 101 - Understanding Branding - SHiFT: Transforming Products to Experiences 	H/L	Chamber/ST	www.travelalberta.com Industry Development Contact: Tracey Desjardins 780.784.0072 Tracey.desjardins@travelalberta.com
4.7	Identify tourism “champions” from the County’s private and public sectors to attend the annual Growing Rural Tourism Conference. These individuals will be instrumental in encouraging a “visitor economy” in the destination.	H/L	VFWG/ongoing	Conference occurs annually in February www.growingruraltourism.ca
4.8	Work with tourism stakeholders to collect and share base-level visitor data with all tourism partners (Municipality, Businesses, Operators) that can be used to enhance customer service.	H/L	VFWG, Chamber/ST	★ This would include numbers of visitors, why they are visiting, and where they are coming from (e.g. collect postal codes). A Community Visitor Survey Toolkit is available from The Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association and the Chinook Country Tourist Association.

5. Visitor Information

Initiatives		Priority/Cost	Lead/Timeline	Notes
5.1	Develop a Public Information Strategy for the County that is coordinated with visitor information. This would include orientation maps and information panels/kiosks at key visitor locations and amenities.	H/M	County/MT	Lac La Biche and Plamondon could each have their own strategies, but it is recommended that they collaborate on this. The strategy should align with the New Visitor Services Model for Alberta .
5.2	Ensure the Visitor Guide and Fun Map is available at local attractions and businesses. All other tourism information and maps should be consistent with the Fun Map in their use of symbols and language.	H/L	All/ST	★ The Visitor Guide and Fun Map should be separated from other tourism information and put “front and centre” so visitors will pick them up first.

5.3	Separate visitor information regarding the region from visitor information about the rest of the province at the VIC.	H/L	VIC/ST	★ Visitor information regarding the region should be “front and centre.”
5.4	Develop tourism information panels/kiosks that will be located at existing pull out areas along major highways. Panels/kiosks should include a large map and important public information related to services.	H/H	VFWG/MT	Funding may be available for this initiative through the Visitor Services Innovation Fund . Up to \$7,000 is available to one organization from a single community, and up to \$16,000 is available to partnerships of multiple organizations from multiple communities. Highway pull outs already exist, therefore much of the cost of developing this amenity has already been covered.
5.5	Ensure the VIC’s operating hours align with visitor patterns. This may mean extending operating hours during peak times in the summer.	M/L	VIC/ST	
5.6	Offer opportunities to book accommodations, restaurants, entertainment, etc. at the VIC and on laclabicheregion.com .	M/L	VIC, CF/ST	At the VIC, this could be as simple as staff “making the call” for the visitor.
5.7	Ensure the Fun Map is available for download on the landing page and “Tourism” tab at http://laclabicheregion.com/ .	H/L	CF/ST	★
5.8	Add a more prominent blue-green algae advisory sign by the beach at McArthur Park. There should be clear instructions on whether it is safe to swim or not.	M/L	County/ST	
5.9	Ensure the hours of operation for public washrooms are consistent and are not missing from the facilities.	H/L	County/ST	★
5.10	Ensure laclabicheregion.com is mobile-friendly and that links are not misdirected.	H/M	CF/ST	
5.11	Add a “visitors” tab to laclabicherecounty.com that will direct visitors to tourist information.	H/L	County/ST	★
5.12	Update and add to the video content on the LLBTourism YouTube page. This content should be shared across all digital platforms.	L/M	VFWG	This platform can be used as a digital media library for tourism.

5.13	Follow social media best practices on all platforms, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experiential writing that is grammatically correct, - Building relationships with media influencers, - Consistent content schedules, - Engaging with followers, - Limiting auto-posting and hashtag use 	M/L	All/ongoing	See Appendix E in the Situational/Market Analysis and Visitor Friendly Assessment.
5.14	Develop a Google AdWords campaign to help further enhance the searchability of the laclabicheregion.com website.	H/L	CF/ST	
5.15	Ensure local attractions and businesses are listed on the Alberta Tourism Information Service (ATIS).	H/L	VFWG/ST	 Refer to: industry.travelalberta.com/atis
5.16	Enhance training for Visitor Information Centre staff by participating in the Visitor Information Providers Program.	M/L	VIC/ST	Further information on this program is available at Alberta Culture and Tourism's website .
5.17	Develop a site map for the Mission Site.	H/L	MB/ST	
5.18	Provide additional visitor information in the Mission Site foyer.	H/L	MB/ST	
5.19	Add a link to return to the home page in the navigation panel of laclabichemission.com.	M/L	MB/ST	
5.20	Consider updating the design of laclabichemission.com to a more modern website design.	M/M	MB/ST	

6. Strategic Planning and Organizational Development

Initiatives		Priority/Cost	Lead/Timeline	Notes
6.1	Link tourism objectives to future planning regarding land use, infrastructure, economic development, recreation, etc.	H/L	All/ST	★
6.2	Work with Travel Alberta to confirm the County's tourism target markets.	H/L	VFWG/ST	★ This can be done in-house and at a low cost with the support of Travel Alberta (see contact information in 4.8).
6.3	Participate in the potential development of a destination management plan (DMP) for Lakeland Country.	H/H	County, CF/ST	The development of a DMP for Lakeland Country was an objective in the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (2012).
6.4	Develop a tourism product development plan that would identify key opportunities for new tourism product in the region. Elements of the plan should include an asset inventory, gap analysis, market analysis, opportunity analysis and implementation plan.	H/H	VFWG, CF/MT	Work with Alberta Culture and Tourism to explore funding options.
6.5	Enhance the County's attractiveness to the VFR market by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing a hospitality ambassador program whereby residents can learn about the County's unique tourism offerings and gain the skills to be an informed tour guide for their family and friends, - Consider adding familiarization tours and/or locals nights for residents as part of the ambassador program, - Encouraging local tourism operators to offer referral rewards/discounts for residents who bring their family and friends with them 	M/M	VFWG, CF/MT	See Nanaimo's Hospitality Ambassador Program for an example.
6.6	Consider adding a tourism development officer who would be dedicated to moving tourism development initiatives forward in Lac La Biche County.	H/H	County, CF/ST	

7. Action Plan Implementation

Initiatives		Priority/Cost	Lead/Timeline	Notes
7.1	Obtain commitment from County Council, Plamondon and District Community Development Society, and the Chamber of Commerce to work to improve visitor friendliness.	H/L	All/ST	★
7.2	Establish a Visitor Friendly Working Group to work on specific action items.	H/L	VFWG/ST	★
7.3	Evaluate action plan initiatives and re-align priorities annually.	H/L	VFWG/Annually	★
7.4	Formally celebrate success of completed initiatives annually.	H/L	VFWG/Annually	
7.5	In 5 years, complete a follow-up assessment of the study area to measure improvements and successes.	M/H	VFWG/MT	
7.6	Using this report as a starting point, build an ongoing annual work plan that identifies initiatives and reports on results.	H/L	All/ST	
7.7	Complete an annual visitor survey to monitor progress from initiatives.	H/L	VFWG/ongoing	
7.8	Complete an annual business survey to monitor progress from initiatives.	H/L	VFWG/ongoing	

Top 10 Action Items

The following action items have been identified as the top priorities to improve visitor friendliness. These are organized in order of priority.

1. Improve the maintenance of downtown Lac La Biche and main street areas (i.e. repaint faded road lines, weed removal, street sweeping, etc.).
2. Develop a plan to improve safety and alleviate real or perceived risks to personal safety in downtown Lac La Biche.
3. Establish a public art policy and program that would enhance the visitor experience through the addition of more art in tourist areas (main streets, attractions, facilities).
4. Develop a plan to enhance the pedestrian friendliness of streetscapes with widened sidewalks, traffic calming measures, street furniture, decorative lighting, landscaping, etc.
5. Develop a consistent and comprehensive signage program (vehicular and pedestrian) for the County that includes directions to key amenities, facilities and services.
6. Ensure the Visitor Guide and Fun Map is available at local attractions and businesses. All other tourism information and maps should be consistent with the Fun Map in their use of symbols and language.
7. Consistently apply Lac La Biche County's theme in development standards, signage programs and visitor information.
8. Develop a Public Information Strategy for the County that is coordinated with visitor information. This would include orientation maps and information panels/kiosks at existing pull out areas along major highways.
9. Enhance the County's attractiveness to the VFR market by developing a hospitality ambassador program, adding familiarization tours for residents, and encouraging local tourism operators to offer referral rewards/discounts for residents who bring their family and friends with them.
10. Develop a Tourism Program Plan that will facilitate more daytime and evening entertainment options for visitors. The plan should also address the need for increased festivals and events, destination animation, and public programming related to local culture and history.

