

# SUNSHINE COAST

## VISITOR SERVICES STRATEGY

FINAL - JULY 29, 2019  
V1.0

Prepared by Vardo Creative  
Susan Rybar  
Paris Spence-Lang



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Executive Summary .....	3
2.	Introduction .....	4
3.	Planning Considerations .....	5
4.	Visitor Services Vision .....	7
5.	Goals .....	7
6.	Visitor Services Team .....	8
7.	Strategies.....	9
8.	Priority Initiatives .....	10
	Theme One: Working as one amazing visitor services team.....	10
	Theme Two: Improving engagement through visitor services touchpoints ....	14
	Theme Three: Elevating visitor experiences.....	17
9.	Budget.....	19
10.	Priorities for Implementation .....	20

Prepared by Vardo Creative  
Susan Rybar  
Paris Spence-Lang



## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tourism is an important and growing industry on the Sunshine Coast. As part of the 10-year Sunshine Coast Destination Development Strategy execution, a priority project was identified to create a visitor services strategy for the entire Sunshine Coast. This strategy is the result of efforts from the core visitor services teams on the Sunshine Coast coming together in cooperation to work on priorities together.

### The vision for visitor services on the Sunshine Coast:

The Sunshine Coast's visitor services teams work together to shape an exceptional visitor experience that makes visitors want to come back and recommend the Sunshine Coast as a great place to visit.

### Six goals were identified for visitor services on the Sunshine Coast:

1. Achieve a unified Sunshine Coast visitor services team.
2. Drive longer stays throughout the entire Sunshine Coast.
3. Increase the number of visitors that come back for a repeat visit.
4. Lead BC as the friendliest place to visit.
5. Increase the number of people who would recommend the Sunshine Coast as a place to visit.
6. Support the development of a year round visitor economy.

### There are 11 strategies within the themes to support the identified goals:

#### Working as one amazing visitor services team

1. Find the best approach to coordinated visitor centre operations to improve services and reduce duplication of effort
2. Ensure the ongoing collection, analysis and sharing of visitor services intelligence and performance metrics
3. Create consistent key messaging
4. Develop better partnerships between visitor services and the tourism industry at large

#### Improving engagement through visitor services touchpoints

5. Help visitors better understand the Sunshine Coast
6. Develop a seamless visitor services experience
7. Create more impactful visitor centres
8. Implement Live Chat pilot project for the entire Sunshine Coast

#### Elevating Visitor Experiences

9. Implement the visitor services actions of the Destination Development Strategy
10. Help tourism experiences get market ready
11. Use visitor services to improve the experience visitors have with transportation to and within the Sunshine Coast

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an important and growing industry on the Sunshine Coast, and many communities have become more reliant on the visitors that help diversify the economy in their communities. The 10-year Sunshine Coast Destination Development Strategy was developed in 2016-2017 to guide tourism development with the goal to increase the social, cultural, and economic benefits from a year-round visitor economy. It is in year two of being executed.

As part of the Sunshine Coast Destination Development Strategy execution, a priority project was identified to create a visitor services strategy for the entire Sunshine Coast. At the time, there was little communication and collaboration amongst the four core visitor services providers as well as others, such as heritage centres.

While much progress has been made over the last two years, this Sunshine Coast Visitor Services Strategy has the intention to further update visitor services capabilities in light of increased technology opportunities and evolving visitor needs. This strategy is the result of efforts from the core visitor services teams on the Sunshine Coast coming together in cooperation to work on priorities together.

First, we took a deeper look into tourism in the Sunshine Coast through a context review. As part of that review, workshops were held on May 6, 2019 in Powell River and May 7, 2019 in Sechelt to engage all tourism stakeholders into this plan creation. Then, we used the findings from that work, which are included as Planning Considerations, to develop a plan that includes the most important opportunities we want to take action on now, and those important projects we need to work on for the longer term. This plan can evolve as action is taken, with new projects rising to the top as others are complete.

This plan puts the visitor at the middle of all we do, and identifies collaborative visitor services initiatives with the aim to get everyone passionate about working together towards the same goals. It was developed in alignment with the Sunshine Coast Destination Development Strategy and other local, regional and provincial plans that impact the Sunshine Coast.

### **Sunshine Coast Tourism and Powell River Tourism**

During the course of the planning efforts, there have been organizational challenges between Sunshine Coast Tourism and Tourism Powell River. While efforts are being made to resolve their differences, and potentially merge together as one organization, this process is not complete and discussions are still underway. The approach in facilitating and developing this strategy has been to take an objective view of visitor services through the lens of the visitor, and not be deterred by any organizational challenges.

