

The Story of Tourism in Niagara, 1969 to Present Day

Introduction

There are many reasons to visit Niagara region, though Niagara Falls has undoubtedly been its showcase for centuries: “The falls surpass everything said and written about them at home,” wrote the philosopher and parliamentarian Alexis de Tocqueville in 1831. “They surpass anything one’s imagination conjures beforehand” (Linnaberry 2019). Building on de Tocqueville’s reflections, MacFarlane (2020) calls the internationally renowned cataract an example of “the sublime”—a catalyst for both fear and awe that continues to draw visitors to Niagara.

But Niagara Falls is not the only reason to visit the region. The area is also home to several historic sites, owing to its position along traditional trade routes and the Canada-United States border. More recent initiatives, such as a “Living Museum Tour” in Niagara Falls, highlight the history of Indigenous peoples across Niagara (MacFarlane 2020; Niagara Falls Tourism, n.d.). Visitors to Niagara can also tour remnants of the early Welland Canal system, or observe the ongoing operation of the current canal. Other sites showcase the evolution of hydroelectric power generation in Ontario, or Niagara’s place in the Underground Railway. Niagara’s micro-climate has also nurtured an agriculture that features tender fruits, leading to a wine industry that now draws tourists from around the world.

Despite the many reasons to visit Niagara, the region’s prominence as a tourist destination was not inevitable. Instead, tourism in Niagara has been crafted by a determined effort to capitalize, protect, and improve upon the natural and historic significance of the region itself.



The Bruce Trail runs along the Niagara Escarpment and is a draw for eco-tourists and those looking for an active experience.

Nathan A Olmstead, PhD (ABD) | Post-Doctoral Researcher, Niagara Community Observatory | nolmstead@brocku.ca
Tia Henstra, BA | Research Assistant, Niagara Community Observatory
Charles Conteh, PhD | Director, Niagara Community Observatory | cconteh@brocku.ca

This research is funded by the Wilson Foundation, a multi-year partnership with Brock University and facilitated by the Niagara Community Observatory to map Niagara’s economic history and deepen the understanding of the region’s economic and social development. Principal Investigator: Dr. Charles Conteh.

www.brocku.ca/nco

One of the most infamous efforts in this regard came in 1827, when a group of local hotel owners decided to send a condemned ship loaded with live animals over Niagara Falls (Likens 2018). Such spectacular efforts have been balanced with conservation initiatives intended to preserve the natural beauty of Niagara, including the creation of the Niagara Parks Commission in 1887 and the careful regulation of water diversions above Niagara Falls for the sake of hydroelectric power generation (MacFarlane 2020).


As a result, Niagara hosts a vibrant and diverse tourism sector today. The tourism industry is, in turn, supported by a range of policies that guide and regulate tourist activity and programming within the region. However, Niagara's tourism sector is facing new challenges around infrastructure development, seasonal fluctuations, labour shortages, and more. Many of these challenges have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly impacted businesses and workers in tourism and hospitality.

This paper explores the growth of the tourism industry in Niagara and its role in economic development policy post-1969, which is the year the Regional Municipality of Niagara

(Niagara Region) was officially incorporated as a two-tier municipality in the Province of Ontario. This paper explores the policies that have supported or constrained the tourism industry during this time, as well as the opportunities and challenges that exist for Niagara's tourism sector today.

A Diverse Tourism Experience (1969–1990)

By 1969, Niagara Region was home to a vibrant tourism industry. Existing geographical strengths were bolstered by a variety of commercial attractions, including a rapidly expanding hotel and casino industry in Niagara Falls. The latter was fueled, at least in part, by regulatory changes that eased restrictions on gambling in Canada, as well as the popularization of jet travel in the 1960s and 1970s (MacLaurin and LaLaurin 2003). Niagara was also host to a unique collection of seasonal programming and events, including the Grape and Wine Festival (started in 1951), the Shaw Festival (started in 1962), and Canal Days in Port Colborne which hosted its inaugural festival in 1978 (Port Colborne n.d.) The mid-1970s saw the creation of the Inniskillin winery, and the entrepreneurial efforts of Donald Ziraldo and Karl Kaiser to put Niagara's budding wine industry on the global stage.



Locust Lane Estate Winery on the Beamsville Bench in Lincoln. The wine industry has led the growth of agritourism across Niagara.



Niagara Falls attracts an average of 14 million visitors each year, including three million from the U.S.

These efforts helped to establish the whole of the Niagara region—and Niagara-on-the-Lake in particular—as a premier tourist destination adjacent to the more energetic experience of Niagara Falls. By 1973, Niagara’s Grape and Wine Festival was attracting over 500,000 visitors per year (St. Catharines 1974).

The growth of Niagara’s tourism sector was supported by broader change. The opening of Brock University and Niagara College in the 1960s encouraged a stream of new—and formally trained—talent in Niagara’s tourism and hospitality sectors (Niagara Region 1970). The expansion of the Queen Elizabeth Way (QEW) highway, beginning in the 1950s, also helped to make Niagara more accessible to tourists coming from the Toronto area or the United States (Niagara Region Planning and Development Department 1989). By 1970, visitors from the United States accounted for 75 per cent of total tourist expenditures within Niagara (Niagara Region 1970).