Visitor Friendly Scorecard

The Visitor Friendly Scorecard will assist during the implementation of the top 10 action items. The scorecard outlines key performance measures and tools to easily track progress and success.

Top 10 Action Items	Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Measurement Tool	Progress Report
1. Improve the maintenance of downtown Lac La Biche and main street areas.	1.1 By year 5, 90% of visitor survey respondents rate the visual appeal of downtown Lac La Biche and main street areas as ok to great.	Visitor Survey	
	1.2 The maintenance schedule for downtown and main street areas has been expanded.	Annual Report	
2. Improve safety and alleviate real or perceived risks to personal safety in downtown Lac La Biche.	2.1 By year 5, 90% of visitor survey respondents rate the safety of downtown Lac La Biche as ok to great.	Visitor Survey	
	2.2 By year 5, 90% of business survey respondents rate the safety of downtown Lac La Biche as ok to great.	Business Survey	
3. Establish a public art policy and program that would enhance the visitor experience.	3.1 Public art policy and program developed, approved, resourced, and implemented.	Council Minutes	
	3.2 By year 5, 90% of visitor survey respondents rate the visual appeal of the County as ok to great.	Visitor Survey	
4. Develop a plan to enhance the pedestrian friendliness of streetscapes.	4.1 Pedestrian friendliness plan developed, approved, resourced and implemented.	Council Minutes	
	4.2 By year 5, 90% of visitor survey respondents rate the pedestrian friendliness of the County as ok to great.	Visitor Survey	
5. Develop a consistent and comprehensive signage program (vehicular and pedestrian).	5.1 Signage program developed, approved, resourced, and implemented.	Council Minutes	
	5.2 By year 5, 90% of visitor survey respondents rate the usefulness of directional signage as ok to great.	Visitor Survey	

<p>6. Ensure the Visitor Guide and Fun Map is available at local attractions and businesses.</p>	<p>6.1 The Visitor Guide and Fun Map is made available at all local attractions.</p> <p>6.2 By year 5, the Visitor Guide and Fun Map is available at 75% of identified local businesses.</p>	<p>Distribution Record Business Survey</p>	
<p>7. Consistently apply Lac La Biche County's theme.</p>	<p>7.1 Theme is consistently applied in development standards, signage programs, visitor information and branding.</p>	<p>Annual Report</p>	
<p>8. Develop a Public Information Strategy.</p>	<p>8.1 Public Information Strategy developed, approved, resourced and implemented.</p> <p>8.2 By year 5, 90% of visitor survey respondents rate the availability of visitor information as ok to great.</p> <p>8.3 By year 5, 90% of resident survey respondents rate the availability of visitor information as ok to great.</p>	<p>Council Minutes Visitor Survey Residents Survey</p>	
<p>9. Enhance the County's attractiveness to the VFR market.</p>	<p>9.1 Hospitality ambassador program developed, approved, resourced and implemented.</p> <p>9.2 By year 5, 75% of local tourism operators offer referral rewards/discounts for residents.</p>	<p>Council Minutes Business Survey</p>	
<p>10. Develop a Tourism Program Plan.</p>	<p>10.1 Tourism Program Plan developed, approved, resourced, and implemented.</p> <p>10.2 10% increase in tourism programming each year.</p> <p>10.3 By year 5, 90% of visitor survey respondents rate programs, events and experiences as ok to great.</p>	<p>Council Minutes Program Plan Visitor Survey</p>	



05

NEXT STEPS AND CONCLUSION

05 NEXT STEPS AND CONCLUSION

Next Steps

There are a number of key initiatives that the County should consider moving forward. Below is a brief timeline describing activities that should occur within the next year.

Strategic Priorities Within the Next 12 Months

1. Obtain commitment from County Council, Plamondon and District Community Development Society, and the Chamber of Commerce to work to improve visitor friendliness.
2. Establish a Visitor Friendly Working Group to lead the implementation of the Action Plan.
3. Begin implementation of the action plan. Particular focus could be directed towards the “quick wins” in order to achieve successes early and help build momentum.
4. Evaluate action plan initiatives and re-align priorities at the end of year 1.

Conclusion

The Visitor Friendly Assessment provides valuable information to Lac La Biche County; a practical action plan, and a starting point to improve visitor friendliness. With this plan in hand, Lac La Biche County can begin to enhance all aspects of its visitor friendliness, including ambience and visual appeal, wayfinding and signage, customer service, public services and amenities, and visitor information. The successful implementation of this plan will ensure that Lac La Biche County continues to be a destination of choice for tourists seeking outdoor, nature-based experiences, and will significantly contribute to the growth of the local tourism industry.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Organizations Impacting Tourism (Expanded Version)

The following is an expanded summary of key organizations that impact tourism in Lac La Biche County.

Businesses

Many front-line visitor services are delivered by the private sector. The private sector serves food, beverage and accommodation needs (e.g. hotels, cabins, private or contracted campground operations); and entrepreneurs offer boat tours, guided fishing trips, canoe rentals, camping equipment, RV rentals, U-pick gardens, and even craft beer. The business community is represented by the Lac La Biche & District Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber is a member-driven, volunteer-led organization that supports the local business community with advocacy, resources, and networking. The Chamber encourages businesses to promote their experiences in the Lac La Biche Visitor Information Centre, housed in the Lac La Biche Museum and Discovery Centre, as well as on destination marketing websites managed by Community Future Lac La Biche (www.laclabicheregion.com), Travel Lakeland (www.travellakeland.ca) and Travel Alberta (www.travelalberta.com).

Community Futures Lac La Biche

This is a not-for-profit organization under contract with Western Economic Diversification Canada to provide financial and business services to rural communities and entrepreneurs in the Lac La Biche region. Its service area includes Lac La Biche County, Beaver Lake Cree Nation, Heart Lake Cree Nation, Buffalo Lake Metis Settlement and Kikino Metis Settlement. It actively promotes the region for investment, relocation and tourism. Community Futures Lac La Biche maintains www.laclabicheregion.com with information on visiting, living and doing business in the region. Its staff attend consumer tradeshow and industry events to promote the region for tourism.

Travel Lakeland (Alberta's Lakeland Tourism)

Travel Lakeland is a destination marketing organization (DMO) in northeast Alberta. The DMO works with communities, businesses and events to develop and promote visitor experiences in Alberta's Lakeland, including Lac La Biche County, Cold Lake, Smoky Lake, Vilna, St Paul and Heinburg. Travel Lakeland maintains www.travellakeland.ca, publishes a travel guide, and attends consumer tradeshow and industry events.

Travel Alberta

Travel Alberta is the provincial tourism marketing agency of the Alberta government. Travel Alberta markets the province as a destination of choice in key global markets. Travel Alberta provides free and cooperative marketing opportunities for tourism businesses and has a multi-media library of high quality video, maps, photographs and stories for industry to use. Travel Alberta provides businesses and destinations with consultation services in tourism marketing and experience development, and maintains industry information and resources on www.industry.travel.com. Tourism businesses in Lac La Biche County can promote their travel packages and deals on Travel Alberta's consumer website, www.travelalberta.com and can leverage its social media platforms.

Alberta Culture and Tourism

Alberta Culture and Tourism (ACT) is a provincial ministry that supports the development and marketing of tourism experiences, products and destinations throughout the province.²² The ministry's goal is for Alberta's tourism sector to become a \$10.3 billion industry by 2020, providing sustainable economic benefits to all regions of Alberta. ACT offers a host of programs and services, in addition to research and statistics that support Alberta's tourism industry.

Alberta Environment and Parks

The Government of Alberta has jurisdiction over 70% of the land base in Lac La Biche County.²³ Crown land includes provincial leased lands, provincial lands released for industrial, commercial and work camp developments, provincial parks, and provincial recreation areas. Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) manages the popular Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park and Lakeland Provincial Park and Recreation Area. AEP also regulates recreation on Public Lands, including camping, fishing, hunting and off-highway vehicle use. Regulations are enforced by Conservation Officers and Fish and Wildlife Officers. AEP is also involved in planning for recreation and tourism use in the region (see Lower Athabasca Regional Plan in the following section).