The visitor services team that came together to work on this plan agree that from a visitor services perspective, the visitor will best benefit from all within the Sunshine Coast acting as one destination made up of many unique coastal communities. Regardless of what organization they are working on behalf of, they have the ability to work together well, and put the visitor as the focus of the work.

### 3. PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The following planning considerations are the results of a context review. These have been identified as the most important considerations that guided the plan creation.

1. Visitor services are drastically changing. Visitors now expect a seamless omni-channel experience, but are also increasingly expecting to be able to solve their problems on their own through **self-service**. **Visitors increasingly expect continuity and best-practice service between customer service channels** throughout their travel experience, from all businesses and destinations. The increasingly demanding desires and expectations of the consumer must be kept in mind at every step of their experience from Googling the Sunshine Coast to walking into the visitor centre. The focus from visitor services and marketing needs to be on **engaging with visitors how they want, when they want and where they want**.
2. Changes in the Internet and digital/online/mobile have created a fundamental shift in how people communicate, gather information, make purchasing decisions and plan/book travel. The shift to digital for travel planning continues to increase in importance for travellers, as does connectivity. To not become stagnant and irrelevant, it is essential that any visitor services strategy includes a **strong focus on digital connections and online information while maintaining brochures for in-market purchases**.
3. While visitor centre visitation is declining provincially, it has increased in the Sunshine Coast by 2% since 2013. **Brick and mortar visitor centres are valued contributors**, in particular for more in-depth “concierge” type service. This should be maintained while new and innovating methods of reaching the consumer are pursued, including **reviewing more effective visitor centre locations or visitor services models**.
4. There is a strong history of **innovative visitor services** on the Sunshine Coast, in particular from Powell River. Provision of visitor services is in a state of change around the world. Teams should continue to be innovative in visitor services by trying new ways of connecting with visitors and new ways of working together with community partners to support the visitor economy that supports most communities.
5. The Sunshine Coast is a large and geographically diverse region, and different levels of service are offered at each centre. These make innovative visitor service solutions appealing. There are opportunities for all **organizations to work more collaboratively to provide a more seamless experience for the visitor**, e.g., if one visitor centre is closed another centre can provide service via Live Chat or phone. The region must unify and cross-promote.
6. Transportation can be a challenge for visitors, especially when communication is limited. When these challenges arise, **some visitors find themselves stranded without any visitor services**. This negative visitor experience can be somewhat mitigated through improved visitor service.
7. Travellers are choosing to travel outside of high season for more capacity and favourable pricing but still expect exceptional service levels and experiences all year. Seasonal closures for visitor services and tourism businesses can leave some visitors feeling stranded, and there are opportunities to **coordinate businesses to meet visitor service needs**, i.e. ensuring all restaurants are not closed on the same day.

8. A **Destination Development Strategy** is already completed for the Sunshine Coast. **Visitor services should align with the strategy and prepare for upcoming developments**, including new infrastructure, experiences, and information. TVICs should fully understand the goals and the nine motivating experiences and growth markets for the area so they can promote them on the front line (e.g. shoulder and off season, making recommendations for sustainable dining, etc.)
9. For a world-class visitor experience, the Sunshine Coast businesses should ensure **tourism experiences are market-ready**. For visitor services, this especially includes business elements such as trained and knowledgeable front-line staff, opening hours, response times, and booking systems.
10. What's good for Langdale is good for Lund. It is important for all visitor centres and TVICs to **unify and work together towards the common goal of elevating the Sunshine Coast and all communities within it as one destination** to better compete with other destinations in BC and globally. Common strategies and goals must be shared and embraced, and TVICs should be aware of the region as a whole.
11. The tourism industry on the Sunshine Coast has worked hard to get to where it is now, with all communities supported by Sunshine Coast Tourism, a funding model, a strong brand, and a destination that has become more popular. The visitor services strategy should **support the momentum of the overarching destination approach**, while still **showcasing the uniqueness of each community**.
12. The Sunshine Coast has a wide range of businesses, artisans, events, and experiences. This base of **local knowledge and potential ambassadors** should be tapped into, including on-site (e.g. brochure placement in artisan workshops).
13. BC residents account for 57% of BC's total overnight visitation and continues to be BC's largest market. Combined with Alberta, the two markets represent 70% of the volume. Leisure travel and Visiting Family and Friends are the top two trip purposes for travellers from BC, Alberta and Washington. **Better engaging locals** who provide information and advice to friends and relatives may be an opportunity.
14. A number of other organized, community-based visitor services programs exist in BC, including the BC Visitor Services Network. There are opportunities for the visitors services teams to **work with community and sector-based tourism partners** to provide fluid visitor services to create outstanding experiences.
15. Partnerships are the key to success. Destinations with progressive visitor centres/servicing strategies have **empowered partnerships with technology, content and booking (OTAs) businesses**. As some visitor services teams have limited resources (staff, funding and time), identifying ways to support a consistent level of service online, within all communities and places in between, will provide a competitive advantage.
16. Efforts should be made to ensure the **community is collectively contributing** to creating a positive experience for the visitor that compels the visitor to share their experiences with others and engenders loyalty for a return visit.

