


Destination Stratford | 2021 Year in Review




Upon entering into **2021**, our province experienced more devastating lockdowns, forcing change, challenges and uncertainty for the local tourism and business sector. Despite the restrictions and continued challenges, Destination Stratford and the community rallied together in support, and as such, new and **creative collaborations and partnerships emerged**. The organization prioritized creating **innovative campaigns** and deliverables that were fluid, to allow the opportunity to switch on and off as required by the province's pandemic restrictions, with the main goal being **economic recovery**. From successfully bringing in over \$700,000 in tourism economic recovery investments, welcoming over 50,000 patrons to the public AI Fresco outdoor dining areas, and hosting an award-winning 6-week winter lights festival with attendance of over 80,000 across the main lighting displays, Destination Stratford is proud to share our top highlights and successes during this rapidly changing year.




“Stratford is my home away from home! Always love to visit! It's a refreshing change from the big city, friendly people, delicious food and a great atmosphere. Fun times at the festival, walking the river, eating chocolate, drinking the tea or coffee breaks, exploring the cute lovely shops... can't wait to come back!” - Susan Y. 

2021 YEAR IN REVIEW CORE INITIATIVES:

1. Destination Marketing
2. Destination Development
3. Destination Management

“Loving the new Stratford Staycation idea for locals! Such a fun initiative! Also loving the new Destination Stratford website - great job.” - Laurie D. 

“Pre-pandemic I'd drive 9+ hours to visit Stratford from Pennsylvania, so this ‘Stratford Road Trips’ series is so interesting to me because I don't know the area! I'm making notes for my next visit to Canada!” - Caroline A. 



1. DESTINATION MARKETING

The year 2021 proved to be another opportunity for Destination Stratford to creatively and thoughtfully execute Destination Marketing campaigns during frequently changing restrictions and necessary pivots due to the global pandemic. Through stay-at-home orders and lockdowns, hyper-local marketing and strategic regional initiatives, Destination Stratford successfully executed compelling marketing campaigns across multi-media platforms including: print, radio, broadcast, social media and influencer marketing.

27

**INFLUENCER
CAMPAIGNS**

307,400

INFLUENCER CAMPAIGN SOCIAL REACH

37,133

LIKES

3,025

COMMENTS

535

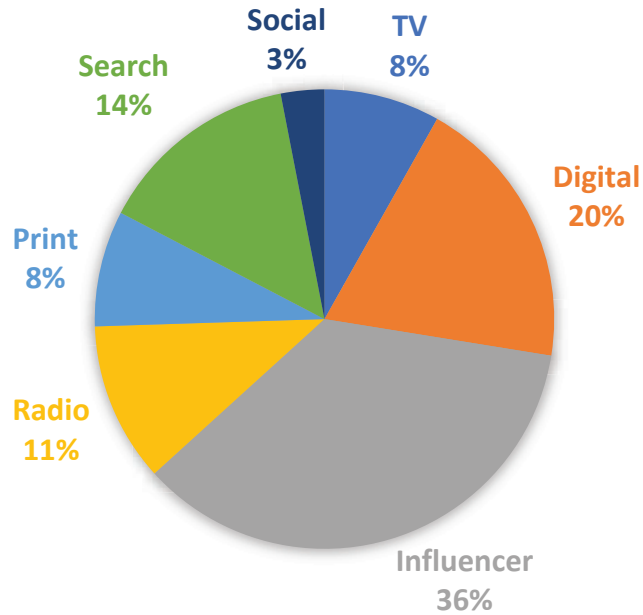
SHARES

230,000

VIDEO VIEWS

Destination Stratford captured 61 unique articles, distributed 11 press releases and conducted multiple interviews across Canadian media outlets including broadcast, radio, online and print channels. Aside from highlighting Destination Stratford's marketing initiatives and local economic recovery efforts through media, other topics included tourism industry news, press release coverage, community events, and collaborations.



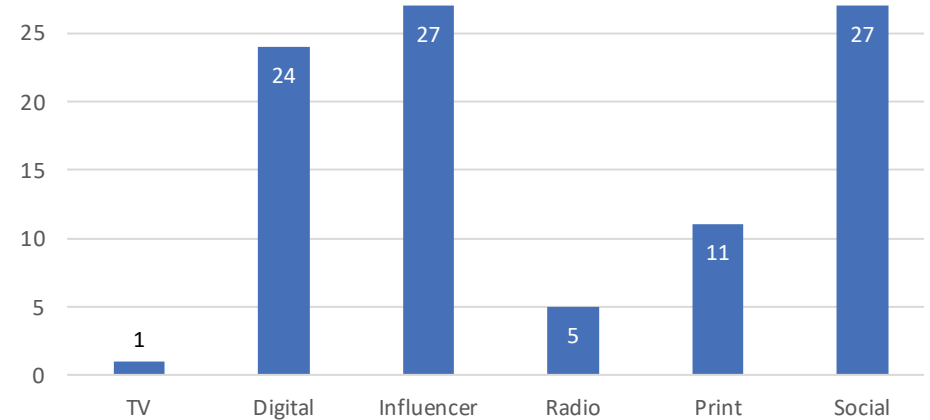


2021 ADVERTISING SPEND BY CHANNEL

“I am excited to see all the shows at the new outdoor theatre. Get dressed up like old times, get some take out from Braai House and sit by the water before the show.” Candice S. (Instagram)

“I absolutely adore the Humans of Stratford features. Thank you for sharing such beautiful stories! People truly make a place.” - Jessica V. (Instagram)

2021 MARKETING CAMPAIGNS BY CHANNEL



“Destination Stratford is a life saver for small businesses. Truly the best! We appreciate all that you have done to help us bring in customers that normally do not know we exist. Absolutely fantastic! We take any opportunity to participate in your culinary trails which help to grow our business and keep people employed. Thank you!”