Municipal Government

County Council shapes the strategic direction for tourism and creates bylaws and policies that impact tourism development and the visitor experience. Administration implements the resulting programs and initiatives. Recent examples of municipal investment are a new floating dock at McArthur Park on Lac la Biche, capital upgrades to trails, and special event funding for Pow Wow Days. The municipality also invests in the Bold Center facility, staffing and programs, and maintains dozens of public areas, including parks, playgrounds, campsites, walking trails, municipal boat launches, public beaches and day-use areas. The municipality recognizes that a significant amount of land in County boundaries is outside of its planning jurisdiction and collaboration with the provincial government and First Nations communities is key.

APPENDIX B: Tourism-Related Planning (Expanded Version)

Municipal Development Plan, 2013

Lac La Biche County recognizes its built and natural assets as valuable to recreation and tourism in its primary planning policy document, the Municipal Development Plan. The County identifies opportunities to leverage assets related to tourism marketing (e.g. promoting the County's unique natural and scenic resources, promoting safe water-based activities), product development (e.g. guided tours, educational programs, attractions, exhibits or interpretive sites), economic diversification (e.g. support for eco-tourism, agri-tourism, bed and breakfasts/guest ranches, market gardens, greenhouses), and infrastructure investment (e.g. trail/pedestrian links in the Hamlet of Lac La Biche, McArthur Park redevelopment, maintain and upgrade public lakeshore area).²⁴

Economic Development Strategic Plan, 2013-15

The Economic Development Authority (EDA) developed a strategic plan to guide efforts to recruit and retain businesses, build relationships with oil and resource industry companies, increase supply of affordable housing, and to grow tourism. To leverage the potential of tourism, EDA identifies initiatives related to infrastructure investment (e.g. Lac la Biche lakeshore developments, Hamlet of Lac La Biche main street enhancements, trails, boat launches, and wayfinding signage), policy (e.g. environmental assessments and monitoring protocols of water, land and air), tourism business attraction, events and marketing.²⁵

Lac La Biche County 2013 Airport Expansion Study

This 2013 study examined options to expand Lac La Biche Airport, located approximately 3 km west of Lac La Biche, along Highway 55. Three options were identified: expand the existing airport; relocate airport to an alternate location; not to expand the existing airport. Four alternative locations were identified as suitable. While expansion of Lac La Biche Airport primarily serves industrial and commercial needs, investment can have spin off tourism benefits (e.g. chartered flights for fishing, sightseeing, etc.).

Bold Centre Strategic Plan, 2013-2018

The Bold Centre is a 233,000 square foot recreation complex with twin arenas, two field houses, a running track, fitness and boxing area, curling rink, and library. It is home to hockey, volleyball and soccer leagues. The County recognizes that the centre draws residents and visitors from outside the County and that it is increasingly seen as a one-stop shop for recreational activities. The strategic plan sets the goal to "establish the Bold Centre as a Regional Facility for Recreation, Culture, Leisure and Sport for the County and beyond."²⁶ To achieve this goal, the Centre seeks to host tournaments at the local, regional and provincial level; promote its programs, services and events outside the County; and identify new event or programming opportunities to meet local or regional demand.



Aquatic Services Strategic Plan, 2015-2020

Portage Pool is a 19,000 square foot facility with 5 lanes, a whirlpool, wet steam room, wading pool, and viewing area. In the summer months, the pool serves a large volume of residents and visitors. Many of the visitors are campers who come for the paid showers or as a rainy day activity, and some even enroll their children in swimming lessons. The strategic plan was developed to address challenges with staffing and program delivery, and set a course for the pool to meet the high demand for aquatic services while addressing staff shortages and maintenance and programming needs.²⁷

Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP)

The Alberta government introduced the Land-Use Framework in 2008 to help address cumulative pressures on Alberta's land base and resources. The Lower Athabasca Regional Plan came into effect in 2012. The most recent progress report from the government in 2014 provides updates on key initiatives, including those impacting tourism in Lac La Biche County, which are: developing a Lakeland Country Destination Development Plan; enhancing the supply of tourism products and infrastructure; establishing Tourism Development Nodes; creating a Scenic Byways Network; developing a landscape management plan for public lands in the Green Area; designating new provincial recreation areas to address demand for recreational opportunities; developing a Regional Parks Plan to integrate recreation and conservation mandate of Alberta Parks; and developing the Lower Athabasca Regional Trail System Plan. The 2012 map titled, *New Conservation and Recreation/Tourism Areas in the Lower Athabasca Region*, shows the various park and public land designations in the region.²⁸

Tourism Product Gap Analysis for Northeast Alberta, 2011

In 2011, Alberta's Lakeland Tourism (Travel Lakeland) and the Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta (CDEA) worked with regional and provincial tourism stakeholders to identify opportunities to grow new tourism experiences in northeast Alberta, including the Lac La Biche region.²⁹ Culinary and francophone experiences were highlighted as key opportunities, and stakeholder efforts have resulted in culinary events such as Cook It Raw; RawTrails North, a self-guided culinary trail from Edmonton to Lac La Biche; bilingual signage in communities; and francophone cultural activities at events.

APPENDIX C: Visitor Friendly Assessment

Score Guide:

1	Poor performance throughout the community
2	Poor to Satisfactory performance in most of the community
3	Satisfactory to Excellent performance in most of the community
4	Excellent performance throughout the community
N/A	Criteria is not applicable in this community

OVERALL AMBIENCE/VISUAL APPEAL			
#	Indicators	Score	Comments
1	Public waste baskets are readily available	3	Downtowns and lakeshore have ample waste baskets. Combo waste/recycling bins are great.
2	Public waste baskets appear well maintained	3	Most were in good repair, but some were old bins and were missing bags.
3	Key locations appear free of graffiti	4	No graffiti observed.
4	Buildings (empty and occupied) appear well maintained	2	Buildings along main streets have a worn look, and some are damaged. Vacant sites are not well maintained.
5	Streets appear clean	2	There was a large amount of dirt and some litter along the main streets. The lakeshore and residential areas were well kept.
6	Industrial sites/power lines etc. are camouflaged	1	Power lines and industrial sites are visible from the main tourist areas. Industrial sites are not camouflaged or screened. The highway corridor could benefit from better screening and developing design guidelines.
7	Empty space is well maintained	1	Vacant lots along 101 Ave were not well maintained or screened from view.

8	Heritage buildings appear well maintained	4	Heritage buildings appeared to be in good condition. The door to the Plamondon District Museum could be replaced or painted.
9	Public green spaces are visually appealing	3	McArthur Park, Lac La Biche Mission Site and the Festival Centre area were visually appealing and in good condition.
10	Streetscapes are visually appealing (i.e. banners, decoration, planting visible, etc.)	2	The main streets in Lac La Biche and Plamondon could be enhanced. The planter boxes are a welcome sight, but street poles are missing banners. Street furniture is lacking (e.g. benches, tables, chairs).
11	Public art/murals are prominent throughout the community	1	More public art/murals should be added to throughout the County.
12	Pedestrian areas are easy to navigate	2	The communities are easy to navigate on foot, however, there are many improvements that would enhance walkability (e.g. more cross walks, longer crossing lights, traffic calming measures).
13	Pedestrian areas appear safe	2	No loitering signs, barred windows and broken glass causes pedestrian areas to feel less safe. Some pedestrian areas are right next to highways that receive a lot of traffic.
14	Key locations appear to be well lit	3	Good lighting in McArthur Park and along main streets. Lamp posts were consistently observed through the County.
15	There are adequate walking trails along scenic viewpoints	3	The lakeshore trail in Lac La Biche has many scenic views and leads to the David Thompson Statue. Plamondon is missing pedestrian connections.
16	There is an overall theme to the community (e.g. consistent signage, etc.)	1-2	There is no indication of an overall theme in Lac La Biche or Plamondon. The main streets are a varied mix of sidings, bricks, and wood. The Bold Centre has a modern Contemporary architecture that clashed with the rest of the "old-town" ambience of the County.