Tourism thus began to occupy an increasingly significant role in Niagara’s regional economy. In 1977, the tourism sector supported nearly one-fifth (19.1 per cent) of local employment in Niagara and generated \$572 million

in taxes (Northwood 2000). The growing importance of tourism coincided with the decrease of traditionally strong sectors like manufacturing, which were by this time facing challenges of their own. Between 1951 and 1981, the proportion of Niagara’s workforce employed in the service sector increased from 37.9 per cent to 59.3 per cent (Niagara Region Development Corporation 1982).

Niagara tourism continued to benefit from supportive policy. In 1989, for example, the Ontario Wine Adjustment Program provided \$40 million in funding to support the pricing and marketing of Ontario’s wine industry, two years after the opening of an official Niagara Wine Route in 1987 (Ontario Grape Growers Marketing Board n.d.; Little 1995). This official “route” supported the expansion of agriculture-based tourism in Niagara, driven by local wineries but including tender-fruit production and value-added agriculture as well (Niagara Falls 2014; Little 1995). The result was increased farm and winery incomes, expanded employment opportunities, and the growth of government tax income from the tourism industry (Gayler 2003).

The rise of agritourism in Niagara reflected growing interest in nature-based tourism across Canada (Eagles 1998).

In addition to visiting local wineries, tourists were becoming increasingly interested in the many parks, trails, and ecosystems present in Niagara. In this regard, the region benefited from the early work of the Niagara Parks Commission (Eagles 1998). In 1973, the provincial government also passed the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act, which established the Niagara Escarpment Commission (Niagara Escarpment Commission n.d.). The Commission's mandate, beyond protecting the Niagara Escarpment from industrial development, included the creation and maintenance of parks and trails such as the Bruce Trail, and culminated in the creation of a Niagara Escarpment Plan in 1985 (Niagara Escarpment Commission n.d.).

By 1972, following the opening of the Welland Canal Bypass, the Welland Canal had also taken its current form. The result—in addition to improving the flow of goods through Niagara—was an emergent interest in preserving, showcasing, and capitalizing upon the older sections of the Canal that now sat unused (Shipley 1999). The Welland Canals Preservation Association (WCPA) was created and began converting portions of the old canal system into walking paths and parks for

local patrons and tourists (Shipley 1999). These efforts gained the attention of the Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation, which assigned staff to inventory heritage resources along the canal, and to recommend a strategy for their development.

Though the province ultimately rejected the ministry's advice, the WCPA continued working. Recognizing the need for a more open forum regarding the future of the old canal system, the group was renamed the Welland Canals Society and expanded to include representatives from local and regional governments, local chambers of commerce, the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority, and other community stakeholders (Shipley 1999). In 1985, the group received funding through the federal government's Innovation Program, which was intended to explore new approaches to job creation across the country. The investment reflected growing interest in the tourism industry, and the institutionalization of nature-based tourism within Niagara (Shipley 1999; Eagles 1998).

But while policymakers were optimistic about the future of Niagara tourism, this period of growth was to be followed by new and unforeseen challenges.



Fort George in Niagara-on-the-Lake is owned and operated by Parks Canada. It is one of Niagara's heritage-based tourist attractions.

Roadside stands and pick-your-own businesses have provided farmers with a way to contribute towards Niagara's agritourism.



Global Challenges and Policy Response: 1980–2010

Beginning in the 1980s, downturns in the global economy created new challenges for Niagara's tourism industry. Rising fuel and transportation costs discouraged international travel and increased costs for local businesses (Gordon 1980). These challenges were exacerbated by, and contributed to, the deterioration of attractions within Niagara (Gordon 1980). The Welland Canals Society was also out of business by 1991, and portions of the old canal were being buried for new development (ShIPLEY 1999).

Nevertheless, the challenges facing other sectors, such as manufacturing, were even more dire. Policymakers therefore turned to tourism as a potential counterbalance to the declines seen in other local industries (Niagara Region 1985). Niagara Region and the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs both recommended further leveraging of the Welland Canal's tourism potential, as well as the continued promotion of local wineries (Niagara Region 1985). In a report titled "Where Next? A Look to the Future," Niagara's Planning and Development Department (1989) identified tourism as a key growth area outside of

manufacturing. The same economic trends that challenged local tourism in the short-term thus signaled a more long-term transition towards a post-industrial economy in Niagara, and the importance of tourism to economic growth moving forward (Niagara Region Development Corporation 1985).

Still, policies intended to kickstart economic growth towards the end of the 20th Century were creating new questions for local tourism. Free trade agreements with the United States led local wineries to worry about competition with wine industry giants in California (Gayler 2003). To assuage these concerns, Ontario launched a Grape Acreage Reduction Program in the late 1980s to improve the competitiveness of local wineries (Gayler 2003). The program provided over \$50 million in subsidies to farmers willing to replace up to 40 per cent of their "much despised" local grape varieties with more premium grapes (Gayler 2003). The province also helped Niagara grape growers by reducing the proportion of foreign concentrate allowed in Ontario blended wines, while changing regulations to allow wineries to sell directly to bars and restaurants rather than through the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (Gayler 2003).