## 4. VISITOR SERVICES VISION

The vision for visitor services on the Sunshine Coast has been created for beyond the life of this plan. This vision should be reviewed periodically to ensure it remains relevant over the long-term:

The Sunshine Coast's visitor services teams work together to shape an exceptional visitor experience that makes visitors want to come back and recommend the Sunshine Coast as a great place to visit.

This Visitor Services Vision supports the Sunshine Coast Destination Development Strategy vision for tourism:

We are a unified Sunshine Coast, working together to increase the social, cultural, and economic benefits from our year-round visitor economy. We have vibrant coastal communities amid exceptional outdoor adventures. We attract respectful visitors who like to discover and understand more about our laid-back pace of life and the wild, natural places that nourish us.

## 5. GOALS

Six goals were identified for visitor services on the Sunshine Coast:

1. Achieve a unified Sunshine Coast visitor services team.
2. Drive longer stays throughout the entire Sunshine Coast.
3. Increase the number of visitors that come back for a repeat visit.
4. Lead BC as the friendliest place to visit.
5. Increase the number of people who would recommend the Sunshine Coast as a place to visit.
6. Support the development of a year round visitor economy.

## 6. VISITOR SERVICES TEAM

This plan will be worked on collaboratively by a core Sunshine Coast Visitor Services Team encompassing the core primary visitor centre teams:

- Gibsons Visitor Centre: managed by Sunshine Coast Tourism through operating contract from the Town of Gibsons
- Sechelt Visitor Centre: managed by Sunshine Coast Tourism through operating contract from the District of Sechelt
- Pender Harbour Visitor Booth: managed by the Pender Harbour Chamber of Commerce
- Powell River Visitor Centre: managed by Tourism Powell River
- Gibsons Gateway Visitor Information Park and Ferry Ambassadors: managed by the Gibsons Chamber of Commerce

Other visitor services providers on the Sunshine Coast will be engaged to also work collaboratively on the strategy implementation, including:

- Lund Resort at Klah Ah Men
- Townsite Heritage Society of Powell River: information provided at Dr. Henderson's House
- Egmont Heritage Centre
- Ruby Lake Resort
- Iris Griffith Nature Centre
- Harbour Authority of Pender Harbour
- Texada Arts, Cultural & Tourism Society
- Savary Island
- Publishers: Powell River Living Magazine, Discover Powell River, Coast Reporter, Harbour Spiel, Vital Signs, Rotary Club of Pender Harbour, Halfmoon Bay Citizen's Association, Sunshine Coast Trails Society

Other partners in visitor services include:

- **First Nations:** Tla'amin Nation, Klahoose Nation, shíshálh Nation and skwxwú7mesh Nation
- **Local Governments:** Town of Gibsons, District of Sechelt, City of Powell River, Sunshine Coast Regional District, qathet Regional District
- **Local Organizations:** Powell River Chamber of Commerce, Chamber of Commerce Texada Island, Sechelt Downtown Business Association, Sechelt Chamber of Commerce, Coast Cultural Alliance, Lund Community Club/Society; Arts, Culture, Heritage Organizations; Clubs/Volunteer Groups, Harbours/Marinas
- **Tourism Businesses:** Tourism Operators, Transportation Providers (BC Ferries, plane services, shuttles, etc.)
- **Locals:** Approximately 50,000 residents



## 7. STRATEGIES

The strategies were divided into three different themes:

<b>WORKING AS ONE AMAZING VISITOR SERVICES TEAM</b>	<b>IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT THROUGH VISITOR SERVICES TOUCHPOINTS</b>	<b>ELEVATING VISITOR EXPERIENCES</b>
Increasing collaboration between visitor centres and other visitor services providers to take visitor services to the next level, provide a seamless experience for visitors, and increase efficiencies.	Connecting with visitors at more of the right moments, increasing visitor understanding of the Sunshine Coast and communities within, and increasing the contribution of visitor services.	Improving the overall visitor experience of the Sunshine Coast through greater visitor services

There are 11 strategies within the themes to support the identified goals:

### Working as one amazing visitor services team

1. Find the best approach to coordinated visitor centre operations to improve services and reduce duplication of effort
2. Ensure the ongoing collection, analysis and sharing of visitor services intelligence and performance metrics
3. Create consistent key messaging
4. Develop better partnerships between visitor services and the tourism industry at large

### Improving engagement through visitor services touchpoints

5. Help visitors better understand the Sunshine Coast
6. Develop a seamless visitor services experience
7. Create more impactful visitor centres
8. Implement Live Chat pilot project for the entire Sunshine Coast

### Elevating Visitor Experiences

9. Implement the visitor services actions of the Sunshine Coast Destination Development Strategy
10. Help tourism experiences get market ready
11. Use visitor services to improve the experience visitors have with transportation to and within the Sunshine Coast

## 8. PRIORITY INITIATIVES

The following potential actions were identified from the destination development planning process, visitor services input sessions and interviews, and validated with a core visitor services team.

Acronyms used:

Core Sunshine Coast Visitor Services Team: SCVST

SCT = Sunshine Coast Tourism, TPR = Tourism Powell River, GVC = Gibsons Visitor Centre,

SVC = Sechelt Visitor Centre, PHVC = Pender Harbour Visitor Centre,

PRVC = Powell River Visitor Centre, GCC = Gibsons Chamber of Commerce

### THEME ONE: WORKING AS ONE AMAZING VISITOR SERVICES TEAM

#### 1. Find the best approach to coordinated visitor centre operations to improve services and reduce duplication of effort

The Sunshine Coast Destination Development Strategy prioritized “management of the four visitor centres through coordinated effort and one system”. The Sunshine Coast’s geographical diversity and the different services offered at each centre make collaboration and capacity management essential, meaning the Sunshine Coast visitor and tourism industry will be best served by all visitor services organizations working as one team.

It was determined by the visitor services teams that working together to improve efficiencies and reduce duplication of effort was their number one priority, and ensures they are collectively being fiscally responsible to the tourism stakeholders and partners on the Sunshine Coast.

Action	Budget	Timing	Team
1.1 Create an operations management approach for the four visitor centres to ensure all teams/partners are unified and working in the same direction. Ensure clear roles and priorities between marketing, visitor services and content creation.	Existing resources	Year 1	SCVST
1.2 Increase opportunities for visitor services teams to learn, meet and collaborate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.2.1 Create a visitor services conference each spring specifically for the Sunshine Coast.</li> <li>1.2.2 Increase face-to-face meetings and visitation of other centres, especially between the north and south coasts.</li> <li>1.2.3 Continue participation in the Visitor Services Network and adopt new best practices that are relevant to the Sunshine Coast’s communities. Include Pender Harbour in Network opportunities such as the conference.</li> <li>1.2.4 Continue to identify educational opportunities, enhancements in technology and alternative ways to share information that further the team’s ability to execute a successful visitor services strategy.</li> </ul>	\$10,000	Ongoing Conference – Spring 2010	SCVST, DBC, tourism businesses

Continued from previous			
Action	Budget	Timing	Team
1.3 Share visitor services resources (tools, equipment, staff) for events, as relevant, to reduce duplication of effort.	Existing resources	Ongoing	SCVST
1.4 Develop an approach to provide coordinated visitor services through social media in a warm, friendly way.	Existing resources	Ongoing	SCVST
1.5 Work with all organizations that provide visitor information and materials to streamline offerings, including brochures, visitor guides, websites and social media pages, and ensure relevant, up to date information is presented. (Work towards removal of confusing, dated and potentially damaging materials).  1.5.1 All visitor centre staff to collaborate together to make consolidated offerings even better, such as improving the Sunshine Coast Tourism website and a hiking guide.	\$10,000 (may not be needed)	Year 1-2 (in progress)	SCVST, Other visitor services, providers, publishers, Partners
1.6 Better communicate to all stakeholders and partners in the tourism industry on what efforts the visitor centres and marketing organizations are doing to reduce overlap. This includes messaging through existing communications such as newsletters, site visits, workshops, meetings and reports.	Existing resources	Ongoing	SCVST

## 2. Ensure the ongoing collection, analysis and sharing of visitor services intelligence and performance metrics.

A strong measurement program will better assist the visitor services team in meeting visitor needs and responding to changes in the marketplace. Quite simply, what gets measured gets done, and a coordinated management framework for monitoring activities is important for making future service delivery and resource allocation decisions.