SIGNAGE/WAYFINDING			
#	Indicators	Score	Comments
17	Highway signage appears well maintained	3	Most signs appeared to be in good shape and were easily readable from a vehicle. Highway signage could be improved along Hwy 663.
18	Highway signage effectively directed me to the community	2	Highway signage often directed visitors away from the downtowns towards campgrounds and recreation areas.
19	Gateway signage is visually appealing	2	Gateway signs had a rustic, outdoor look which aligns with the County's tourism product offering.
20	Gateway signage effectively welcomed me to the community	2	Gateway signs were welcoming and easy to notice. Two different gateway signs are next to each other on Highway 36 (south). Plamondon's southern gateway sign was difficult to see behind large shrubs.
21	Business signs are visually appealing	2	There appears to be a lack of consistency and standard for business signage.
22	Business signs effectively directed me to appropriate services	1-2	A lack of blade signage made it more difficult to locate businesses on the main streets. Sandwich board signs helped, but they cluttered the sidewalks.
23	Signage to sites and attractions is visually appealing	2	The whole wayfinding strategy for the County needs to be evaluated – the signage system needs to be tied visually to the mapping system, and any symbols used or verbal titles need to be consistent.
24	Signage to sites and attractions effectively directed me to attractions	3	Highway signage effectively directs visitors towards attractions.

25	Signage to VIC is visually appealing	3	The blue “?” signs are effective, and applied appropriately.
26	Signage to VIC effectively directed me to the VIC	3-4	Signage to the VIC was present along the major highways and effectively directs visitors. The additional signage needed to get to the basement VIC was confusing at times. This will be fixed when the VIC moves above ground.
27	Signage to key parking areas is visually appealing	2	Clear and identifiable parking signage was lacking.
28	Signage to key parking areas effectively directed me to parking	2	There were few signs indicating public parking behind the Museum, there were only general directional signs located along main street.
29	Signage at key attractions is visually appealing	3	The signs at the Mission site were particularly attractive.
30	Signage at key attractions effectively directed me around the attraction site	1-2	There was limited signage at the Museum directing visitors to McArthur Park, the beach area or the lakeshore trail.

QUALITY OF SERVICE			
#	Indicators	Score	Comments
31	Service Sector employees/volunteers (other than VIC Staff) were courteous	2-3	Service sector employees were generally courteous – with the exception of one who denied use of the bathroom and forbade taking pictures.
32	Service Sector employees/volunteers (other than VIC Staff) were attentive	3	Most staff members were quick to help and answered questions in a timely manner.
33	Service Sector employees/volunteers (other than VIC Staff) were able to answer questions effectively	2-3	Some staff were unable to provide recommendations of what to do for fun in the community.

			A server in a restaurant did a good job of describing where to find the VIC.
34	Service Sector employees/volunteers (other than VIC Staff) were neat in appearance	2-3	Most staff were neat in appearance and wore uniforms when required. Some staff could have been more presentable.
35	There are opportunities available to provide feedback on service (e.g. surveys etc.)	1	We were not made aware of opportunities to give feedback.
36	Local residents are welcoming	2-3	Most residents were welcoming. There were some loitering downtown that seemed less welcoming. Visitors were quite friendly and in a good mood. We spoke with an older man and his grandson who were playing on the beach. It was a pleasant interaction.

PUBLIC SERVICES/VISITOR AMENITIES			
#	Indicators	Score	Comments
37	Public restrooms are available at key locations in the community	2-3	The VIC, Mission site, and McArthur Park have adequate restrooms. Plamondon has no public restrooms.
38	Public restrooms appear well maintained	3	Public restrooms were clean and in good repair.
39	Public parking is available at key locations in the community	2-3	Plenty of parking for single vehicles is available. RV parking is difficult to find.
40	Transportation options are available to travel within the community (e.g. taxi, transit, shuttle service, etc.)	2	There are taxi services in Lac La Biche. This could be promoted more with other tourist information.

41	Picnic areas are available at key locations in the community	2-3	There is a limited supply of picnic areas in Lac La Biche and Plamondon. McArthur Park is a great spot for a picnic.
42	Picnic areas appear well maintained	3	McArthur Park was in good condition and had almost no litter.
43	An adequate supply of overnight accommodations are available	4	The County has a large number of hotel/motel rooms and campsites available.
44	Diverse overnight accommodation options are available	2	There is a good supply of mid-range accommodation and campsites, but a lower supply of higher end/resort/eco-lodging, and budget/niche accommodation (e.g. B&B, guest house, hostel).
45	An adequate supply of restaurants are available	3	
46	Diverse restaurant options are available	2	Low supply of cafes and delis that serve breakfast/brunch, speciality coffees, and healthy meal options. There are numerous pub-style restaurants, but few options for sit down meals or unique culinary experiences.
47	An adequate supply of other visitor amenities is available (gas stations, banks, restaurants, shopping, internet access, pharmacies, supermarkets, etc.)	3	Visitor amenities are available along the main streets and at the entrances to Lac La Biche. Plamondon has basic amenities available. There is a lack of diversity in shopping options for visitors. Many of the stores along main street are geared towards residents (e.g. hardware, furniture).
48	Facilities are accessible to users with different needs (wheelchairs, seeing or hearing impaired)	1-2	New developments are highly accessible, but older areas are not accessible (e.g. sidewalks are uneven and cracked, steps into attractions and businesses, manual doors, steep curb cuts, etc.).
49	An adequate supply of evening entertainment/activities are available	1-2	There are few programmed opportunities for visitors to do in the evenings. Terri Clark performed a few days after one of our visits – more events like this would be good.

50	Diverse evening entertainment/activity options are available	1-2	Mostly restaurants and bars – could add/diversify night activities for families.
51	An adequate supply of daytime entertainment/activities are available	2	The beach, water and outdoor areas provide activity options, however there are limited other opportunities. Additional activities for visitors should be considered in the downtowns to draw visitors into the communities.
52	Diverse daytime entertainment/activity options are available	2	As above.

VISITOR INFORMATION			
#	Indicators	Score	Comments
53	Community website effectively welcomed me to the community	2-3	The Region website is attractive and clearly communicates visitor information. Region website is not mobile-friendly. The County website is geared towards residents. Limited information for visitors.
54	Community website effectively directed me to appropriate tourism services and attractions	2-3	The Region website has well-written, engaging content, but is missing live links and redirects visitors to a page about living in Lac La Biche. County website is missing a link to tourism information.
55	Phone line for tourism information is well advertised	3	Phone numbers are advertised online and on hard copy visitor information. Both the VIC and Lac La Biche Region phone numbers are given. It would be more efficient if only one number was given.
56	Tourism business websites effectively welcomed me to the community	1-2	Many businesses do not have websites or have very poor websites.
57	Tourism business websites effectively directed me to appropriate services	1-2	As above.

58	Information (e.g. maps, products, services) is available at outdoor kiosks for 24-hr access	2-3	The visitor guide is very useful. Information is missing at road side pull-outs. There needs to be a comprehensive information system that starts with the website and continues through all print-based information pieces and includes physical maps at kiosks, public washroom locations, drop-off zones and in parking areas.
At the Visitor Information Centre:			
59	VIC is open for visitors at convenient times	2-3	The VIC's operating hours were not clear – signs said it was open until 4:30pm and also 5:00pm. Not open in the evening.
60	Comprehensive information is available at the VIC related to the community	1-2	The VIC had information about the community, but it was buried in a large amount of visitor information about other Albertan destinations (e.g. Drumheller, Banff, Jasper, etc.). More local information is needed to support tourism operators.
61	Comprehensive information is available at the VIC related to the region	1-2	As above.
62	Comprehensive information is available at the VIC related to the province	3	There was a lot of printed material about the rest of the Province.
63	Information is available in different languages	1-2	The Mission site provided information in both French and English. The rest of the information in the County was in English.
64	An up-to-date calendar of events is available at the VIC	1-2	The calendar appeared to be missing events and was not easy to find. Needs to be clearer.
65	Adequate public internet access is available at the VIC	4	Guest Wi-Fi was available, and no password needed. Very visitor friendly.
66	An opportunity to book accommodations, restaurants, entertainment, etc. is available at the VIC	1	This was not available at the VIC.

67	VIC employees/volunteers were courteous	3	We were pleasantly greeted by VIC staff.
68	VIC employees/volunteers were attentive	2	We received mixed reviews. Staff were attentive and offered up good information on one of our visits, but failed to provide useful information on another.
69	VIC employees/volunteers were able to answer questions effectively	2	As above.
70	VIC employees/volunteers were neat in appearance	4	VIC staff looked professional.