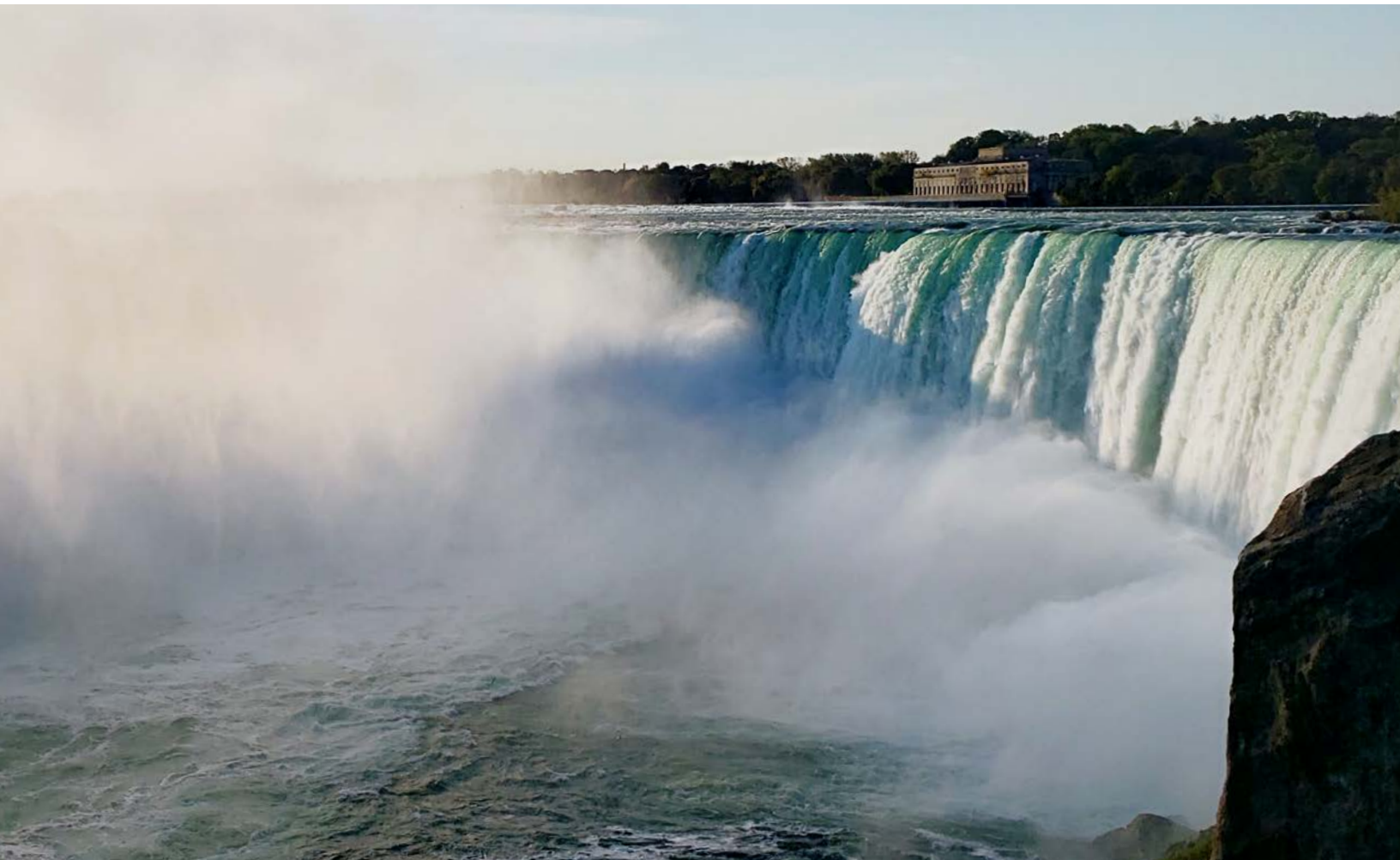
These efforts reflected the growing importance of local wineries to tourism within Niagara, as well as the nuanced relationships between tourism, agriculture, and manufacturing within the region.

Niagara tourism entered the 21st century on a high note, with millions of tourists visiting the region each year. Expanding the sector continued to be a priority for regional economic development (Niagara Economic and Tourism Corporation 1998). By 2002, policymakers expected the region to see up to 19.7 million visitors with \$2.29 billion in tourist spending and more than 25 per cent of the local workforce employed in the tourism sector (Niagara Economic and Tourism Corporation 1999). The Region also anticipated \$6 billion worth of new economic development projects between 2000 and 2005, including infrastructure like roads and hotels intended to service local tourism (Niagara Economic and Tourism Corporation 1999).

In addition to the continued growth of agritourism and ecotourism, this period saw the further development of gaming and hospitality in Niagara. By the early 2000s, Casino Niagara (opened in 1986) was seeing millions of day-visitors a year, and the gaming industry was seen as

increasingly critical to the growth of Niagara tourism (Gayler 2003; MacLaurin and Wolstenholme 2008). Events-based tourism was also bolstered by several infrastructure improvements and innovations (Jayawardena 2008). In 2004, for instance, a \$30 million crowd-funding campaign resulted in the construction of a new production centre for the increasingly popular Shaw Festival, housing rehearsal space, a “Green Room”, and more. Gayler (2003) notes the popularization of ice wines during this time, as well, and their role in strengthening Niagara’s position as a premier wine destination.

