



EXPLORE EDMONTON'S

VISITOR ECONOMY

RELAUNCH PLAN

Edmonton saw a record number of visitors to our city in 2019, with just over 6.3 million people visiting the capital region, and those visitors spent \$1.7 billion dollars in our city. In 2020, no surprise that number plummeted with just over 3.3 million visitors contributing just \$315 million to the local economy. Obviously, recovery of the visitor economy must be a priority in the capital region and Explore Edmonton will be at the forefront with several initiatives to get visitors back to the city.

While it slowed down, there was still work to be done during the pandemic. The following are some of the projects and objectives Explore Edmonton's teams worked on.



NHL BUBBLE

The Edmonton Events team worked with the City of Edmonton and Oilers Entertainment Group to bring the NHL playoffs to Rogers Place. It gave Edmonton an international platform and led to the city securing the IIHF World Junior Hockey Championship bubble during the holiday season of 2020/21. The expertise that our partners at Rogers Place were able to get with NHL and IIHF events is invaluable, and they shared their best practices with our other partners to help get 2021 events approved by health authorities, for example HSBC World Rugby Sevens Series which will be held at Commonwealth stadium in late September.

GBAC STAR ACCREDITATION

Edmonton became the first city in Canada to achieve the Global Biorisk Advisory Council (GBAC) STAR accreditation which is the cleaning industry's only outbreak prevention, response, and recovery accreditation. This ensures event organizers and guests can feel safe when visiting our two venues, Edmonton Expo Centre and the Edmonton Convention Centre. Explore Edmonton also partnered with EIA, Oilers Entertainment Group, Edmonton Destination Marketing Hotels, as well as TRAXX Coachlines to achieve the GBAC STAR accreditation. Edmonton is one of just two cities in North America to achieve this standard.

VENUES

As stewards of two important public venues, we have a responsibility to use our spaces and resources in support of our communities. From March to August 2020, the Edmonton EXPO Centre was activated as a temporary day programming and temporary medical isolation facility for Edmontonians experiencing homelessness. Everyday, Edmonton EXPO Centre staff would prepare and deliver approximately 2,000 meals to guests. From October 2020 – April 2021, the Edmonton Convention Centre opened its doors to the City of Edmonton's temporary pandemic accommodation, creating additional capacity for 300 homeless Edmontonians to be supported by Bissell Centre, Boyle Street Community Services, Mustard Seed and Bent Arrow services. In addition to managing security operations, maintenance, housekeeping and operational support, our food and beverage team prepared over 180,000 meals and poured more than 2,200 cups of coffee every day. On September 9, 2020, Alberta Health Services opened Edmonton's largest COVID-19 assessment centre within Hall A of the Edmonton EXPO Centre. The assessment centre is open seven days a week and can administer more than 5,000 COVID-19 tests each day, or 350 people every 30 minutes. In April, 2021, Alberta Health Services opened a COVID-19 vaccination centre within Hall C of the Edmonton EXPO Centre.

VIRTUAL TOURS

We have worked extensively over the last six months to produce a virtual tours tool that can be used to take clients through our city. We have 360 degree photography captured of many hotels, facilities and venues now, and we can add to this inventory as required. This tool also includes a series of introductory videos to our city and outlines what our city and Business Events team provides. The 3D Vista platform we use allows one of our team to host the virtual tour, invite stakeholders to join while their venue is being toured to provide commentary and make introductions to their product offering. We anticipate this tool will continue to be used well past the end of travel restrictions for COVID-19, so that clients wishing to take an in-depth review of our city can do so without an in-person visit.

CONGRESS 2021

The University of Alberta partnered with our Edmonton All In team to host the Congress 2021 of the Humanities and Social Sciences online from May 27 to June 4, 2021. The conference saw around 6,200 registered participants tuning in from 72 countries, with 1,750 zoom meetings held over nine days. A major legacy of a virtual Congress 2021 are those innovations we developed in concert with our partners in the delivery of a virtual conference of this size: particularly around online accessibility, community building and network spaces, virtual wellness and arts programming, and the management of multiple simultaneous events.