APPENDIX D: Examples of Successful Wayfinding Strategies

The Town of Devon

The wayfinding strategy for the Town of Devon incorporates a symbol-based approach in order to allow multiple amenities and services to be identified on street sign blades and on stand-alone main reference signs. The Town of Devon symbol system is based on international symbol standards for public information and therefore displays common features that may have been seen in other contexts, such as national parks. The challenge with this approach is that visitors and residents are required to “learn” the symbol language.



City of St. Albert

The wayfinding strategy for The City of St. Albert is text-based and very clear. The signs lead the viewer progressively and include only key directions to parts of the City where further details in the form of combined and framed sign blade posts provide direction to particular amenities and services. Parking locations are clearly marked, and parking areas display maps that allow visitors to orientate themselves, and that show other parking options in the general vicinity.



APPENDIX E: Lac La Biche County's Digital and Online Presence

The following tourism websites and social media platforms were included in the assessment:

1. Google Search
2. Laclabicheregion.com
3. Laclabichecounty.com
4. Laclabichemission.com
5. Facebook.com (LLB Tourism and County)
6. Twitter.com (LLB Tourism and County)
7. Youtube.com
8. Instagram.com

The information below provides a summary of key findings from the digital and online presence assessment.

Lac La Biche's Digital and Online Presence

The Lac La Biche region is well-represented online, particularly by the site LaclabicheRegion.com. The majority of Google's first page results stem from this site, and provide excellent information for residents and visitors alike. It is also useful to see a Lac La Biche presence on TripAdvisor, which shows up on Google's first page of results as well. More and more people are drawing travel inspiration from TripAdvisor, so this works well in your favour.

Accommodation listings are absent from Google's first page, and are not listed until the bottom of Google's second page (on booking.com), after websites of various churches and even a dating website. It would be very useful to provide accommodation listings on one of the websites you own, and then do a targeted Google Adwords campaign to draw greater attention to it.

It is also great to see that there are social media accounts connected to the region. It is surprising, however, that these accounts don't show up until the third page of Google, as social media links are often prioritized by Google. It may be worth considering a scheduling adjustment, and/or an advertising campaign within Facebook and Twitter to help drive for more reach and more engagement.

What follows is an analysis of the primary websites that come up in Google searches. You may have control of these sites, or you may not, but they all impact Lac La Biche County's visitor friendliness. We also analyzed Lac La Biche County's social media presence and visitors' access to logistical trip-planning information. The analysis begins with an examination of Google Search findings. *

*A Glossary of Terms is provided at the end of this section. It contains important definitions and acronyms used in the analysis below.

Google Search Key Findings

Term: "Lac La Biche"

- LaLaBicheRegion.com is very well represented on the first page of Google. Several relevant internal links are listed, which means the Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is working well.
- The other pages that show up on the first page are useful for visitors (i.e. TripAdvisor, Wikipedia).
- Great to see visitor-friendly information about beaches and other things to do on Google's first page.
- The Chamber of Commerce and local newspaper round out the top Google results, both of which are useful.
- Easy links to accommodations do not show up for several pages.

Term: "Lac La Biche Tourism"

- Useful results on Google's first page, including the LaLaBicheRegion.com tourism page and TripAdvisor (with lots of images - fantastic!), and social media.
- There are some great third-party articles and blogs about things to do, which is excellent. Though you cannot control the messaging, it is that much more meaningful when others do your marketing for you. It might be useful to create a targeted invitation to bloggers and travel writers to share information about the community to maximize this kind of content.
- Accommodation information does not show up for several pages.
- Travel Alberta content is notably absent. It would be great to develop closer ties to TravelAlberta.com to encourage them to better cover the region.

Term: "Lac La Biche Things To Do"

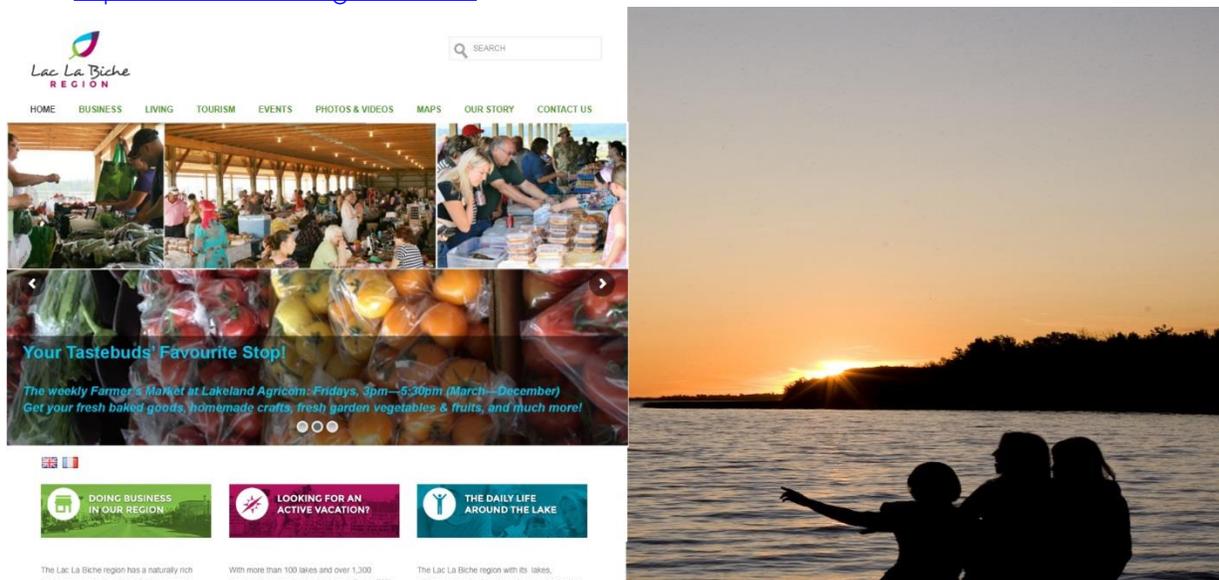
- Good combination between content on LaLaBicheRegion.com and third-party sites like TripAdvisor. Having a variety of sources raises the trust level for the value of the experiences.
- Top results are a good combination of outdoor activities and historical/cultural pursuits. This provides a well-rounded image of the community.
- Great to see that winter activities are specifically included in some of the results. So many tourism campaigns are based on summer activities, but our winter climate can be a significant draw, particularly for visitors from overseas, and marketing winter could provide a competitive edge for the region.

Term: “Lac La Biche Accommodations”

- Accommodations listings are primarily from larger chains, many of which are aggregators (booking.com, expedia.com, etc.).
- It is difficult to find information on more specialized forms of accommodations, such as bed and breakfasts, cabins and campgrounds without specifically searching those terms.
- laclabicheregion.com does list some of these other forms of accommodation, but many don't have live links, which makes booking them more complicated.