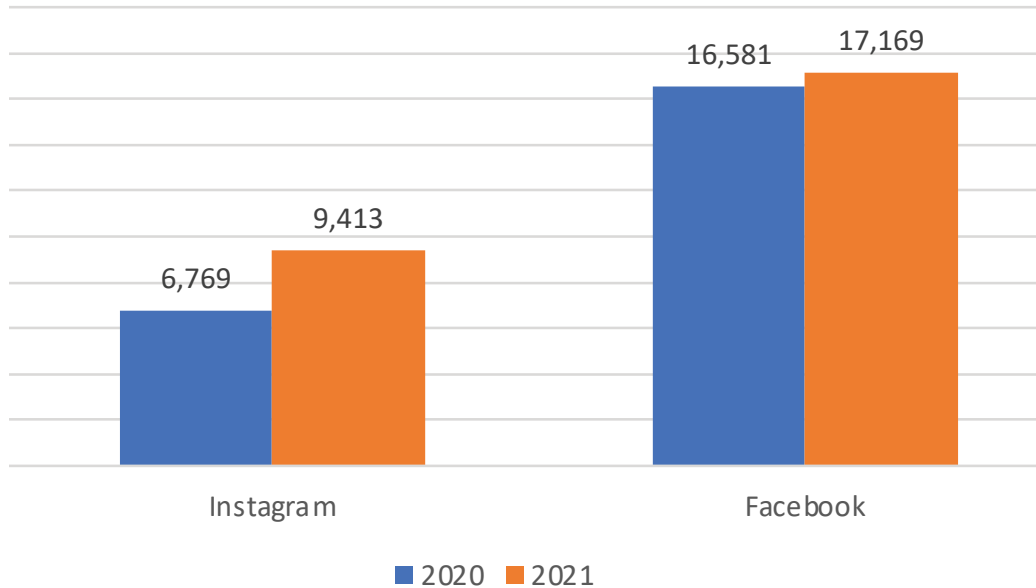
Trevor Exner (Owner, Black Angus Bakery and Catering.)

Social Media 2021 Growth

INSTAGRAM = 39% increase (Jan 2021: 6,769 | Dec 2021: 9,413)

FACEBOOK = 4% increase (Jan 2021: 16,581 | Dec 2021: 17,169)

Instagram & Facebook Follower Growth



Top 10 engaged Instagram posts of 2021



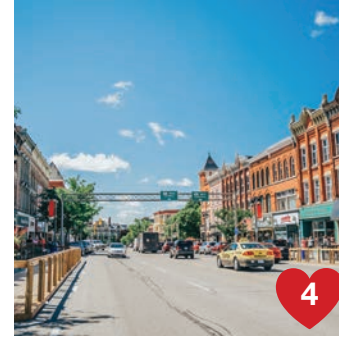
Total Engagement: 1,480
Total Reach: 9,110



Total Engagement: 1,301
Total Reach: 4,902



Total Engagement: 1,238
Total Reach: 9,666



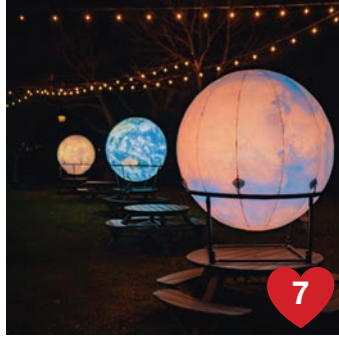
Total Engagement: 1,105
Total Reach: 5,970



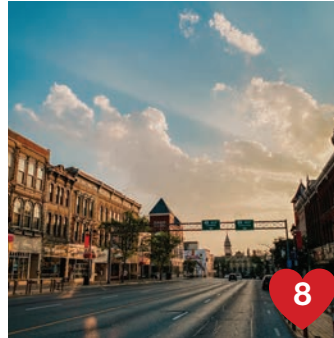
Total Engagement: 981
Total Reach: 5,850



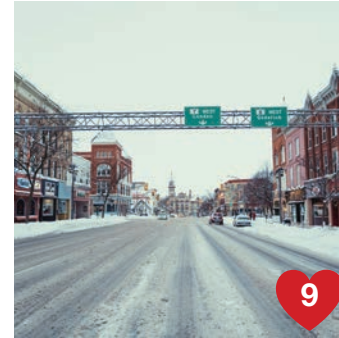
Total Engagement: 797
Total Reach: 5,515



Total Engagement: 767
Total Reach: 7,730



Total Engagement: 607
Total Reach: 6,231



Total Engagement: 600
Total Reach: 6,221



Total Engagement: 585
Total Reach: 5,350

Top 10 engaged Facebook posts of 2021



Total Engagement: 6,900
Total Reach: 59,700



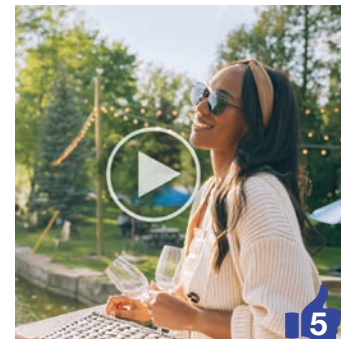
Total Engagement: 3,785
Total Reach: 19,600



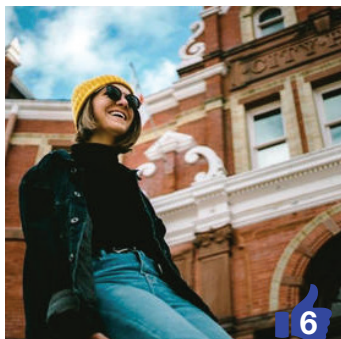
Total Engagement: 3,350
Total Reach: 13,900