Action	Budget	Timing	Team
2.1 Standardize data collection between visitor centres, SCT and TPR to ensure efficient and correct data collection.	Existing resources	Year 1	SCVST, DBC
2.2 Work with digital platforms to gather data and signals of intent to reach visitors at the right time, provide valuable information, and connect them to tourism businesses.	Existing resources	Ongoing	SCT
2.3 Increase measurement of the tourism industry at a local level through digital collaboration and coordination.	Existing resources	Year 2-3	SCT, TPR
2.4 Work with Destination BC to modernize data collection and then use that data to improve understanding of visitors and improve visitor services.	\$10,000	Year 2-3	SCVST, Detination BC

### 3. Create consistent key messaging.

Tourism on the Sunshine Coast must become a team, and that team needs consistent messaging. The key messages that visitors receive should be clear and consistent no matter which visitor service or marketing channel they engage with. Consistent messaging should represent the whole coast and showcase the unique elements of each community, and should resonate from south coast to north coast to help immerse visitors in a single spectacular experience. Consistency in messaging builds awareness, trust and loyalty with visitors.

Consistent messaging does not mean all visitor counsellors are robots, it's the opposite. It's about being real while using the right tone of voice that's human, professional and true to the Sunshine Coast. Consistent messaging also does not mean all communities will be the same; Pender Harbour is not the same as Gibsons and potential visitors should be able to see that reflected in communications (marketing and visitor services communications) while still being on brand for the destination.

Action	Budget	Timing	Team
3.1 Work together to create a common messaging approach for all visitor services that reflects what visitors need, the common messages and local specific messages.	Existing resources	Year 1	SCVST
3.2 Create a short information document for all visitor services and marketing staff that captures engaging stories to share with visitors, not just talking points. (Example: The story of seeing a bear walking down the street outside the Powell River visitor centre.)	Existing resources	Year 1	SCVST
3.3 Educate all relevant partners on Sunshine Coast key messages and communication styles, and the importance of staying on-message and on-brand.	\$1,000	Ongoing	SCVST
3.4 Ensure all tourism teams are on-message through all communications.	Existing resources	Ongoing	SCVST

#### 4. Develop better partnerships between visitor services and the tourism industry at large

Visitor services are a key channel to the visitor, and the visitor is the driver of the tourism industry. Without the visitor, tourism businesses and the tourism industry at large are moot. Destinations are realizing that it takes ever-increasing levels of visitor services to meet the visitor expectations and increase visitor stays, increase visitor spend and increase advocacy. A destination-wide approach is needed to make a remarkable impact on visitors.

Action	Budget	Timing	Team
<p>4.1 Instill a sense of being one region within the broader community, e.g., change the industry perspective on working together.</p> <p>4.1.1 Encourage everyone involved in tourism to think destination-wide, including familiarizing themselves with the entire destination and being able to speak to the region as a whole.</p>	Existing resources	Ongoing	SCVST
4.2 Increase efforts to engage and support Tla'amin Nation, Klahoose Nation, shíshálh Nation and skwxwú7mesh Nation presence in visitor service delivery.	Additional funds may be required	Year 2-3	SCVST, Tla'amin Nation, Klahoose Nation, shíshálh Nation, skwxwú7mesh Nation
4.3 Work with external partners, e.g., Vancouver Island and the Coastal Circle Route, Horseshoe Bay, mountain biking, and other destinations with shared experiences.	Existing resources	Year 2-3	SCVST, external partners
4.4 Identify ways to work more collaboratively with BC Parks and BC Ferries in visitor services delivery.	Existing resources	Year 2-3	SCVST, BC Parks, BC Ferries
4.5 Establish a destination role for visitor services in coordinated emergency planning and response and recovery efforts.	\$3,000	Year 2-3	SCVST

## THEME TWO: IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT THROUGH VISITOR SERVICES TOUCHPOINTS

### 5. Help visitors better understand the Sunshine Coast

For visitors to get the most out of their experience, they need to understand the destination they are visiting. This understanding must be improved through marketing and visitor services channels so visitors have the information needed to learn about and find the activities and services they want. The deeper the understanding, the deeper the potential experience.

Action	Budget	Timing	Team
5.1 Incorporate educational material on Sunshine Coast heritage, including Indigenous culture, settler history and industrial heritage, into visitor services counsellor training and visitor-facing communications.	\$5,000	Year 2-3	SCVST
5.2 Distinguish unique communities and address all nine motivating experiences (as identified within the Sunshine Coast Destination Development Strategy <sup>1</sup> ) in communication materials. Review existing content to address these and continue to work with each community to make sure their unique elements are represented.	\$5,000	Year 2-3	SCVST
5.3 Create a mapping of all relevant visitor touchpoints (where the visitor connects with the Sunshine Coast for information and advice) and ensure all are equipped to provide visitors with the appropriate information, including exploring use of digital kiosks at appropriate locations.	\$3,000 (not including kiosk implementation)	Year 1 – complete mapping and explore funding for pilot project of digital kiosks	SCVST, Destination BC, Other visitor services providers, Partners, digital platforms
5.4 Develop a Visitor Code of Conduct, a guide on how visitors can best respect the people and places they visit. This should include educating visitors on local wildlife interaction policies/guidelines for reducing human disturbances to wildlife, e.g., wildlife viewing.	\$5,000	Year 2	SCVST