MARKETING LOCAL

Marketing campaigns shifted from Stay Home and Support Local to Stay Safe and Support Local. Most of our efforts throughout Covid have been focused on telling the stories of inspirational local entrepreneurs and ensuring we were providing the most up-to-date information on the businesses still providing services and how to access them. One initiative saw the creation of a Brewery Pass which helped to show support for a local industry and put resources into incentivizing people to get out and put money into local businesses. There was also the 'Here for Good' campaign; it was a partnership with local company Print Machine which saw sales of t-shirts go back to participating companies. Around \$40,000 was raised through the sale of shirts, which included limited edition Explore Edmonton designs.

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGY

Supported stakeholders by way of connecting businesses to grants that would provide financial aid during the pandemic. It also helped stakeholders to transition to experience models, such as virtual, that were appropriate during the various lockdowns.

RELAUNCH OF VISITOR ECONOMY



The final quarter of 2021 leading in to 2022 will see a mass effort from across the organization. Here is a breakdown of the major projects and expectations from each business team:



EDMONTON EVENTS

Sport and cultural events make up 70 per cent of the economic impact of the visitor economy. The unit has hired more event attraction staff in hopes of bringing more major events to the capital region. Prior to the pandemic, sport tourism was a \$6.8 billion industry so there is a lot of potential to bring in even more events and see a great return on investment.

We are working with traditional and unconventional venues and local sport groups and organizers to determine what's possible to host in Edmonton and assess if it's the right fit for our city. We're always looking for that next exciting event that our citizens are going to enjoy and ones that will help drive greater visitation to our city. I think the big difference in 2021, is that we've got more resources behind event attraction and we're exploring every option available to us. We don't have a goal to increase the number of targeted events, we care about economic impact: if we can get our EI 2018/2019 levels with 10 events, we will do that.



We now have a dedicated Event Development Manager on staff whose job it is to work with rightsholders and local organizing committees after an event has been secured to better plan and execute both sport and community benefits. This is a big bucket of options, and it means different things for different events. For example, we have partnered with an incredible organization called End Poverty Edmonton to work with Hockey Canada to try and implement social procurement processes for the IIHF World Junior Championship taking place this upcoming holiday season. We're trying to leverage the purchasing power of major events to increase overall community benefits in Edmonton; so essentially events would hire local suppliers that have targeted employment or training for priority populations, or support local economic development, or provide environmental benefits.

BUSINESS EVENTS

Edmonton joined the global Hybrid City Alliance to enable us to help our clients navigate hybrid events and connect us with a network of international cities that can share best practices and provide us with lead opportunities where groups may be looking for a Canadian based hub for an international Hub and Spoke event. Edmonton is one of three Canadian cities to join the alliance.

Right now, there is an incentive to book before December 31, 2021, for all future programs. It is called Touchdown to Take Off, which includes monetary incentives for select hotels, carbon offsetting, consultation and support from our experts in house, as well as no cancellation or attrition fees at our venues, and EDMH member hotels.



DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGY

Overall, Destination Development and Strategy (DD&S) has started to implement initiatives set out in the Tourism Master Plan, as well as support the development of new and/or enhanced tourism experiences in Edmonton. DD&S will also assist events and festivals to promote and work in partnership, once it is safe to do so.

In travel media, there will be a summer and winter advertorial promoting Edmonton in Westjet Magazine.

All throughout July and through to September there will be a variety of visits from content creators across the country. The Creator Co. Project plans to host 12-15 content creators who will visit Edmonton with a loose itinerary, giving them a chance to discover Edmonton on their own terms. In a partnership, the Explore Edmonton – Tourism Jasper Expedia project will host a content creator from Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal in alignment with the marketing plans for this campaign.

Explore Edmonton is creating a video showcasing Indigenous experiences in Edmonton, specifically the new Indigenous Peoples Experience (IPE) at Fort Edmonton Park. The video will have a performance and appearances by James Jones, better known as Notorious Cree on social media. He will also be shooting a Tik Tok video, Instagram post and stories as part of the content to promote the new experience at Fort Edmonton Park. In August, we will host a virtual mini familiarization (FAM) tour with international and U.S. media to showcase all indigenous experiences across Edmonton, like Metis Crossing, Fort Edmonton Park IPE and a cooking demonstration with renowned Indigenous chef Scott Iserhoff.



The travel trade department will look to ramp things up once international borders open. Travel Trade will also work in collaboration with EIA which includes the re-start of the KLM campaign with EIA, Tourism Jasper, Travel Alberta and City Zapper, to promote the direct KLM flight from Amsterdam to Edmonton.