The number of organizations involved in Niagara tourism also grew during this time. In 2005, for instance, the Region proposed the creation of “a co-operative marketing consortia to ensure year-round tourism” and to “diversify tourism leisure” within Niagara (Niagara Region 2005). In 2007, Niagara College hosted the Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (WHATT) Roundtable, with global experts providing recommendations for the continued growth of the tourism sector (Jayawardena 2008). In 2010, the province created the Tourism Partnership of Niagara, a non-profit industry-led organization and one of 13 Regional Tourism Organizations in Ontario.





The historic Niagara Parks Power Station is the latest tourist draw, showcasing the history of hydro-generation by the Horseshoe Falls.

A year later, in 2011, the passing of the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Act established the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation, a provincial organization focused on promoting tourism within the province.

By 2013, Niagara's tourism sector was generating \$1.5 billion in annual receipts, approximately 10 per cent of Ontario's total annual tourism receipts (Niagara Region 2013). The region was welcoming an average of 10.3 million visitors per year, 42 per cent of whom were international (Niagara Region 2013). Tourism-related businesses employed over 22,000 employees, including a range of seasonal and entry-level positions (Niagara Region 2013). At the same time, local stakeholders continued to explore opportunities for expansion, including the growing popularity of sports tourism within Canada (Niagara Region 2014).

However, local stakeholders were beginning to voice concerns regarding the seasonality of Niagara's hospitality industry (Jayawardena 2008; Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada 2023 2023). This seasonality—with tourism slowing down

significantly during the winter months—was creating secondary challenges around talent development and retention. Many students were leaving Niagara during the most tourist-friendly months (i.e., the summer), and recent graduates—including graduates in service and hospitality programs—were leaving to pursue year-round employment opportunities elsewhere (Jayawardena 2008). This period therefore saw a more concerted effort to extend the tourist season in Niagara, including further investment in the ice wine industry.

Internal Discord and Emerging Challenges: 2010–Present

Today, Niagara Falls welcomes an average of 14 million tourists each year, including three million tourists from the United States (Niagara Falls 2020). Tourism spending in Niagara is over \$2 billion annually, and every \$100 million in direct revenue in tourism produces an indirect economic output of \$69 million (Niagara Falls 2020). Tourism employs 40,000 people in Niagara, and across the region the "Accommodation and food services" industry continues to be one of the fastest growing areas of employment (Niagara Falls 2020; St. Catharines 2017).

Recent infrastructure investments have further strengthened local tourism. In 2018, weekday GO Train service from Toronto was extended to Niagara, with weekend service added shortly after. Though weekend service was halted during the COVID-19 pandemic, service returned in August 2022 and was increased by an additional 12 roundtrips per week in May 2023 (Office of the Premier 2023). Such investments have made traveling to Niagara more accessible for tourists coming from the Greater Toronto Area.

Local tourism has also been bolstered by the opening of the Niagara Falls Entertainment Centre, the construction of the Welland International Flatwater Centre, and the opening of a new sports complex for the 2022 Canada Summer Games (Welland 2022; Niagara Economic Development 2022). In Port Colborne, there has also been interest in the construction of a new Waterfront Centre, which policymakers hope will help support a nascent cruise ship industry in Niagara (Culic 2023). In St. Catharines, the opening of the Meridian Centre in 2014, the Marilyn I. Walker Performing Arts building in 2015, and the First Ontario Performing Arts Centre in 2015 have all helped draw more tourists to Niagara

(St. Catharines Economic Development and Tourism Services 2019). Nevertheless, a lack of accommodation capacity in parts of Niagara, and limited connectivity between regional tourist hubs, are ongoing concerns.

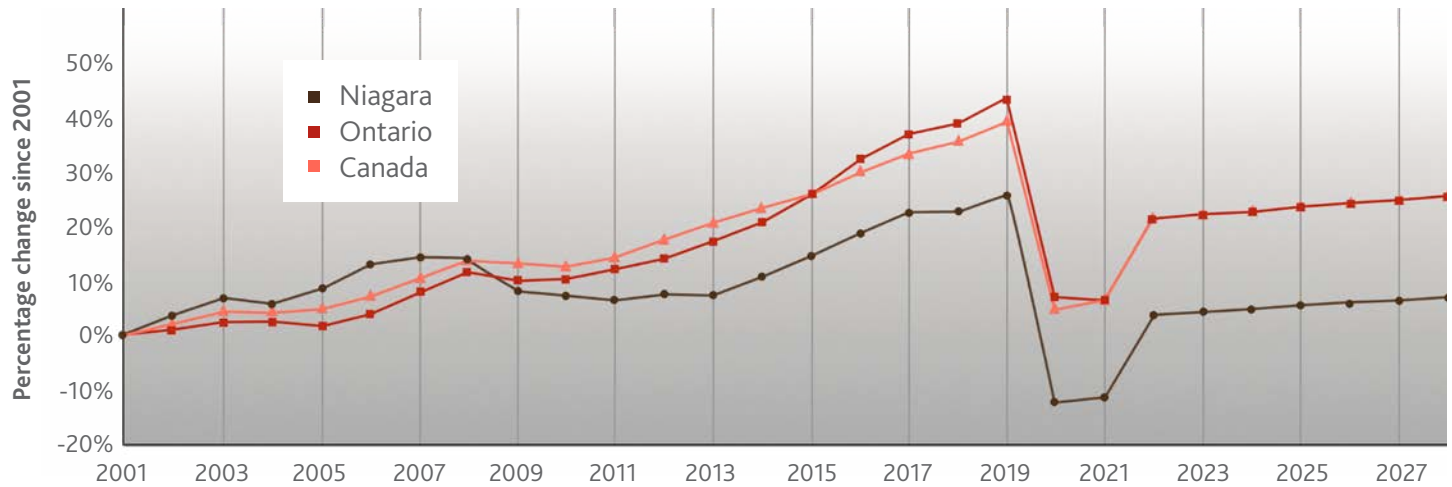
Table 1 provides insight into some of these changes, outlining percentage changes in tourism jobs by industry between 2001 and 2022. Traditionally strong industries like “Amusement parks and arcades” have seen significant increases, far outpacing provincial (60 per cent) and national (33 per cent) rates. Other industries with high rates of change include “Promoters (presenters) of performing arts, sports, and similar events” (152 per cent), “Scenic and sightseeing transportation, water” (101 per cent), “Other amusement and recreation industries” (94 per cent) and “Heritage institutions” (94 per cent). This aligns with the aggressive investments made in sports tourism, ecotourism, and heritage-based tourism during this time.