Total Engagement: 2,977
Total Reach: 9,400



Total Engagement: 2,420
Total Reach: 29,800



Total Engagement: 2,400
Total Reach: 8,900



Total Engagement: 1,850
Total Reach: 10,200



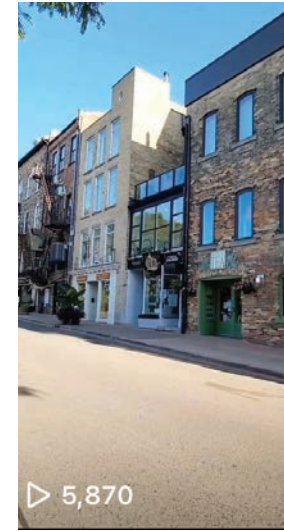
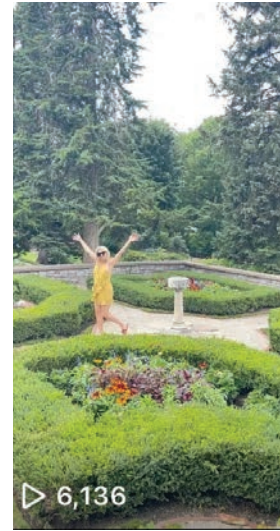
Total Engagement: 1,800
Total Reach: 9,900



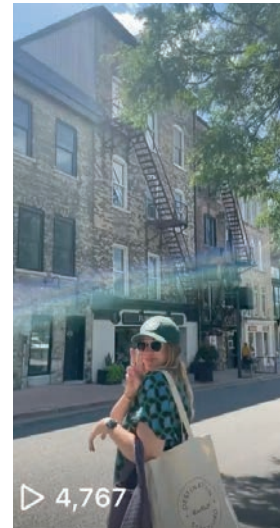
Total Engagement: 1,700
Total Reach: 9,400



Total Engagement: 1,580
Total Reach: 12,700



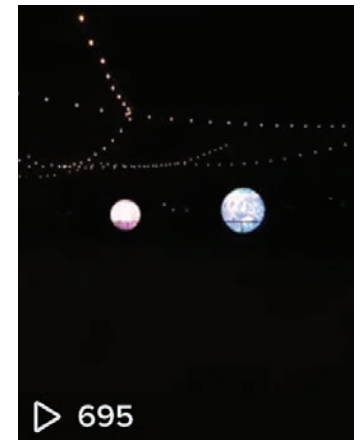
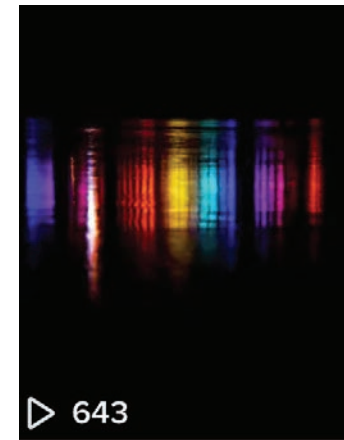
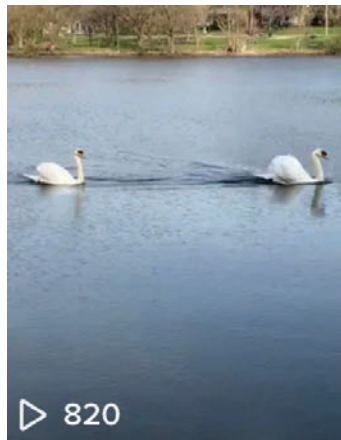
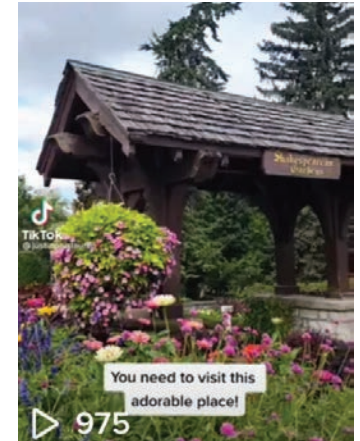
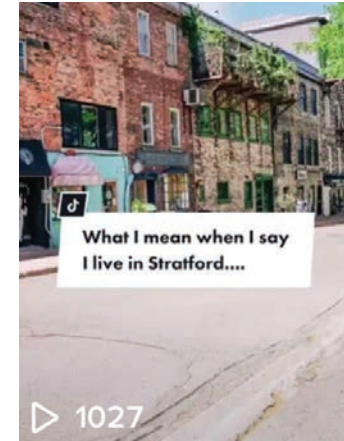
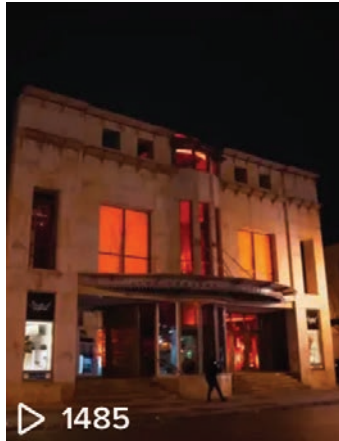
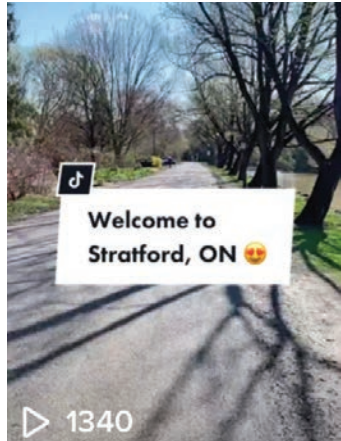
Top 10 Instagram reels of 2021



Did you know?

Destination Stratford added over 1,000 NEW high-quality images in 2021, representing all seasons and 8 (7 Lights On Stratford - 1 Destination Stratford) videos for use in current and future marketing campaigns, website, social media and traditional media use.