Regional Websites Key Findings

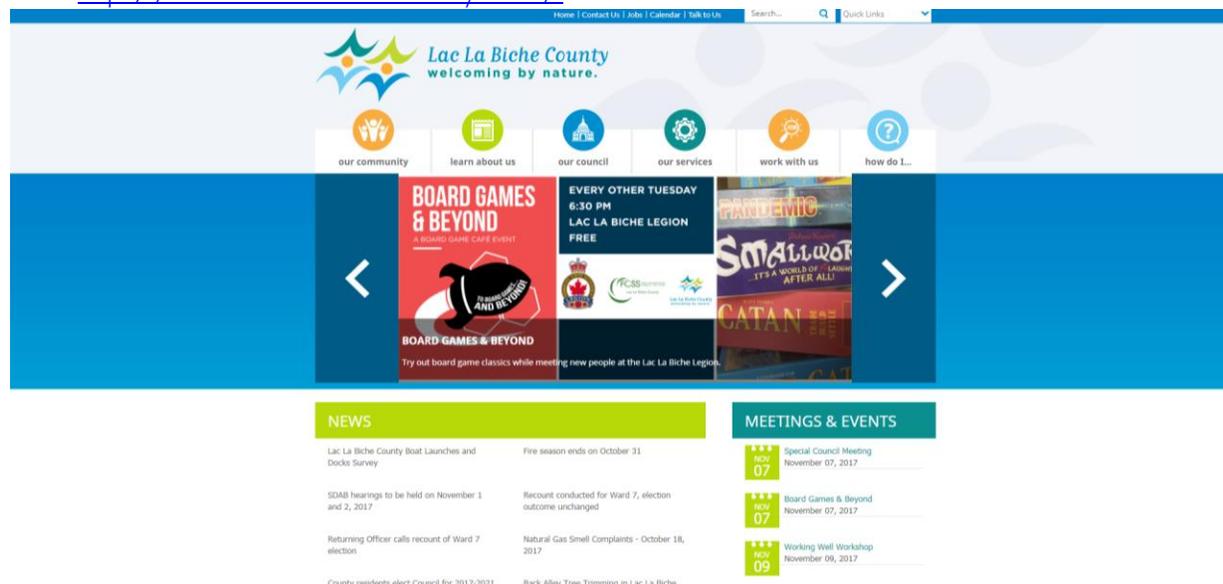
Site: <http://laclabicheregion.com/>



- The site looks great on a desktop, but is less mobile-friendly. Make sure the site reads equally well on a mobile device, as that is how many visitors will experience it.
- Be sure to make rotating banner images a consistent size. The second and third images impede on the menu, when viewed on a mobile device.
- The images on the homepage are good, but are not optimized for mobile viewing.
- Text sections throughout are short, and well written for web-based content.
- Good navigation style, and useful headings that acknowledge the experiences of both visitors and residents.
- Clicking on “Looking For An Active Vacation” on the homepage takes us to a page for residents all about living in Lac La Biche. Whoops! This should be redirected to the tourism part of the site.

- Social media icons are included in the image banner, but are not live. Better to find a place to highlight them where you can directly link to the sites.
- Ranking so highly in Google shows that the SEO of this site is working very well.
- In general, images throughout the site do not load on a mobile device, and images are what sells a location. This is a high-priority fix.
- The content in the Tourism section and activity breakdown is terrific. Fabulous experiential writing (i.e. "Finding an elusive orchid nestled away in the boreal forest is a thrilling experience for amateur and experienced naturalists alike," and "In the Lac La Biche region, you'll realize that it can be difficult to tell where the sky starts and the lake's surface ends.") Kudos to your content writer. This is some of the best experiential writing we have seen on websites of this kind. It gives visitors a good idea of what they can expect, it is poetic enough to get our imaginations rocking, but is down-to-earth so that it does not feel pretentious. So well done.
- It would be good to see that great content in an updated, mobile-friendly site that highlights the images of the region.
- Love the links on the right that connect the visitor to logistical information on each page. This is a great idea.
- All of the What to Eat and Where to Stay businesses should have live links. It should be a requirement for the listing.
- Generally speaking, while the site looks fairly modern and the content writing is fantastic, it is not well-optimized for mobile viewing.

Site: <http://www.laclabichecounty.com/>



- Navigation is logical, though the site appears a bit dated, and is clearly targeted to residents. It is not clear from the homepage whether there is any information for visitors.
- Recreation and Attractions, which is a sub-menu under "Our Community," provides the only relevant information for visitors. Visitors may not think that the content pertains to them. It will serve visitors well to make the content more obvious, and show that it pertains to residents and visitors alike.
- A "Visitors" link on the homepage could be very useful.
- More images of the region will help make the content that much more engaging for visitors and residents alike.

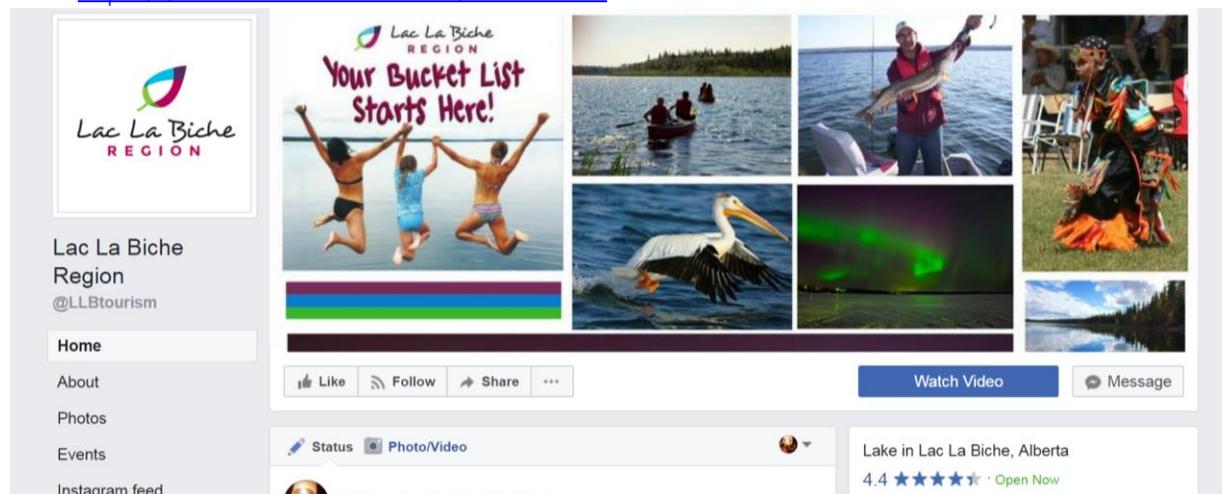
Site: <http://www.laclabichemission.com/>



- The text is well-written and conveys important visitor information.
- The navigation bar is easy for visitors to use to locate information.
- The navigation bar is missing a link to return to the home page.
- The design of the website is dated. An updated design would be more attractive and engaging for visitors.

