NEWS RELEASE

TOURISM & HOSPITALITY SECTOR OUTLINES PRIORITIES FOR NEW GOVERNMENT

October 4, 2024, Vancouver, BC: Leaders of British Columbia's $18 billion+ tourism and hospitality industry say the next provincial government must address several obstacles to sustainable growth in order for the sector to reach its full potential and help communities from a social, environmental, cultural, and economic perspective.

The Tourism Industry Association of British Columbia (TIABC) notes that while the sector has largely recovered from the pandemic thanks to an outstanding tourism product, the resiliency of operators, strong partnerships, as well as provincial and federal government grants that allowed many businesses to continue operating during and/or after COVID, the overall number of tourism businesses has declined while the industry remains short of the workers needed to service visitors.

In its 2024 Election Toolkit, TIABC, along with its business, sector and destination management organization members, is calling on party leaders to address several issues pertaining to land use, transportation, workforce, investment, regulations, Indigenous relations, housing, and education as part of the BC election campaign.

TIABC CEO Walt Judas said, "We have transportation challenges within BC that need to be resolved to allow both residents and visitors the ability to travel seamlessly to and from rural communities. Enhancing infrastructure such as airports, ferry terminals, and highways, as well as investing in new venues such as convention centres that will increase demand for our destination, is vital. At the same time we also need a plan to help businesses saddled by rising costs for necessities like energy, labour, supplies, and taxes that have increased cumulatively by close to 20 percent since 2019 resulting in a steeper decline in profitability relative to a rise in revenue."

While tourism and hospitality sector revenues have not yet reached 2019's record-setting level, the industry is on a positive trajectory but nonetheless requires further government attention. BC Hotel Association President & CEO Ingrid Jarrett explained, "We need our provincial government to facilitate an investment climate that attracts the private sector to develop and invest in our province. Our visitor-based economy is poised for growth and investment is key to expediate development for infrastructure around BC to support sustainable, thoughtful growth and the wellbeing of our communities."

Scott Ellis, CEO of Guide Outfitters of British Columbia and co-chair of the Adventure Tourism Coalition noted, “Tourism businesses rely heavily on access to crown land, as well as secure and long-term tenures to operate. It’s essential that the new government engages our industry on land-use planning, as well as the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA), and that there is timely decision-making on tenure renewals to allow operators to remain viable, provide employment, and contribute to local economies.”

Ellen Walker-Matthews, CEO of the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association, who also serves on the BC Tourism Emergency Management Committee, says the industry requires ongoing support in view of annual emergencies such as wildfires, drought and other climate-change impacts.

“During wildfires for example, countless businesses face visitor cancellations and are forced to lay off employees or even shut down regardless of whether they’re affected directly or not. No matter if it’s road closures or government travel directives, any interruption to business, especially at the height of the tourist season, has a significant impact on revenues. A permanent program similar to what was offered during the pandemic would be welcome to help operators deal with unforeseen major emergencies which are happening with greater frequency.”

The tourism and hospitality industry generally exceeds other major resource sectors in annual GDP. Industry leaders are looking for the next provincial government to affirm tourism as a key economic priority, on par with other leading business sectors such as forestry, mining, oil and gas, as well as agriculture and fishing.

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About TIABC

As a private, membership-based business association, TIABC works to influence government policy and regulation on behalf of its business, education, sector association and destination management organization members to empower British Columbia's tourism industry to reach its full potential economically, socially, culturally, and through the lens of sustainability.

About BCHA

The BC Hotel Association is the advocate for the interests of BC's diverse accommodation industry. It is the bridge builder for owners and operators to government, the corporate community and other hospitality organizations. BCHA's goal is to grow members' business while elevating the accommodation industry's impact on the BC economy.

About TOTA

The Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association (TOTA) is an industry-led organization, governed by an elected Board of Directors, who represent and support business and community tourism interests throughout the Thompson Okanagan region.

About GOABC

As passionate advocates for wildlife, the Guide Outfitters Association of British Columbia (GOABC) is the recognized voice of the guide outfitting family. With integrity and professionalism, GOABC promotes the conservation, stewardship and sustainable use of wildlife.

Adventure Tourism Coalition

The Adventure Tourism Coalition (ATC) aims to encourage, enable, and manage the sustainable growth of adventure tourism in BC by improving collaboration and alignment across the adventure tourism industry, governmental organizations, and recreational users.