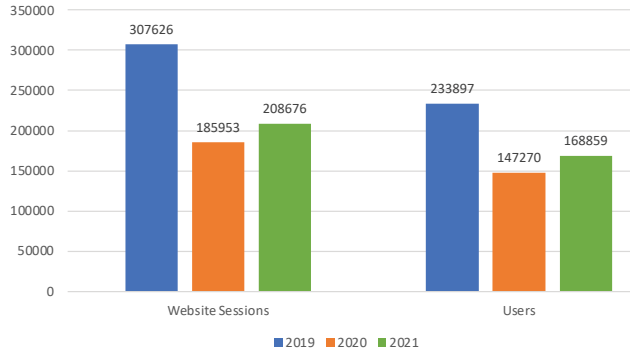
Top 10 TikTok videos of 2021



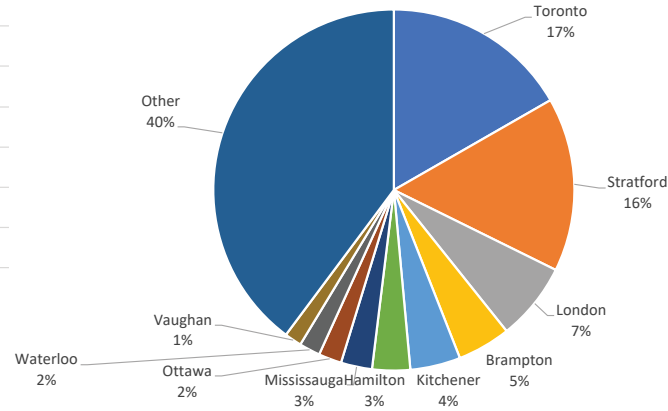
TikTok Stats: 235 Followers, 14,500 Views, 780 Engagements

Website Analytics

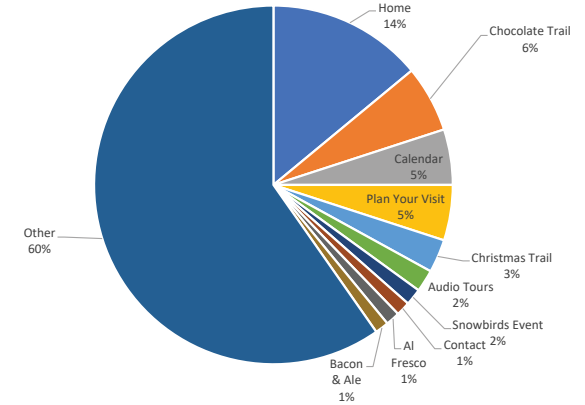
VISITSTRATFORD.CA ACTIVITY BETWEEN 2019-2021



2021 TOP 10 WEBSITE VISITOR LOCATIONS



2021 TOP 10 MOST VISITED PAGES



With 64% of online traffic using a mobile device while on visitstratford.ca, Destination Stratford takes a mobile-first approach to continually improve the user experience. In 2021, the addition and daily maintenance of interactive maps, audio tours, cultural events calendar and high impact visual storytelling created a compelling resource for visitors to explore Stratford from their home and during their visit.

Referring Channel Changes:

Social media: 15% up +5% in 2021
 E-mail: 3% +1% in 2021
 Direct & Referral: 41% +21% in 2021 (earned visits)
 Google Grants: 8% +1% in 2021 (free Google search ads)

Number of users:

168,859 +15% in 2021

2. DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

As we entered into the New Year with stay-at-home orders, Destination Stratford worked diligently to find creative, safe and measurable ways to keep Stratford top-of-mind when travel was not permitted, and welcome visitors to the City when it was safe to do so; competing with many Southwestern Ontario destinations. Despite the constraints due to the pandemic, Destination Stratford created new initiatives including the highly successful Love Stratford Box, strategically developed 10 self-guided audio tours, recorded the highest culinary trail sales to date, and executed another successful year of Stratford Al Fresco and Lights On Stratford - Winter Festival of Lights. In partnership with RTO4 and Downtown Stratford BIA, Destination Stratford managed another successful Destination Animation Project that provided \$35,000 for 12 unique local cultural experiences.

Destination Stratford saw a 34% increase in culinary trail sales during 2021, resulting in the highest number of sales to date!

Cumulative time spent on 2021 culinary trail website pages:

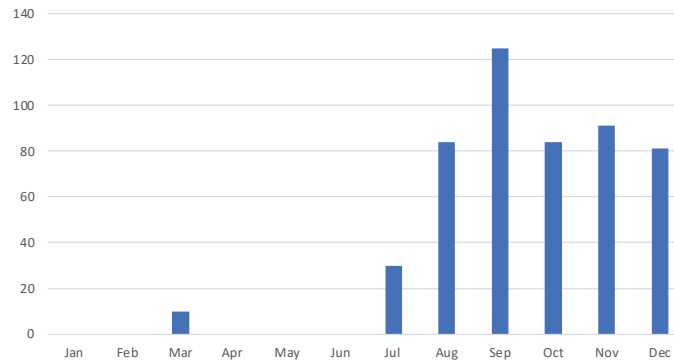
Chocolate Trail
41,167 sessions for the year x 4 mins = 2,744 hours

Bacon & Ale Trail
6,177 sessions for the year x 4 mins = 412 hours

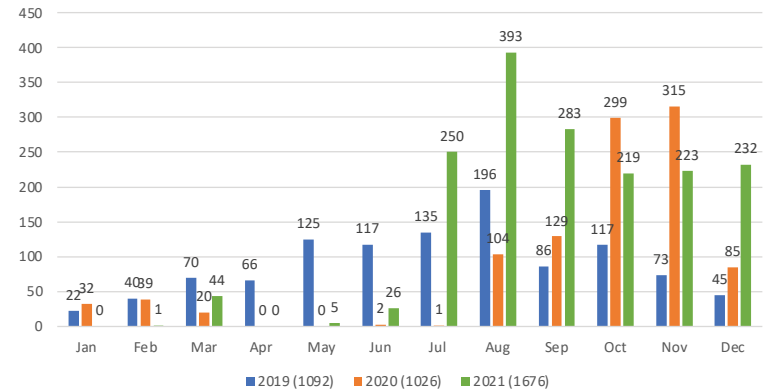
Christmas Trail
13,122 sessions for the year x 4 mins = 875 hours