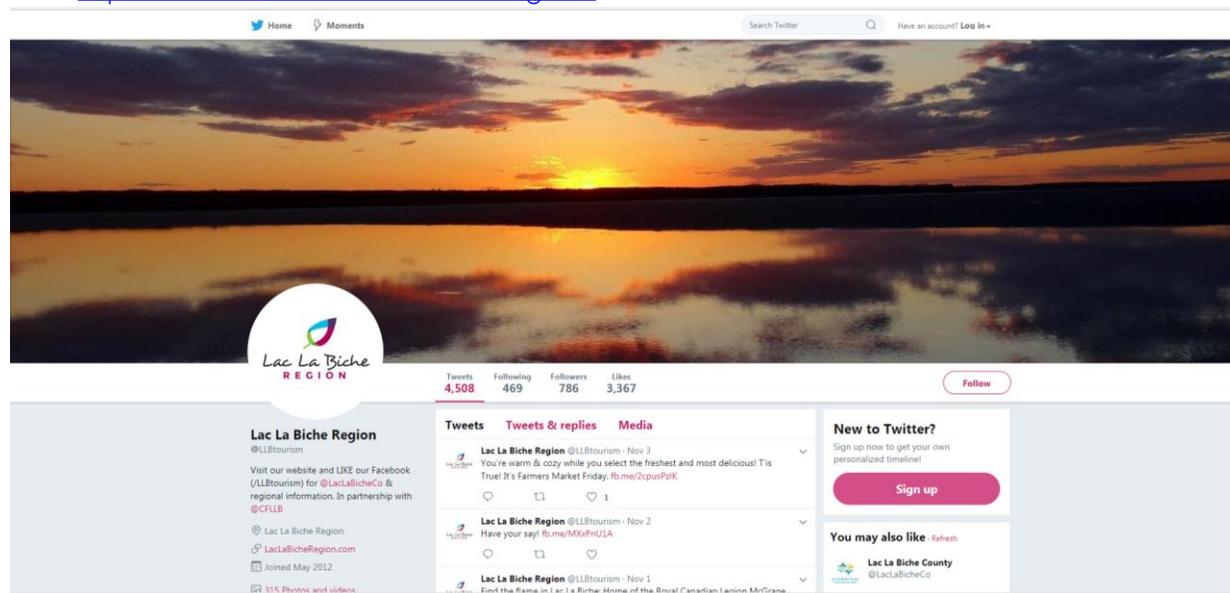
Social Media Key Findings

Site: <https://www.facebook.com/LLBtourism>



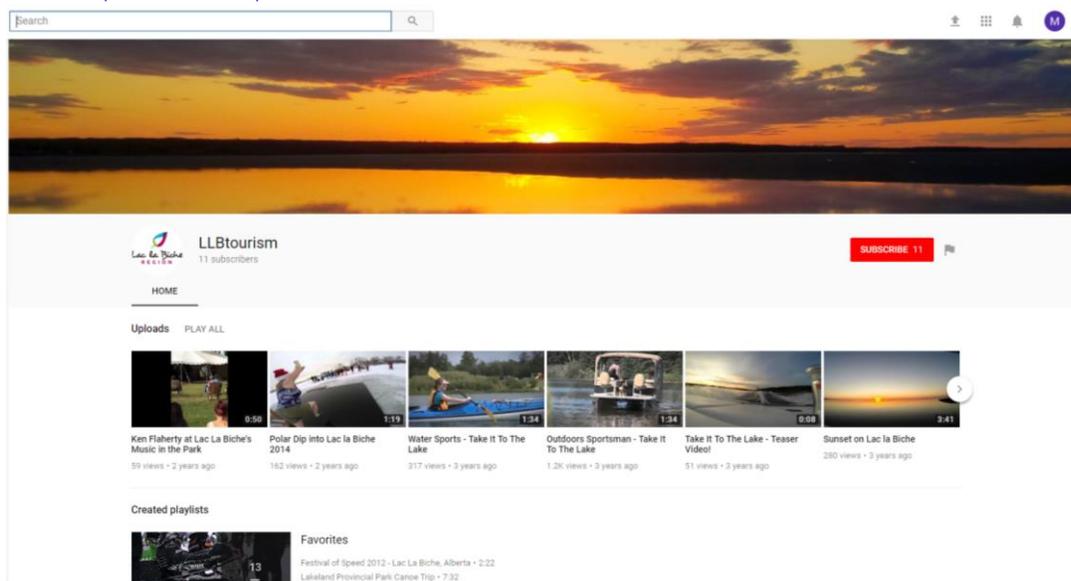
- There is too much use of hashtags. Hashtags are less effective on Facebook (FB) and are not generally part of FB culture, even though they technically work. In our opinion, they clutter up posts and make them harder to read. Hashtag usage also indicates crossposting, which is against best practices.
- Though some of the writing is clever, it could be more experiential. Most posts are brief, almost like tweets. There is opportunity to paint more of a picture of the culture of Lac La Biche, and to be more literary in the approach.
- Be sure to consistently use a plural first-person voice (i.e. "Something tells us it's going to be a thirsty Thursday" instead of "Something tells me...").
- Work for a more consistent content schedule. For this size of community, aim for no more than one post per day, so as to not overwhelm your audience. Every other day, or daily posts would work great for a community of this size, but try not to do three posts on one day, and then nothing for a few days.
- Content is useful for visitors.
- Good use of images. Images with little or no text enables greater engagement with viewers.
- When posting a website that has multiple image options it is best to pick one, rather than letting them all load.
- When possible, be sure to reward comments with a response or a reaction (i.e. comment or like), to encourage more engagement.
- Though the online community is sizeable, there is low engagement. FB advertising could be used to build community and increase engagement. In fact, this is highly recommended. A more experiential approach to the posts will also help to increase engagement.

Site: <https://twitter.com/llbtourism?lang=en>



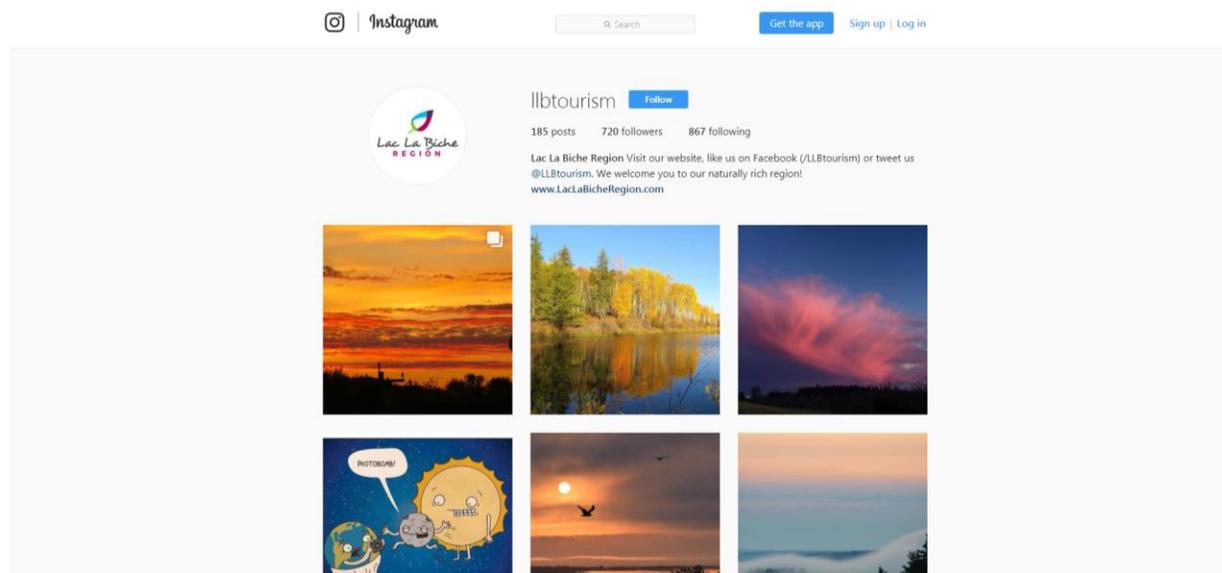
- Great job amplifying other voices in the region. This is one of Twitter’s superpowers, and it is working well on this profile.
- Always aim for readability. Tweets should be written with good grammar and full sentences as much as possible. You may occasionally need to take shortcuts and use abbreviations, but try to make it the exception, rather than the norm.
- Whenever possible, put hashtags at the end of the tweet and do not overuse hashtags. Only tag truly searchable terms, rather than using them for emphasis on words like #curious, #science, etc.
- While the retweets are shared more frequently, the content schedule for @llbtourism tweets is a bit lean. Aim for daily content, so you build trust with your audience. Alternatively, use the “quote tweet” feature to add your own spin to retweeted content.
- Good use of images. Use more “beauty” shots of the area for even more engagement.
- Follow more like-minded accounts and engage directly with influencers to build community size. Not only will this spread information further, it will build trust with visitors.
- Engagement is generally good, especially for the community size. Posts work best when the writing style is colourful and experiential. Really paint the picture of what life is like in the region. Help visitors to picture themselves there.
- Be sure to like other relevant tweets for greater community engagement.

Site: <http://www.youtube.com/LLBtourism>



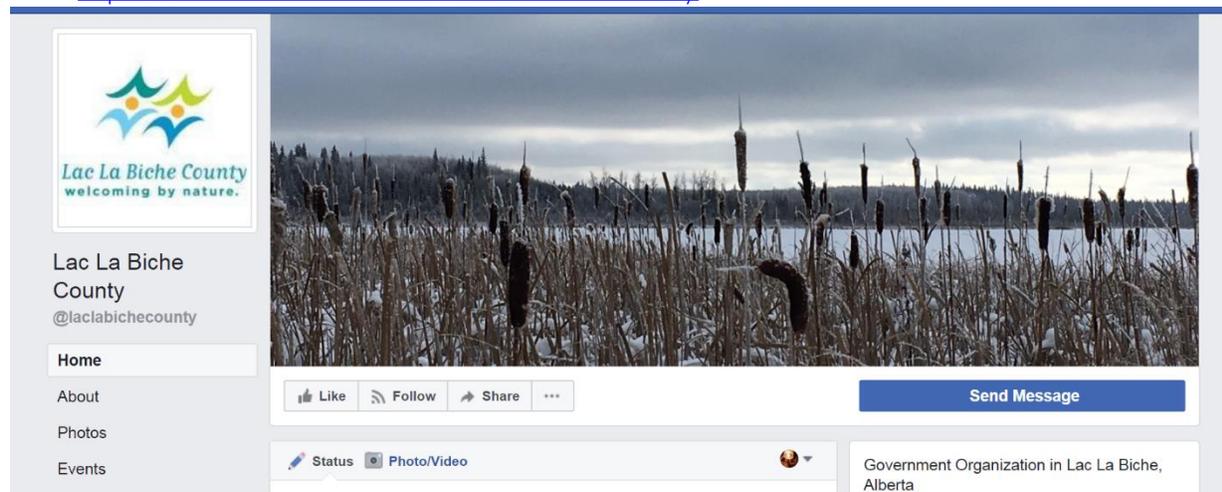
- There is some good “evergreen” video content that shows what life is like in the region.
- All of the content is at least two years old. It would be great to continue to add to your video library with updated content.
- There is a low number of subscribers. However, in this context, that does not really matter. It would appear to be more of a content library, rather than an active channel. While more updated content would be useful for visitors and residents, using YouTube as a video library is still an effective use of the channel.
- Ensure videos are tagged appropriately for greater searchability. It should be noted that none of these videos showed up in our Google search, even though YouTube is frequently prioritized by Google.
- Share the videos on your social media channels for higher visibility. You can use the convention of #ThrowbackThursday to share older content.