Virtual FAM tours will begin in November. We will invite our receptive tour operators and tour operators that we work with in our key markets. The FAM will be hosted on Zoom and be an interactive virtual presentation. We are working with EIA, Metis Crossing, and U of A Botanical Gardens for this. If we choose to do another at any point, we will switch up the experiences we highlight. The presentation includes: a treaty acknowledgment, a Destination EIA video and a welcome from Adrian at EIA, a “transport trivia” section that Jeff created so that they can learn more about Edmonton, a virtual 360 hotel tour and “check-in”, followed by the Metis Crossing virtual experience they’ve created. That includes a live craft (materials will be sent out in advance), and then the U of A Botanic Garden Twilight Picnic experience which uses a video we created, that will be enjoyed while they eat lunch and participants can ask questions. The length of this virtual FAM is roughly an hour and a half total.

More FAMs will continue when borders re-open. A Trade FAM would include us hosting receptive tour operators and tour operators in Edmonton to experience an itinerary we’ve created and organized for them, so that they can experience what’s called export-ready experiences (able to be sold internationally). When they’re able to see our city and experience things first-hand, then they’re better able to sell it or determine if it’s a fit for their clients. Trade FAMs are sometimes in partnership with Travel Alberta as they might not only be here to experience Edmonton, but other destinations around Alberta.

Visitor services is in the process of identifying and assessing the effectiveness of all current visitor service touchpoints across the city, as well as researching and identifying new tools that will improve Edmonton’s visitor experience more efficiently.

Visitor Services is also currently in the process of revamping and relaunching the YEG Expert Program. We provide YEG Expert destination training to frontline staff in the hospitality industry to help them share their Edmonton favourites with visitors. One addition to the program includes a virtual platform and a chatbot to answer commonly asked visitor inquiries.

As always, research and performance will analyze market research to inform evidence-based decision making across the organization.



MARKETING

Heading into the summer, we created five separate campaigns, each with their own focus. We have continued our support of local businesses with a downtown dining pass and will continue to showcase those individuals and businesses that locals can support. For the first time since March 2020, we are also putting resources behind campaign work that encourages Albertans in our regional markets to consider Edmonton for their summer vacations. The major focus is on safe outdoor adventures like the river valley, but we are also putting a major focus on our culinary scene, our festivals that are continuing, and attractions like Fort Edmonton Park and the Muttart Conservatory that are moving forward with safe and modified processes.

Beyond Alberta, we are working very closely with EIA and Tourism Jasper on reigniting the domestic travel sector with campaign work that stretches across the country into our key markets.

Everything we are planning is based on data-driven intelligence that will help us tap into the pent-up demand for Canadians to travel and hopefully encourage them to spend their travel budgets exploring their own country.

International efforts will come last, and we are in consistent discussions with Travel Alberta, Destination Canada, EIA, and the international airlines that we are confident will help us get Edmonton back into the consideration funnel as we head into fall.

The venues will continue collaborating with venue clients and planners to responsibly welcome events in accordance with public health guidelines. The hope is to see the return of as many events as possible, with Imagine Van Gogh and the Edmonton Stingers already welcoming visitors.

OUTCOMES

These actions are meant to reignite interest in Edmonton as a destination. Business events, as well as sports and cultural events, will be vital in bringing visitors back to our city and with them the dollars that they spend in our economy. Air access, event attraction, and dynamic marketing and awareness campaigns are key areas of focus to ensure a return of visitors to our city. Already Edmonton Events has seen success in bringing back major events with HSBC World Rugby Sevens series making a stop here at the end of September. North American Midway Entertainment's Summer Fun Midway exceeded expectations on ticket sales. While we want to eventually see the return of major in person business meetings and conventions, our Business Events team has become an industry leader in hosting hybrid events like this summer's virtual 2021 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences. Marketing campaigns are data-driven with intelligence from various sources like Destination Canada and Leger.

In 2021, the focus was on keeping the sector alive long enough to begin recovery. Our actions through the year were designed to drive whatever business we could into the city until reopening could commence. Now, our focus for the remainder of 2021 will be to jumpstart the visitor economy. Each action is designed to create momentum that we can leverage in to 2022, when we anticipate the visitor economy will start to rebound.