Nevertheless, Niagara’s tourism sector is facing new challenges. Most notable is the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a devastating impact on tourism across the country.

Table 1: Tourism jobs by industry, percentage change 2001–2022; Niagara, Ontario, and Canada compared

Industry	Description	St. Catharines —Niagara	Ontario	Canada
7131	Amusement parks and arcades	1303%	60%	33%
7113	Promoters (presenters) of performing arts, sports and similar events	152%	18%	37%
4872	Scenic and sightseeing transportation, water	101%	15%	(40%)
7139	Other amusement and recreation industries	94%	75%	53%
7121	Heritage institutions	94%	58%	73%
7225	Full-service restaurants and limited-service eating places	30%	39%	39%
7223	Special food services	29%	7%	8%
7212	Recreational vehicle (RV) parks and recreational camps	(2%)	37%	23%
7111	Performing arts companies	(9%)	15%	(8%)
7211	Traveller accommodation	(12%)	(18%)	(17%)
7115	Independent artists, writers and performers	(12%)	9%	41%
4853	Taxi and limousine service	(13%)	40%	34%
5615	Travel arrangement and reservation services	(30%)	(20%)	(24%)
4812	Non-scheduled air transportation	(32%)	(10%)	(1%)
4871	Scenic and sightseeing transportation, land	(39%)	53%	24%
7132	Gambling industries	(61%)	(58%)	(12%)
7224	Drinking places (alcoholic beverages)	(77%)	(53%)	(46%)
4855	Charter bus industry	(79%)	(16%)	(22%)
7112	Spectator sports	(94%)	(46%)	(33%)

Figure 1: Industry job growth in tourism; Niagara, Ontario, and Canada compared



Though federal funding, such as the \$500-million Tourism Relief Fund, has helped to buoy the sector, the challenges brought on by the pandemic are ongoing. Jones (2022) predicts that Ontario’s tourism sector will not fully recover from the impacts of COVID-19 until 2025. Tourism businesses in Ontario are generating just 64 per cent of the revenue they did in 2019, and 70 per cent of businesses say they have taken on debt to stay afloat (Jones 2022). Interestingly, the number of tourism businesses in Canada has recovered more quickly, reaching 93 per cent of 2019 levels (Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada 2023).

The pandemic has also exacerbated longstanding challenges around talent development and retention in the tourism sector. With many students working remotely through the pandemic, for instance, the amount of seasonal and student labour available to local businesses decreased significantly. The availability of migrant workers was also adversely impacted by policy changes made in response to COVID-19. As a result, there has been an increase of 81 per cent in tourism and hospitality job postings in Ontario compared to 2019 (Jones 2022).

These trends are identified clearly in Figure 1. As shown, Niagara closely mirrors provincial and national trends, experiencing a steady increase in tourism jobs over the past two decades before a significant drop between 2019 and 2020. Despite a clear rebound in 2021, the sector has not reached the same levels of growth seen prior to the pandemic.

Not all the challenges facing Niagara’s tourism sector are exogenous. As the diversity of Niagara tourism increases, there is a perceived tension among local stakeholders

between the types of tourism experiences being offered in different municipalities. For example, as Niagara-on-the-Lake invests in the “high-yield, low-impact” tourism associated with premier destinations around the world, there is some concern that this conflicts with Niagara Falls’ (2019) attempts to “enhance the city’s position as Ontario’s premier resort gaming and tourism destination.”

Conversely, Niagara Falls’ tourism industry is perceived as resistant to the environmental policies that support ecotourism in more rural parts of the region. Groups like Residents for Sustainable Tourism are also outspoken against the impacts of “overtourism” on quality of life, particularly in rural Niagara communities that are popular among retirees (Residents for Sustainable Tourism n.d.). Though there are ongoing efforts to resolve such tensions, including a new tourism partnership between Lincoln and St. Catharines, time will tell whether this more collaborative approach is effective (Walter 2023). In any case, there is an ongoing need for regional leadership to help navigate the diversity of local tourism.

The rise of agritourism is also creating unique regulatory challenges for businesses in Niagara. Many of the same policies meant to protect the viability of Niagara agriculture present obstacles to tourism growth. The use of designated agricultural land is tightly regulated, for example, meaning that only small percentages of agricultural land can be allocated to non-agricultural use. As farmers look to expand into retail and accommodation offerings, the question of how much commercial use can be added to a property before it infringes on its agricultural status can be difficult to navigate. At the same time, farmers themselves are learning to engage in farm-gate sales, crop processing, and other value-added activities (Gayler 2003).