CULINARY TRAIL SALES

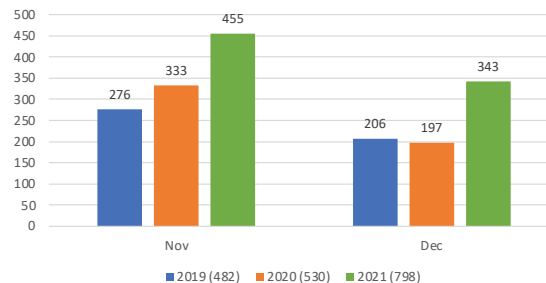
Bacon & Ale Trail - 2021 (505)



Chocolate Trail - 2019 vs 2020 vs 2021



Christmas Trail - 2019 vs 2020 vs 2021



“We at Jobsite Brewing love being part of the Bacon & Ale Trail. It allows patrons an opportunity to enjoy some of our beers while experiencing our fun atmosphere. It's always a pleasure to hear how much fun they have had and how impressed they are with what Stratford has to offer. What a great way to promote so many different locations in one fantastic experience.” Philip Buhler (Co-Owner, Jobsite Brewing Co.)

The Love Stratford Box

In an effort to keep Stratford top of mind while travel was not permitted in Q1, Destination Stratford created an innovative and highly sought after product that was delivered to the doorsteps of Canadians across the country. Introducing The Love Stratford Box - Iconic Edition; a carefully curated consumer box featuring high-quality products and showcasing the incredible and iconic businesses in Stratford. The consumer box was an opportunity to support the economic recovery of Stratford businesses, while staying connected to our beloved visitors. After receiving overwhelming interest and an enthusiastic response, the first-ever Love Stratford Box sold out within the first hour of sales. As such, the team announced a relaunch of the Iconic Edition, doubling quantity and selling out in less than 48 hours.

Destination Stratford continued to receive inquiries from both businesses and visitors, interested in being included and purchasing a future box. As a result, The Love Stratford Box - Holiday Edition was created and released mid- November with tremendous success and appreciation - selling out within the first two hours of sales.

The strong success of The Love Stratford Box can be attributed to the incredible love and admiration both visitors and locals have for Stratford; paired with the unique and passionate retailers and high-quality products. As a result, The Love Stratford Box series showcased 23 local businesses, organizations and artists, raising over \$2,000 for local charities.

Love Stratford Box Influencer Sharing Support:

Solmaz à Khosrowshahian - @thecuriouscreature (reel) - (Reach: 6,682 | Engagement: 295)
Elise Purdon - @apieceofelise (reel) - (Reach: 4,660 | Engagement: 230)
Casie Stewart - @casiesteward (reel) - (Reach: 2,660 | Engagement: 170)
Amanda Reid - @rcitystyleguide (static post) - (Reach: 3,109 | Engagement: 65)
Jennifer Weatherhead - @jennweatherhead (static post) - (Reach: 3,900 | Engagement: 1,105)
Jennifer Valentine - @jennifervalentyne (reel) - (Reach: 31,700 | Engagement: 2,450)
Diana - @dianashealthyliving (stories) - (Reach: 2,510)

TOTAL ENGAGEMENT: 6,825 | TOTAL REACH: 55,221



“You make this Love Box even more special. It is already giving me pleasure. The chocolate and coffee. The non-alcoholic gin is awesome. And I’ve already taken my mask out for a walk. Clearly this Box is put together with love of Stratford and holding a place til we can be together again. Thank you to all. With love and appreciation.”



Stratford Audio Walking Tours

Destination Stratford delivered more innovative ways to bring Stratford into the homes of visitors across the globe, until it was safe to welcome them in person.

Destination Stratford found unique storytelling opportunities to keep Stratford top-of-mind and in the hearts of visitors. First released in February 2021, Destination Stratford announced a new self-guided audio tour series, launching with three tours featuring some of Stratford's most popular and notorious buildings, personalities, hidden gems and rich history.

As a result of the tremendous success and growing interest, seven additional tours have been added to the series that can be safely enjoyed from home, or in-person. The tours include a diverse range of themes, narrators and collaboration with tourism partners, such as the Stratford Festival and the Stratford Perth Museum.

In addition to the creation of new audio tours, Destination Stratford developed interactive digital maps to guide listeners through each location. Each tour is unique and offers listeners an in-depth look into a variety of themes to learn more about the city they love.

To help bring these tours to life, Destination Stratford commissioned talented local artist Claire Scott to create custom illustrations, representing the tour themes. The posters are displayed at the visitors centre, as well as through VisitStratford.ca, and throughout our social media channels. The printed posters include individual QR codes to allow patrons to easily access the audio tour.

"The timing of the Tom Patterson tour and exhibit is perfect, with the newly completed theatre named in his honour providing such a fitting tribute to our hometown hero," says Anita Gaffney, Executive Director of the Stratford Festival. "Destination Stratford and the Stratford Perth Museum drew on the many fascinating facts and artifacts in our Archives to create the tour and exhibit. Visitors and locals alike will find them both to be enlightening and entertaining experiences."

"I can't wait to visit Stratford again and try out the new Insta-Worthy Stops audio tour. This is one of my favourite places in the entire world!" Jessica M. (Instagram)





Cycle Tourism

In a collaborative effort to strategically build Cycle Tourism in the region, Destination Stratford partnered with Perth County, the Town of St. Marys and RTO4 to create a robust and informative pocket-sized cycle map to promote key cycling routes, in addition to recreational points of interest and cycle-worthy details in each region. The map features new and existing trails, and is a large part of the dedicated commitment to welcome cyclists and prioritize the development of Cycle Tourism.