<sup>1</sup> The nine motivating experiences identified within the Sunshine Coast Destination Development: Indigenous Tourism; Arts, Culture, Festivals & Events; Trails – Hiking, Mountain Biking, Marine; Touring – Vehicle, Cycling, Motorcycles; Boating/Marinas; Natural Asset Utilization (e.g., wildlife viewing and other outdoor experiences); Sustainable Culinary Experiences; Health & Wellness; Sport Tourism

## 6. Develop a seamless visitor services experience

Visitors expect the information and assistance they need, when and where they need it. They want a seamless, omni-channel experience when discovering the activities and services available in the Sunshine Coast, and they need to be reached at the right place, at the right time, with the right information. This means using the right channels at more strategically placed touchpoints. Each place or time where a visitor makes contact with the Sunshine Coast is a touchpoint and an opportunity to influence their overall experience. It's important to understand that the consumer touchpoints are not just 'in-destination', and that marketing initiatives and messaging that gets sent out to the world also plays an integral part in providing visitors with the information they need to plan a trip to the Sunshine Coast.

Action	Budget	Timing	Team
6.1 Develop processes to provide each visitor a seamless, "soft hand-off" to other services, connecting the visitor to other visitor services providers and businesses. For example, a social media interaction that brings in the other visitor centres to provide more details on local information is a "soft hand-off".	Existing resources	Year1	SCVST
6.2 Identify emerging visitor services channels to provide more visitor paths, such as new social media platforms.	Existing resources	Ongoing	SCVST, TPR
6.3 Improve visitors' ability for self-service through services such as free WiFi and relevant online content.	Existing resources	Year 2-3	SCVST
6.4 Explore the introduction of an online booking engine that can be used through all visitor services channels.	Existing resources (not including implementation)	Year 1-2	SCVST, TPR
6.5 Ensure all online and offline entry points to the Sunshine Coast welcome visitors to the area and provide a strong sense of place, including highway signage, ferries, shuttles, websites, etc.	Additional funding may be required	Year 2-3	SCVST
6.6 Foster partnerships with stakeholders who can act as touchpoints, e.g., community centres, malls, airport and ferry terminals, tourism businesses, harbours/marinas, etc.	Existing resources	Year 2-3	SCVST
6.7 Fill communication gaps by using systems, tools, and technology to coordinate the visitor services experience such as a shared internal database, call-forwarding, and different visitor centre closing days.	\$7,000	Year 2-3	SCVST
6.8 Tap into the Sunshine Coast's resident base of local knowledge and potential ambassadors such as artisans and, including on-site (e.g. expand collateral placement in artisan workshops).	\$4,000	Year 2-3	SCVST , residents, tourism businesses

## 7. Create more impactful visitor centres

Visitor services are well received on the Sunshine Coast and the visitors who use them are increasing. While service is exceptional, the visitor services team identified that they would be better able to serve more visitors if certain brick and mortar centres were moved to better locations. There are opportunities to create more local, authentic experiences at each centre and have them reflect the essence of the community through design and displays.

Action	Budget	Timing	Team
7.1 Find a better location for the Gibsons visitor centre.	\$25,000 (approximate set up costs)	Year 1-2	SCT, Town of Gibsons
7.2 Review locating the Powell River and Sechelt visitor centres to better locations.	\$10,000	Year 2-3	TPR, City of Powell River, qathet Regional District SCT, District of Sechelt
7.3 Evolve the visitor centres to better reflect the destination appeal, the uniqueness of each community, and ensure a welcoming experience conducive of a concierge service.	\$15,000	Year 2-3	SCVST, visitor services partners
7.4 Explore including a demand generating feature in the visitor centres that drive visitation. This is location and venue dependent and is intended to be an immersive experience that supports the community appeal and destination brand.	Existing resources	Year 2-3	SCVST
7.5 Develop a staffing plan that continues to offer exceptional frontline customer service, including familiarizing visitor services staff of the entire Sunshine Coast through product familiarization trips and other educational efforts (guided and self-learning), and working together to get the most effective funding from the summer student grant program. Explore the use of Sunshine Coast branded uniform shirts and/or jackets to showcase a whole-coast visitor experience.	\$3,000	Year 2-3	SCVST
7.6 Work together to improve the visitor centre retail programs to focus on promoting local businesses and artisans and build brand equity. Examples include local artisan collaboration and bulk orders of bear bells.	\$10,000	Year 2-3	SCVST



## 8. Implement a Live Chat pilot project for the entire Sunshine Coast

The planning considerations show that a strong focus on digital connections and online information is essential. The Powell River Visitor Centre has utilized Live Chat and can share the key learnings and support adoption to the other centres. Chat is quickly becoming an essential visitor services tool, and now is the time to innovate digitally and grow an omni-channel presence.