Niagara wineries are also facing challenges related to provincial policy. Ontario wines sold at on-site winery stores are required to pay an additional “sin tax,” while other restrictions make it difficult for wineries to sell directly to local businesses (Slobodian 2023). As a result, there is little incentive for local restaurants and tourist hubs to prioritize Niagara wines on their menu (Slobodian 2023). A recent motion passed by Niagara Region’s council aims to put pressure on the province to remove the tax.

The role of the province in Niagara Falls’ gaming industry has also been the subject of conversation. As it stands, the Ontario government owns casinos in the province and assigns companies in the private sector to operate them (Spiteri 2023). These businesses in turn have little incentive to invest in improving the casinos themselves. Jim Diodati, the Mayor of Niagara Falls, has argued that this undermines the capacity of the gaming industry to drive tourism in Niagara, particularly given ongoing investments (and more relaxed regulations around smoking and drinking) in the gaming industry in the United States (Spiteri 2023). In response, Niagara Casinos, which operates Fallsview Casino Resort and Casino Niagara, has pointed to the \$32-million investment made in both sites since 2019, as well as money paid to the city and to sponsor community events (Spiteri 2023).

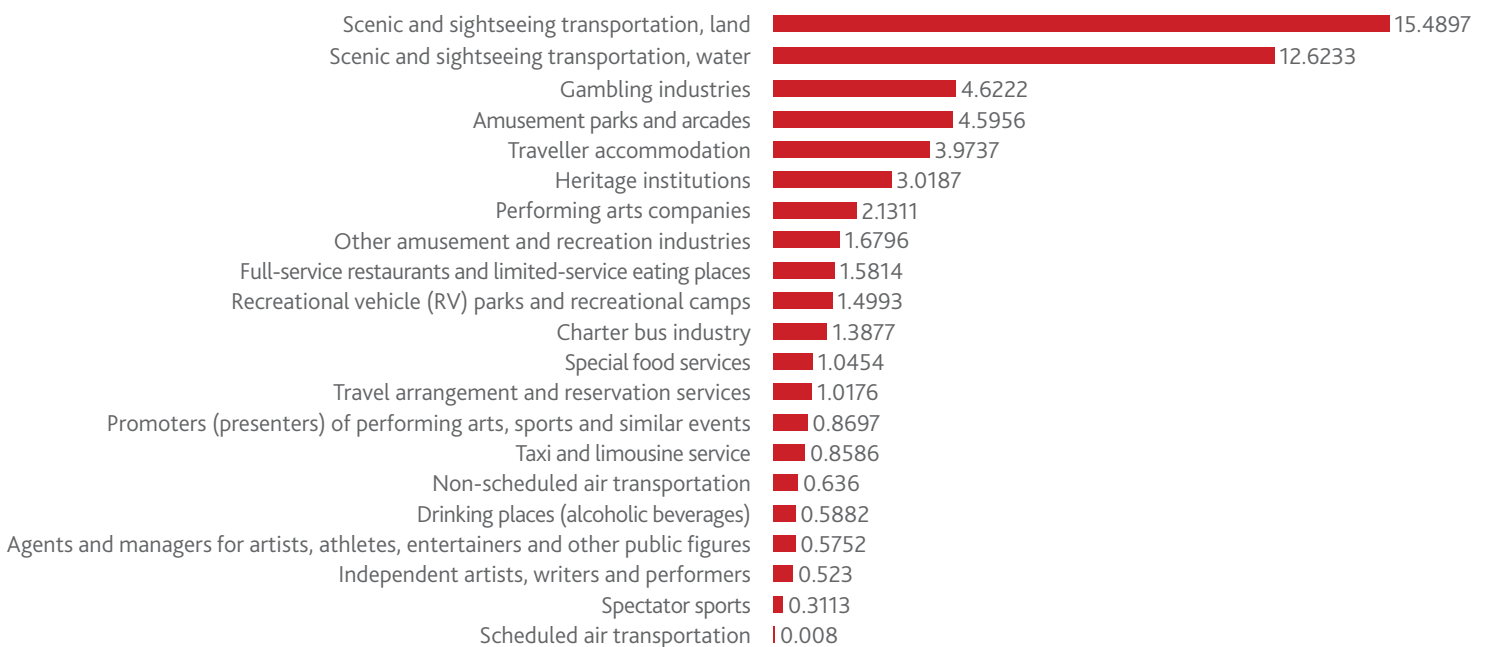
While these regulatory challenges have not stopped Niagara’s tourism sector from growing, this growth is itself putting strain on local infrastructure. Increased traffic

congestion along the QEW, for example, is making it difficult for Niagara businesses to attract tourists from the Greater Toronto Area or the United States (Nicolau 2023). Though improved GO Train service promises some relief, these improvements will take time and will most likely require construction-related delays in the interim.

These concerns are likely to grow as municipalities invest in new attractions, festivals, and programming. Already, Niagara Falls (2019) has noted the need “to establish a traffic and pedestrian management plan in [the City’s] tourist core to mitigate traffic congestion on event nights,” while also improving connectivity between casinos, tourist areas, and the train station. In Niagara-on-the-Lake, officials are working to improve parking infrastructure in the Town’s heritage district, and to encourage alternative transportation such as biking within the community.