The new cycle map provides riders with a comprehensive list of abundant routes and styles, including city, rural, gravel and mountain bike routes. The cycle map is the perfect size to easily access and store while cycling; allowing riders to effortlessly plan and reference their routes. The map further includes details on each region, public washrooms and parking, route mileage, water-bottle filling stations and so much more. These routes are available on RideWithGPS.com, which can also be sent to a phone's GPS mapping app for ease of use while on the road.

In addition to the joint partnership among the destination organizations, Cycle Stratford was a large contributor in assisting in the development of the map and trails, ensuring the routes were accurately mapped with full details to highlight each ride and region.

To complement the cycle strategy, Destination Stratford hosted cycle enthusiast and social media influencer, Traveling Mitch, to explore the region's cycle routes and off-route activities.

To continue the development of Cycle Tourism, the organizations have partnered on a combined membership with the Ontario By Bike Network. Working closely to increase Cycle Tourism awareness to consumers, as well as helping local businesses develop as registered cycle friendly destinations. Our cycle tourism initiative has also encouraged the Downtown Stratford Business Improvement Area (BIA) to work towards becoming an Ontario By Bike certified BIA.

"Stratford, Ontario has a strong reputation for the arts, but Stratford and the surrounding area are slowly gaining a new reputation - as an Ontario cycling headquarters for those who love to ride and do a little sightseeing along the way as well!" Christopher Mitchell.

Stratford Al Fresco

Building on the learning and success of the 2020 Al Fresco partnership with investStratford and Downtown Stratford BIA, the 2021 initiative, managed and funded by Destination Stratford with additional funding support from investStratford and grants, expanded Stratford's public outdoor dining opportunities through managed and staffed dedicated Al Fresco areas in Market Square, Memorial Gardens and Tom Patterson Island, along with new tourism infrastructure investments and an expanded liquor-with-food bylaw pilot project. The 2021 Al Fresco program was highly successful with over \$750,000 of direct spending in addition to myriad social, community and tourism economic recovery benefits.

"I sure hope they keep it all going. My customers loved all aspects of it. Market Square, the Island. I had many show us photos of them eating their lunches there..." Kelly Ballantyne, Sirkel Foods

"I wanted to pass along full support for the Al Fresco initiative. As an example, we did a large take-out order that included alcohol for about 30 people and took it to the Tom Patterson island. I think it has been highly useful / needed and successful over the past 2 years." Bentley's Bar Inn & Restaurant



LIGHTS ON STRATFORD

WINTER FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS



Launched in 2020 during the pandemic, the award-winning Lights On Stratford annual winter festival once again transformed Stratford's heritage downtown core and park system with luminous art and interactive light installations.

Despite the severe pandemic restrictions in place, Lights On Stratford safely welcomed over 80,000 patrons across the main exhibits, and represented a beacon of hope and joy for our community.

The Lights On Stratford 2021 theme was JOURNEY – “an act of traveling from one place to another.” As we find safe ways to emerge from the constraints of having to stay home, missing our friends, family or favourite places; the sense of wonder and delight experienced within a journey will be celebrated anew. This year, Lights On Stratford brought the adventure of travel to the public spaces of Stratford by showcasing exhibits of light that explored motion, transportation, worldly and other-worldly landmarks.

Market Square was brought to life with Sky Castle – a dreamy, interactive sound and light installation journeying from Australia to Canada for its North American premiere at Lights On Stratford. Sky Castle featured a cluster of 20 inflatable arches that evoke the joy and hope that rainbows bring after every storm. As visitors moved through the arches, their movement powered and expanded the melodic xylophone soundscape stimulating colour changes in each arch.

The Festival also brought back Made-in-Stratford light displays which included the Shakespearean Gardens of a Thousand Lights, Journey to the Stars which transformed Tom Patterson Island into an interstellar journey of light, and a spectacular display at Stratford Festival's Avon Theatre. As in 2020, storefronts and locations throughout the City also participated with featured shareable moments of unique light displays and experiences.

We've received consistent feedback from our community and visitors with sincere gratitude for creating something beautiful and hopeful during these challenging times:

“Thank you to all the artists, staff and crew that make Lights On Stratford so successful. Bringing light to our community during these difficult and challenging times brings us together safely and brings us joy.”

Mayor Dan Mathieson

“Oh to be bathed in the hugs of colour and sound! The photos don't do the experience justice. It was great to see the smiles on all the kids and BIG kids! Thank you #lightsonstratford” Barb H.

“Thank you for bringing happiness to all. It's wonderful.” Tammy S.

Stratford is home to some of the world’s best artists, lighting designers, prop builders and creative minds. Lights On Stratford harnessed this precious resource of local talent with over 100 professionals that crafted a truly unique experience. The beacons of Stratford-made light sculptures, displays, exhibits and projections attracts and amazes visitors, who in turn strengthen and grow a robust and diversified year-round tourism economy. This provides much-needed support to the myriad Stratford businesses that help define the character of our city and rely on tourism for their survival.

It takes a village to raise a lights festival. This festival is only possible with the amazing support from our community, partners, sponsors, funders and patrons, along with the founding members investStratford, Downtown Stratford BIA, RT04 and the City of Stratford. With Destination Stratford as the lead organization, plans are underway for the 3rd annual Lights On Stratford in 2022/23.

Earned Media

The second annual Lights On Stratford Festival gained media coverage across Canada including features and mentions in local media papers and radio segments as well as coverage in various print and online sources including: Toronto Star, CTV News, Narcity, Canada Travel & Lifestyle Magazine, Rogers TV and through Destination Ontario’s extensive social channels. In addition, many hosted bloggers teased about the upcoming festival in their summer and fall blog posts.

Lights On Stratford also broadcast the new 30-sec video in early 2022 across CTV London, CTV Kitchener and CP24.