Action	Budget	Timing	Team
8.1 Develop a pilot project to test coordinated Live Chat throughout the entire Sunshine Coast. This would include adopting learnings from Powell River Live Chat, as well as other Visitor Services Network users, and testing a winter program through open visitor centres when seasonal centres are closed.	\$25,000 (approximate set up costs)	Year 1 – fall pilot project	SCT, TPR, GVC, SVC, PHVC, PRVC, GCC

## THEME TREE: ELEVATING VISITOR EXPERIENCES

### 9. Implement the visitor services actions of the Sunshine Coast Destination Development Strategy

With the Sunshine Coast Destination Development Strategy already completed, work is underway to improve the destination. Visitor services will play an integral part in this, and the visitor services team should work closely with destination development teams to align with their strategy and prepare for upcoming changes.

Action	Budget	Timing	Team
9.1 Work with the destination development team to ensure strategic alignment and stay in-the-know on upcoming projects that will require visitor services considerations.	Existing resources	Ongoing	SCVST
9.2 Ensure a voice for visitor services is at the table at key destination development discussions.	Existing resources	Ongoing	SCVST
9.3 Develop an inventory of public washrooms, sanitation and pump out stations that are available for visitor use and complete a gap analysis to identify needs along the Sunshine Coast.	Existing resources	Year 1	SCVST
9.4 Develop a business plan for a shared bus (owned, leased or rented) that can be used by communities and organizations along the Sunshine Coast and islands for enhancing their festivals and events, e.g., beer tour bus, arts crawl bus, etc.	\$3,000 (not including purchase of bus)	Year 2-3	SCT, TPR, as identified in the Sunshine Coast Destination Development Strategy

## 10. Help tourism businesses improve their visitor service levels

Experiences are at the heart of a destination and getting high service levels from front line staff at tourism businesses is essential to growing the destination. Yet not all businesses have the time or resources to focus on improving their experience, including front-line staff, opening hours, and pointing these businesses in the right direction will be a key part of reaching market readiness. The visitor services teams have expertise that can support tourism businesses improve their service levels.

Action	Budget	Timing	Team
10.1 Demonstrate to partners and stakeholders the importance of coordinated visitor experiences and encourage businesses to work collaboratively, e.g., ensuring a restaurant is always open, understanding why online booking is important and how to use it, etc.	\$2,000	Year 2-3	SCVST
10.2 Work with tourism businesses to improve visitor services to market- and export-ready levels.	Additional funds may be required	Ongoing	SCT, TPR
10.3 Encourage tourism businesses to use go2HR training programs to improve frontline services levels.	Existing resources	Ongoing	SCT, TPR

## 11. Use visitor services to improve the experience visitors have with transportation to and within the Sunshine Coast

Visitors face challenges when it comes to transportation on the Sunshine Coast, especially when arriving and leaving. Improved communication and increased visitor services for those facing challenges can help make their first and last impressions, as well as the rest of their journey, more enjoyable.

Action	Budget	Timing	Team
11.1 Develop processes to ensure visitors have real-time data and are fully informed of transportation challenges on the Sunshine Coast through visitor services channels, such as transient moorage, ferry issues, cycling safety, etc.	Existing resources	Ongoing	SCVST
11.2 Ensure visitor services are available for those experiencing transportation challenges, including food and late-night accommodations.	\$5,000	Year 2-3	SCVST
11.3 Send annual communications to municipalities and businesses to review their parking requirements prior to peak summer season beginning, such as identifying RV parking.	Existing resources	Ongoing	SCVST

## 9. BUDGET

It is important to review this plan on an annual basis to reprioritize activities, determine funding requirements and determine availability of funds. See additional Budget notes in Section 10 Priorities for Implementation.