Finally, Niagara’s tourism sector is facing tertiary challenges around affordability. Urbanization pressures and inflation are driving up the cost of living in Niagara, making it difficult for an industry that is already heavily reliant on seasonal work (Jayawardena 2008). Paradoxically, areas most dependent on seasonal work for tourism have also been most resistant to the development of additional housing, which is especially problematic given that transit connections between municipalities remain weak. These challenges threaten to exacerbate the labour shortages that have already arisen due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2: Niagara’s national location quotient for tourism jobs by industry—2022 (sorted by highest to lowest)



The Future of Tourism in Niagara

Despite challenges, there are reasons to be optimistic about the future of the tourism sector in Niagara. The region continues to exhibit strengths in sightseeing, gambling, accommodations, performing arts, dining, and more. Figure 2, for instance, outlines the location quotients (LQs) of jobs in Niagara's tourism sector. LQ scores indicate an area's level of specialization in industries, with a score above 1.5 indicating a significant degree of specialization compared to other regions across Canada. Interestingly, Niagara appears to have a noticeably lower degree of specialization compared to other regions when it comes to drinking places for alcoholic beverages.

Niagara is continuing to invest in heritage-based tourism in the region. St. Catharines, for example, has initiated a 2029 Historic Welland Canals Task Force, which aims to further capitalize on the tourist potential of the old canal system. Sports tourism and agricultural tourism have also been identified as growth sectors in Niagara's regional economy (Niagara Economic Development 2022; Niagara Region 2019). Meanwhile, a new federal tourism strategy has affirmed the importance of tourism to economic growth and the continued importance of expanding the tourism season in Canada (Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada 2023).

The success of these efforts will depend, in part, on continued innovation in the tourism sector. From keeping up with the preferred payment methods of tourists to improving travel around the region, those interviewed for this project emphasized the importance of innovation in improving Niagara tourism. Businesses are also innovating on the back end, from new inventory systems and data analytics to automated call centres that leverage advances in artificial intelligence (AI). Investments in basic infrastructure, such as better cell coverage along parts of the Niagara Parkway, are also critical to appealing to the modern tourist experience. These investments are especially important given the shift towards user-generated content and 'crowdsourced tourism.' Businesses need familiarity with the evolving social media ecosystem, which allows tourists to share their experience with friends and followers.

At the same time, local stakeholders are working to address the more basic infrastructure challenges that face Niagara tourism. Policymakers continue to advocate for improved GO Train service from Toronto, for example, and the recent uploading of public transit to the Region promises important improvements to intraregional

transportation. There is also interest in the expansion of the Niagara District Airport, which could improve access to international tourism (Niagara District Airport Commission 1966; Niagara Falls 2019). As early as 2014, the City of Niagara Falls has also speculated about the benefits of a high-speed rail (HSR) connection between Toronto and New York City, which could provide an efficient—and more environmentally friendly—means of traveling to Niagara (Niagara Falls 2014; Niagara Falls 2019).

Policymakers in Niagara are also working to address the rising cost of living. In 2022, Niagara Falls City Council endorsed a new housing strategy that prescribes policies to improve the availability of affordable housing, promote a diversity of housing types, and increase the supply of rental units within the city (Niagara Falls 2022). Niagara Region also outlines an Affordable Housing Strategy on its website (Niagara Region n.d.). These initiatives promise indirect support to businesses struggling to retain seasonal and part-time workers by making living in Niagara more affordable. Emphasizing the connection between affordability and economic growth will in turn be critical to fostering support for these programs moving forward.

Conclusion

Niagara's tourism sector has grown beyond the familiar allure of Niagara Falls. Today, tourism in the region includes gaming and casinos, agritourism, and a network of parks and trails spanning across the peninsula. Heritage-based tourism is also on the rise, reflecting the rich political and cultural history of Niagara.

At the same time, Niagara's tourism sector is facing new challenges. Beyond the external shock of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are infrastructure challenges related to transportation and traffic congestion. A lack of affordable housing is also producing secondary problems pertaining to talent development and retention. There are tensions between Niagara tourism and provincial policy, as well, particularly when it comes to the growth of agritourism within the region.

More concerning are disagreements over the character of Niagara tourism moving forward. There is a perceived tension between the boisterous tourism of Niagara Falls and the rural tourism experience offered in places like Lincoln and Niagara-on-the-Lake. This tension impacts the marketing and regulation of the tourism industry, as policies favourable to a certain subsector may be viewed as harmful to another.

Navigating these tensions will be critical to the sustainability of Niagara tourism. On the one hand, developing a cohesive identity can help promote Niagara tourism on the global stage. On the other hand, it can provide a united front when it comes to pursuing Niagara-friendly policies at the provincial and federal level. There is room for further regional leadership, in this regard, and a more coordinated approach to the growth of Niagara tourism moving forward. Either way, tourism is likely to remain an integral part of the local economy moving forward. As one interviewee put it, “tourism is who we are.”