Social Media Engagement:

LOS/DS Social Media Engagement:

(FB: 38,290 | IG: 11,539 | TW: 3,056 | TT: 260 | LI: 75)

TOTAL: 53,220

User Generated Social Engagement: 3,970,072

TOTAL SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT: 4,023,292

User Generated Content:

Instagram Posts/Stories: 1,047

Facebook: 901

Twitter: 167

TikTok/ Reels: 37

TOTAL UGC: 2,152

2021 website geo-location: *Stratford 24%, Toronto 17%, Kitchener 7%, London 7%, Brampton 5%, Hamilton 4%, Waterloo 3%, Mississauga 2%, North Bay 2%, Woodstock 2%, Baden 2%, Vaughan*



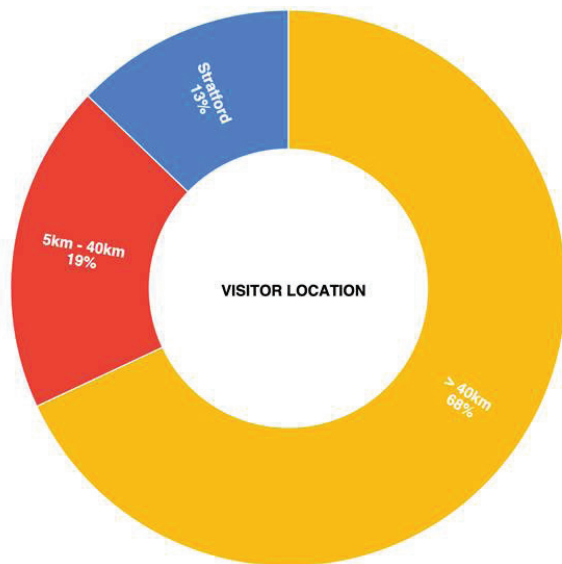
LightsOnStratford.ca December 1-31

Site visits:

2021 - 22,604 | 2020 - 11,528

Site users:

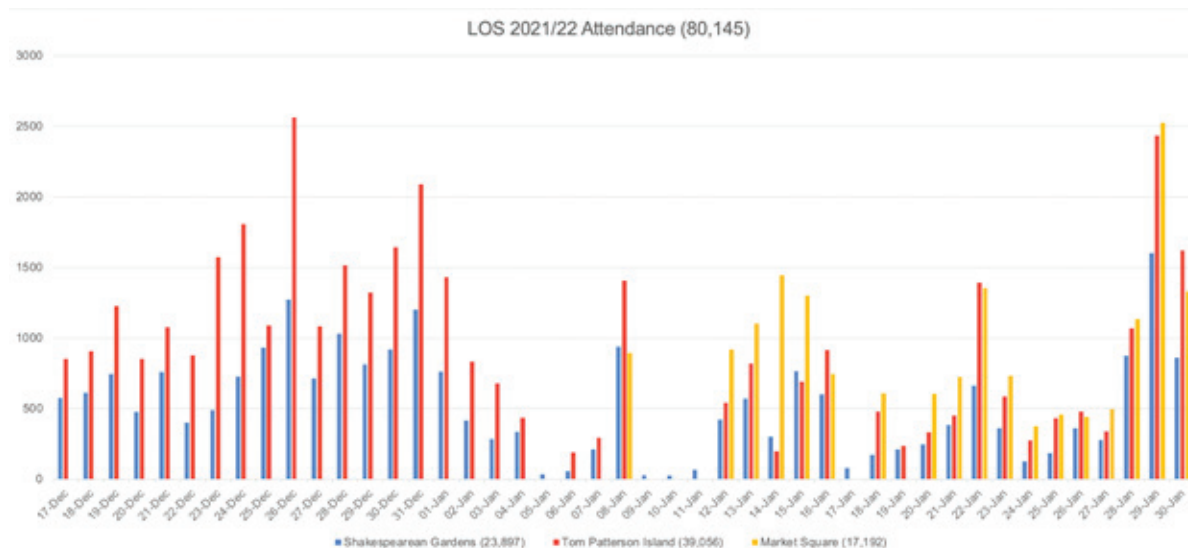
2021 - 16,880 | 2020 - 8,516



“It was GREAT this year! Thanks for making it happen Destination Stratford - I can’t wait to see what you bring to the table next season.” Mellissa Q.

“Innovative and place-based public lighting is vital for winter towns and cities to combat seasonal isolation and encourage people to wander, socialize, dream and shop. It’s even more important during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Way to go Zac Gribble and the team at Destination Stratford for delivering another outstanding year of #LightsOnStratford. We were thrilled to support through the My Main Street program with support from Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario” Jared K.

“Our family cannot wait to return to our favourite place in the world... thank you for keeping the lights on for us. In the meantime, we’ll continue to think about all of the artists, creators, and small business owners that encapsulate the magic of Stratford!” Matt R.



3. DESTINATION MANAGEMENT

Destination Stratford continues to prioritize destination management year-round; working closely with various community stakeholders and the City of Stratford to enhance the destination and ultimately increase the desirability to visitors. The organization continues to play a large tourism advocacy role, as well as a strong contributor to finding strategic ways to support economic recovery.



Downtown Dollar sales continued to be strong in 2021 with over \$150,000 in sales

Frontline staff at Destination Stratford facilitate the sale of BIA Downtown Dollars, which has significantly impacted the downtown businesses.

The expansion of our 2020 interactive digital maps on VisitStratford.ca were a tremendous success to guide visitors and locals around the city based on interests, location and events.

5,042

Dining

3,694

Accommodations

14,215

Stratford Trails

64

Visual Arts

85,164

Lights On Stratford

2,621

Self-Guided Audio Walking Tours

ONLINE INTERACTIVE MAP VIEWS FROM FEBRUARY 18TH ONWARDS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

From: Social Research and Planning Council - United Way Perth-Huron

Destination Stratford works hard to attract thousands of tourists to Stratford each year with events running year-round. Now, they're focusing on working toward positive change in the local tourism sector by certifying as a living wage employer.