Strategies		Budget
<b>Working as one amazing visitor services team</b>		
1	Find the best approach to coordinated visitor centre operations to improve services and reduce duplication of effort	\$20,000
2	Ensure the ongoing collection, analysis and sharing of visitor services intelligence and performance metrics	\$10,000
3	Create consistent key messaging	\$1,000
4	Develop better partnerships between visitor services and the tourism industry at large	\$3,000
Total		\$34,000
<b>Improving engagement through visitor services touchpoints</b>		
5	Help visitors better understand the Sunshine Coast	\$18,000
6	Develop a seamless visitor services experience	\$11,000
7	Create more impactful visitor centres	\$63,000
8	Implement Live Chat pilot project	\$5,000
Total		\$97,000
<b>Elevating Visitor Experiences</b>		
9	Implement the visitor services actions of the Sunshine Coast Destination Development Strategy	\$3,000
10	Help tourism experiences get market ready	\$2,000
11	Use visitor services to improve the experience visitors have with transportation to and within the Sunshine Coast	\$5,000
Total		\$10,000
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>\$141,000</b>

## 10. PRIORITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The visitor services team identified the following as key priorities for implementation.

Implementation of this plan is through the core SCVST working together, and is not the responsibility of one organization on its own.

It is important to note that the Budget figures identified may not be available through existing budgets; this includes budgets of Sunshine Coast Tourism and Tourism Powell River. As such, the SCVST will need to work together to find funds to implement these priorities. This may include pooling resources from existing budgets, reaching out to local tourism partners for funding, applying for grant funds or project-based funding programs, or a variety of other options.

Action	Budget	Timing	Team
1.1 Create an operations management approach for the four visitor centres to ensure all teams/partners are unified and working in the same direction. Ensure clear roles and priorities between marketing, visitor services and content creation.	Existing resources	Year 1	SCVST
1.2 Increase opportunities for visitor services teams to learn, meet and collaborate: 1.2.1 Create a visitor services conference each spring specifically for the Sunshine Coast.	\$10,000	Conference – spring 2020	SCVST, DBC, tourism businesses
1.4 Develop an approach to provide coordinated visitor services through social media in a warm, friendly way.	Existing resources	Year 1	SCVST
1.5 Work with all organizations that provide visitor information and materials to streamline offerings, including brochures, visitor guides, websites and social media pages, and ensure relevant, up to date information is presented. (Work towards removal of confusing, dated and potentially damaging materials). 1.5.1 All visitor centre staff to collaborate together to make consolidated offerings even better, such as improving the Sunshine Coast Tourism website and a hiking guide.	\$10,000 (may not be needed)	In progress	SCVST, Other visitor services providers, Publishers, Partners
1.6 Educate all stakeholders and partners in the tourism industry on what efforts the visitor centres and marketing organizations are doing to reduce overlap.	Existing resources	Ongoing	SCVST
2.1 Standardize data collection between visitor centres, SCT and TPR to ensure efficient and correct data collection.	Existing resources	Year 1	SCVST, DBC
3.1 Work together to create a common messaging approach for all visitor services that reflects what visitors need, the common messages and local specific messages.	Existing resources	Year 1	SCVST
Continued...			

Continued from previous			
Action	Budget	Timing	Team
3.2 Create a short information document for all visitor services and marketing staff that captures engaging stories to share with visitors, not just talking points. (Example: The story of seeing a bear walking down the street outside the Powell River visitor centre.)	Existing resources	Year 1	SCVST
5.3 Create a mapping of all relevant visitor touchpoints (where the visitor connects with the Sunshine Coast for information and advise) and ensure all are equipped to provide visitors with the appropriate information, including exploring use of digital kiosks at appropriate locations.	\$3,000 (not including kiosk implementation)	Year 1 – complete mapping and explore funding for pilot project of digital kiosks	CVST, Destination BC, Other visitor services providers, Partners, digital platforms
6.1 Develop processes to provide each visitor a seamless, “soft hand-off” to other services, connecting the visitor to other visitor services providers and businesses. For example, a social media interaction that brings in the other visitor centres to provide more details on local information is a “soft hand-off”.	Existing resources	Year 1	SCVST
7.5 Develop a staffing plan that continues to offer exceptional frontline customer service, including familiarizing visitor services staff of the entire Sunshine Coast through product familiarization trips and other educational efforts, and working together to get the most effective funding from the summer student grant program.	\$3,000	Year 1 – coordinated familiarization tours	SCVST
8.1 Develop a pilot project to test coordinated Live Chat throughout the entire Sunshine Coast. This would include adopting learnings from Powell River Live Chat, as well as other Visitor Services Network users, and testing a winter program through open visitor centres when seasonal centres are closed.	\$5,000	Year 1 – fall pilot project	SCT, TPR, GVC, SVC, PHVC, PRVC, GCC
9.3 Develop an inventory of public washrooms, sanitations and pump out stations that are available for visitor use and complete a gap analysis to identify needs along the Sunshine Coast.	Existing resources	Year 1	SCVST, DBC