Works Cited

- Culic, J. (2023). “Port Colborne Scraps Waterfront Welcome Centre from its Cruise Ship Plans.” *Niagara this Week*.
- Eagles, P. (1998). “International trends in park tourism and economics: Implications for Ontario.”
- Gayler, G. (2003). Agritourism developments in the rural-urban fringe.
- Gordon, W. (1980). “Regional Niagara: Economic Development Study.”
- Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada. (2023). “Canada 365: Welcoming the World. Every Day.”
- Jayawardena, C. (2008). “Tourism in Niagara: Conclusions and Solutions.” *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 20(3), 360–368.
- Johnson Tew, P., Lu, Z., Tolomiczenko, G., and Gellatly, J. (2008). “SARS: Lessons in strategic planning for hoteliers and destination marketers.” *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 20(3), 333–347.
- Jones, A. (2022). “Ontario’s Tourism Sector Won’t Fully Recover From the Pandemic until 2025, Report Says.” *CBC News*.
- Likens, T. (2018). “Worst Niagara Falls promotion ever: Sending helpless animals in cages over the waterfall in a “pirate” boat.” *Vintage News*.
- Linnaberry, A. M. (2019). “NIAGARA DISCOVERIES: Tocqueville and Trollope visit the Falls in 1831.” *Niagara Gazette*.
- Little, D. (1995). “Vineyard Tourism in the Niagara Region.”
- MacFarlane, D. (2020). *Fixing Niagara Falls: Environment, energy, and engineers at the world’s most famous waterfall*. UBC Press.
- MacLaurin, T., & MacLaurin, D. (2003). “Casino gaming and tourism in Canada.” *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 15(6), 328–332.
- MacLaurin, D., and Wolstenholme, S. (2008). “An analysis of the gaming industry in the Niagara region.” *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 20(3), 320–331.
- Niagara District Airport Commission. (1966). “Recommendations for Management Policies and Financial Planning for the Niagara District Airport Commission.”
- Niagara Economic and Tourism Corporation. (1999). “Niagara Tourism Investment Opportunities.”
- Niagara Economic Development. (2022). “Niagara’s 10-Year Economic Development Strategy: 2022–2032.”
- Niagara Escarpment Commission. (n.d.). “Our Story.” Accessed at: <https://escarpment.org/about/>
- Niagara Falls. (2022). “Housing Directions Study Phase 2: Housing Strategy.”
- Niagara Falls. (2020). “Community Investment Profile.”
- Niagara Falls. (2019). “Strategic Priorities: 2019–2022.”
- Niagara Falls. (2014). “Niagara Falls: Environmental Scan.”
- Niagara Falls. (2014b). “Economic Development Strategic Plan.”
- Niagara Falls Tourism. (n.d.). “Indigenous Niagara Falls.” Accessed at: <https://www.niagarafallstourism.com/media-kit/story-ideas/indigenous-niagara-falls>
- Niagara on the Lake. (1994). “Local Economic Development of Borderland Communities: A case study of the Town of Niagara on the Lake.”
- Niagara Region. (n.d.). “Affordable Housing Strategy.” Accessed at: <https://www.niagararegion.ca/housing-homelessness/affordable-housing-strategy.aspx>
- Niagara Region. (2019). “Strategic Plan: 2019–2022.”
- Niagara Region. (2014). “Team Niagara: Economic development action plan 2015–2018.”
- Niagara Region. (2013). “Economic Growth Strategy: 2013–2015.”
- Niagara Region. (2005). “Navigating our Future: Niagara’s economic growth strategy 2005–2010).

Niagara Region. (1985). "Initiatives for Employment Development in Niagara Region and its Municipalities."

Niagara Region. (1970). "Regional Niagara: An economic and financial survey of the Regional Municipality of Niagara."

Niagara Region Development Corporation. (1985). "Economic Development Strategy."

Niagara Region Development Corporation. (1982). "Corporate Fonds: 1982–1990."

Niagara Region Planning & Development Department. (1989). "Where next? A look to the future."

Northwood, G. M. (2000). "Role of wine tourism in economic development: A case study of Niagara Region (Ontario)." *Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Wilfred Laurier University*.

Office of the Premier. (2023). "Ontario Bringing Back Year-Round Weekend GO Rail Service to Niagara." Accessed at: <https://bit.ly/45JiKJ0>

Ontario Grape Growers Marketing Board. (n.d.). "Ontario Grape Growers Marketing Board Records, 1946–1993, n.d. (non-inclusive)." *Ontario Editorial Bureau Fonds*.

Port Colborne. (n.d.). "About Canal Days." Accessed at: <https://www.portcolborne.ca/en/recreation-and-leisure/about-canal-days.aspx>

Residents for Sustainable Tourism. (n.d.). "About Residents for Sustainable Tourism." Accessed at: <https://www.residentsforsustainabletourism.com>

Shiple, R. (1999). "Making a Silk Purse from a Sow's Ear: Lessons from the failure to develop the Welland Canal as a tourism resource." *Environments*, 27(2), 25.

Slobodian, S. (2023). "Unfair 6.1% tax on VQA wines needs to be eliminated, industry says." *Niagara Now*.

Spiteri, R. (2023). "Ontario gaming industry 'cannibalizing' itself, says Niagara mayor." *Niagara Falls Review*.

St. Catharines Economic Development and Tourism Services. (2019). "InvestSTC: Downtown St. Catharines."

St. Catharines. (1974). "Economic Development in St. Catharines."

Walter, K. (2023). "Tourism partnership between St. Catharines and Lincoln to become reality." *St. Catharines Standard*.

Welland. (2022). "Community Profile."

