
FACTSHEET

For Immediate Release

Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture

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COVID-19 economic recovery plan boosts B.C. tourism industry

COVID-19 has had a profound and devastating impact on the tourism sector and has altered British Columbia's visitor economy. Throughout the pandemic, the ministry consulted extensively with business owners, sector associations and marketing organizations to hear their priorities for recovery and ideas to help British Columbia remain a globally competitive destination. B.C.'s COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan includes a cross-government approach to help all aspects of the tourism industry recover, create jobs and grow the economy.

Investing in the resilience of B.C.'s visitor economy:

- A new Tourism Task Force will bring together leaders from business, labour, First Nations and not-for-profits to seek innovative ideas on how to best position the industry for the 2021 season. The Province is allocating \$50 million in the Economic Recovery Plan for new measures that result from the task force's work.
- The Province will invest \$19 million to support small municipalities that are dependent on tourism to build, adapt and diversify their tourism infrastructure. This program will create job opportunities in the communities and prepare for the future.
- The Province will invest nearly \$14 million to support targeted tourism development partnership initiatives in the six tourism regions across B.C. to help the industry recover from COVID-19.
- Destination BC will invest an additional \$5 million to continue to market British Columbia domestically and secure its spot in the international tourism market. International bookings are often made one year before the date of departure.
- The new Community Economic Recovery Infrastructure Program will invest \$100 million in projects that make life better for locals and improve the experience for visitors. The elements that support the tourism sector include:
 - \$20 million for tourism infrastructure projects supporting destination development. Local governments, not-for-profits and Indigenous Nations will be able to apply for project funding to help bring back visitors through investments in tourism infrastructure and amenities in communities;
 - \$20 million to support economic recovery for rural communities; and
 - \$20 million for investments in unique heritage infrastructure, including funding for First Nations to repair, renew or develop Indigenous cultural heritage infrastructure.

Investing in businesses and tourism workers:

The Province will invest \$300 million for Small Business Recovery grants that many tourism-related businesses will be eligible for. This program will enable small businesses to access professional advice and grants to support recovery for companies heavily impacted by the

pandemic and most likely to recover. The grant amounts will be scalable based on the size and annual pre COVID-19 revenues of the business, to a maximum of \$30,000. Hard-hit tourism operators will be eligible to receive a top up of up to \$10,000, for a maximum grant of \$40,000 based on overall eligibility criteria. The provincial government estimates that 15,000 small businesses will benefit from the program and help protect more than 200,000 jobs throughout B.C.

To spur new growth, effective immediately, government is providing a temporary PST rebate on select machinery and equipment to make it easier for businesses to make the kinds of investments that will allow them to grow and become more productive. Effective Sept. 17, 2020, eligible businesses will receive a 100% PST rebate on select machinery and equipment purchases. This program will run for one year, ending on Sept. 30, 2021. Eligible businesses can recover 100% of the PST they pay on select purchases and leases of machinery and equipment over that period. To be eligible, a business must be incorporated.

The provincial government is also implementing a new hiring incentive rebate. Employers that hire new people or bring people back who lost their jobs during the height of the pandemic measures are eligible for a credit equal to 15% of any increase in total payroll paid for the last quarter of 2020. The B.C. Increased Employment Incentive will go to businesses that hire back employees or restore work hours/wages that were reduced as a result of COVID-19. In addition, to ensure the greatest impact on job creation, the benefit is also available to businesses that increase employment even if they may not have been negatively impacted by COVID-19.

Recognizing the demand for online services during the pandemic, the provincial government is providing \$12 million to support businesses that want to build an online presence, boost their e-commerce operations, or increase their digital marketing capacity. In addition, \$2 million will be available to support restaurants, tourism businesses and other types of businesses to create digital marketing tools.

As B.C.'s visitor economy starts to rebound, businesses will need access to skilled workers. A new \$15 million fund for Indigenous skills training and education will provide opportunities for up to 1,250 Indigenous people whose employment has been impacted by COVID-19. First Nations will be able to access the fund to provide educational programs in their communities, including for tourism skills training. In addition, another \$20 million is available for short-term skills training for up to 2,800 people to fill in-demand jobs in the community, region or province with a goal of helping them find employment.

Helping visitors access communities across B.C.:

Transportation infrastructure is a key driver of a strong tourism sector, making it easier for visitors to travel within communities and between regions of the province. The Province is investing \$26 million to upgrade provincial side roads and forest service roads, and another \$26 million in safety improvements to the access road that connects Huu-ay-aht community of Anacla and the nearby village of Bamfield to Port Alberni – opening up new destination development opportunities for these communities.

Tourism business owners located outside urban centres identified air access as a key driver of visitation to their communities. The Province is investing nearly \$16 million to improve small, rural airports through air access grants.

Improving the visitor experience:

Visitors are increasingly becoming conscious of their eco-footprint and seeking out destinations that promote active living. The provincial government is investing \$17 million to fund projects that improve the safety of transportation networks like local paths and rail trails. BC Parks had record visitation over the summer, and with this level of demand expected to continue in the future, government is investing \$5 million in parks infrastructure.

In addition, visitors are increasingly expecting to have access to high-speed internet and Wif-Fi at destinations. Expanding connectivity in rural areas not only improves the visitor experience, but also allows business owners to effectively promote their operation and access new markets. The Province will invest \$75 million to expand high-speed internet services for rural communities and an additional \$15 million to improve Wif-Fi and cellular connectivity along major highways and at key rests stops.

Many visitors are attracted to a destination because of its museums, galleries and theatres. The arts and culture sector has also been deeply impacted by the pandemic, threatening the ability of many venues to continue operating. The provincial government is investing \$21 million to provide additional relief to the sector over the short term, while helping organizations adapt their operations and artistic practices to the realities of the pandemic.

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