Site: <http://instagram.com/llbtourism>



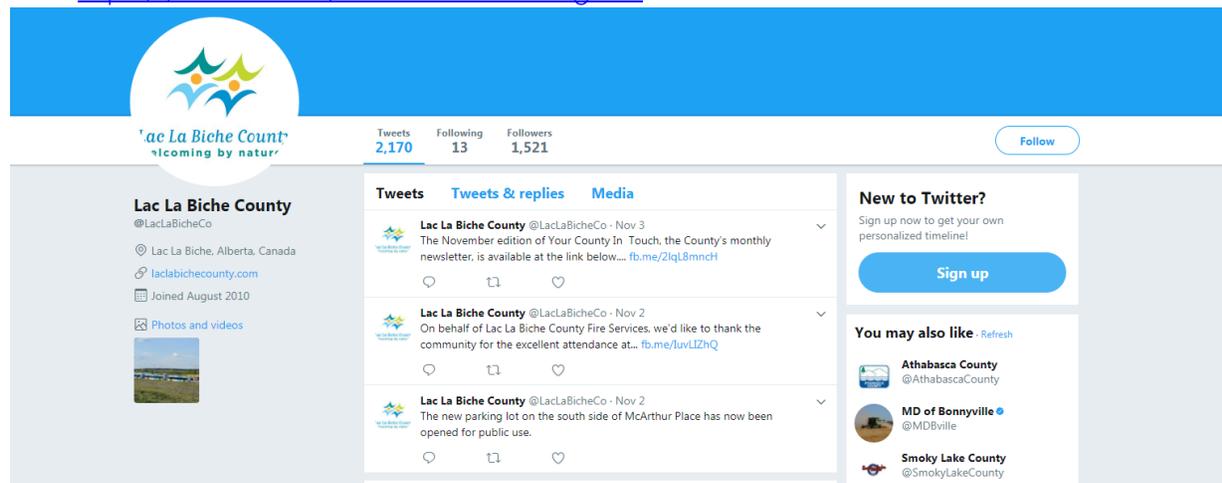
- Excellent Instagram (IG) images. The feed is very appealing and inspiring for visitors.
- Posts have good engagement. Try following more accounts and engaging with other accounts to build a larger audience.
- Could use more hashtags for greater searchability. Try adding them in the first comment if you don't want to clutter up your post with more hashtags.
- Glad to see you are not crossposting between Twitter, FB and IG. That said, both Twitter and FB could benefit from the writing style and the images on your IG feed. Do not crosspost, but do make use of some of this fantastic content for those platforms too.
- Fantastic experiential writing! You do a fabulous job of helping the viewer imagine themselves in the pictures.
- Always focus on readability. Even though you are writing with hashtags, be sure to use proper grammar, punctuation and capitalization.
- Of all of the profiles we've looked at on the various platforms, your Instagram is executed the best. As Instagram is one of the top platforms for tourist, we see this as very positive.

Site: <https://www.facebook.com/laclabichecounty>



- Content is clearly oriented to residents. Visitors likely would not spend much time on this site.
- Be sure to follow FB best practices, such as making sure every post has an image, limiting posts to one per day for this audience size, writing experientially with 'headlines' in mind to capture the audience's attention, and not burying the lead in too many details. When that is not possible, be sure to lead with the most interesting part of the story.
- Try using some FB advertising to increase community engagement. Engagement is currently very low, despite a good-sized community.

Site: <https://twitter.com/laclabicheco?lang=en>



- All posts appear to be crossposted from Facebook. Though crossposting can be a time-saver, this goes against best practices because each platform has its own language, culture and vernacular. Posts work best when they make use of those unique superpowers.
- Engagement is low. Writing posts specifically for Twitter will help increase engagement.
- Make sure you use images whenever possible for greater engagement.

- Community is actually a fairly good size, despite low engagement. Try following more influencers in the region, and engage with them to drive more interest to the platform.
- Currently only 13 other profiles are followed. For a community size of roughly 1500, try following a minimum of 500 accounts to build a better reciprocal community.
- Most of the content is intended for residents. If there was more use of engaging photos and writing, there is a good likelihood that visitors would engage with it as well. Visitors will not necessarily understand the difference between @lacobichedcounty and @llbtourism, especially when they are tagging photos and tweets. Capitalizing on this content could make for a more vibrant profile.

Conclusions

- In general, there is a significant amount of information for visitors to access, however much of it is on sites that are not mobile-friendly. Updating to mobile-friendly sites would be hugely useful.
- Creating a shorter path for visitors to find information on both the region and county websites would be helpful, and ensure that they are correctly linked from the homepage.
- It would be useful to have a more polished presence on social media to build relationships with visitors before (and after) their trips. Social media can go a long way to creating a friendly first impression for visitors, and to build ambassadorship for the region. Instagram is working very well for you, now aim to bring the other platforms up to the same standard.
- More partnerships are needed with tourism sites like Travel Alberta in order have a bigger online presence.
- Highlighting accommodation content would be useful for visitors. Particular attention should be given to B&Bs, cabins and campgrounds, as this information was challenging to find.
- Continue to build your content libraries (both images and stills) for use on all of your digital media.

Glossary of Terms:

- **Crossposting:** Posting the same social media content on all of your accounts, usually done on a third-party platform like Hootsuite. While this can look like a time-saver, it's against best practices as each social media platform has a different culture, uses different vernacular, and has different expectations for engagement. It also penalizes audience members who follow your accounts on various platforms - who are likely your super fans or ambassadors - as they are the ones who will encounter the duplicated content, which may turn them off. Social media is about building relationships, and those relationships are compromised if the content delivered is not fresh, relevant and delivered using the unique conventions of each platform.

- **Autoposting:** Posting content directly from an auto-scheduler. Frequently, newsletter or website platforms have a “publish to social media” function, where content is automatically drafted into tweets or FB posts, based on key words and headlines in the content. These rarely make for engaging posts, and many auto-publishers don’t follow best practices, like ensuring readability or publishing an image with the post. Again, it may seem like a time-saver, but the content feels “computer generated” and rarely follows best practices. That said, we do recommend creating content ahead of time - as it can be extremely time consuming and impractical to post “in the moment” every day. But to do so, we recommend using the native apps whenever possible, so you can see exactly what the post will look like before it goes out (i.e. when posting on FB, post directly from the FB app - FB has excellent scheduling functionality). When it’s not possible (i.e. in the case of Twitter, which unless you’re using Twitter advertising functionality, scheduling can’t be done natively), to make use of a third party app like Hootsuite or Buffer. Just make sure you’re only sharing the content to the platform you’re creating it for (see Crossposting), and that you’re making use of best practices like writing experientially and posting an image with the post.
- **Scheduling Adjustment:** Developing a consistent presence on social media is important, but sometimes too much can be as big of a problem as not enough. Best practice suggests no more than one post per day on FB when you have a relatively small audience. Too many posts will bombard your audience and potentially overwhelm them, limiting engagement. Pages with huge followings can often post 2-3 times per day, but that’s really only best for the biggest brands. With small followings, you can even get away with every other day, or even just 3 posts per week - but it’s the consistency that counts, as it’s all about building trust with your audience. On Twitter, you ideally want a daily presence, and can tweet multiple times per day, with a healthy mix of retweets and quoted tweets to amplify the messages of others. On Instagram, you have a bit more flexibility - if your images are strong, go ahead and post as many times as you like, but better to have a consistent presence, rather than put out a lot of images at once, and then not post for a week. But if your engagement is low, try adjusting your schedule by experimenting with posting content at different times of day. 10 am, 2 pm, 7 pm, and 10 pm tend to be good times for engagement (correlating with people’s “downtime”), but it really will depend on your audience.
- **Search Engine Optimization (SEO):** The process of making sure your website shows up in Google searches. It is based on common search terms and tags built into the algorithms of the site.
- **Mobile-Friendly:** Ensuring that your website is equally functional and attractive on a mobile device and on a desktop. This means proper scaling of images to a smaller screen size, and ensuring that the core functionality of all links and menus is still intact (and attractive) when viewed from a mobile device.

APPENDIX F: References

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