"As we continue to navigate our collective economic recovery from the pandemic, we have an opportunity to rethink and reimagine our tourism sector," says Zac Gribble, Executive Director of Destination Stratford. "Increased tourism workforce development and opportunity are critically important, and we recognize that a living wage is a step in the right direction."

"We appreciate Destination Stratford stepping up and supporting the living wage," added United Way Perth-Huron Executive Director Ryan Erb. "The tourism sector is a huge part of the local economy and by certifying as a living wage employer, Destination Stratford is committing to helping build a stronger community. We hope their decision inspires other local tourism-based businesses to follow suit."

Based on a 35-hour work week, the Perth-Huron living wage is calculated regularly using local data and took into account the living expenses of a weighted average of family types including a family of four, a single mother supporting a seven-year-old child and a single adult, once government transfers and deductions were taken into account. Everyday expenses in the calculation included food, housing, utilities, childcare and transportation. For more information about Perth-Huron's living wage, visit perthhuron.unitedway.ca.



Destination Stratford pushing for regulations allowing short-term rentals beyond just primary residences

As city planning staff prepare to bring a final draft of Stratford's comprehensive zoning bylaw to a special meeting of council for one more round of public and councillor feedback, Destination Stratford is pushing for an amendment to the proposed bylaw that would see less-prescriptive regulations for short-term-rental accommodations.

After being asked for its advice on proposed rules that would allow short-term rental accommodations in Stratford's residential neighbourhoods, the city's tourism agency wants the city to remove a clause that limits operation to just primary homes.

Destination Stratford executive director Zac Gribble met with city planning staff twice in January to offer his thoughts – based on research on the local market and other tourism areas in the province like Prince Edward County and Niagara-on-the-Lake – on whether council's proposed regulations, which would allow licensed short-term rentals in principal residences only for an annual maximum of 180 days, would meet the needs of the local tourism industry.

“Much of the recommendation makes sense, and certainly licensing and having all accommodation types (offers) an even playing field in terms of being regulated. ... In fact most of the people in the industry I talked to supported that notion,” Gribble said.

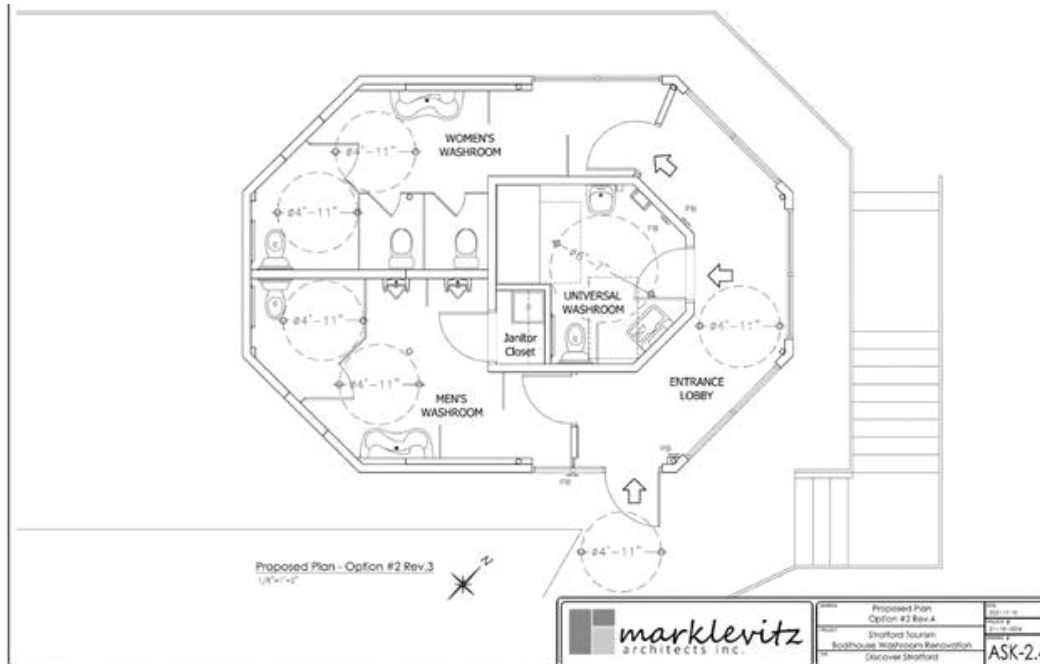
“Where we have a bit of a differing view is precluding the rental of entire dwelling units, save for primary residences. ... That particular accommodation type is the fastest-growing segment within accommodation, and it's very unusual for a principal homeowner to be renting out their own house in that respect. There will be people who choose not to visit Stratford because this accommodation type won't be available.”

With demand growing for accommodations that offer the privacy and amenities only available through the rental of full houses, apartments or condos, Gribble said the city may not be able to keep pace with future tourism growth if its regulations hamper the ability of local operators to meet the needs of all tourists.

Tourism / Community Infrastructure Projects

Boathouse Washrooms

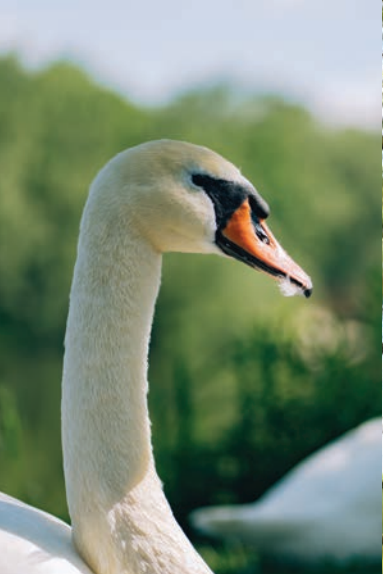
Destination Stratford has successfully secured government funding for the 2021/22 Boathouse Public Washroom Expansion Project. Public washrooms serve our entire rural community and are fundamental to being an inclusive society. This project seeks to reimagine, rejuvenate and modernize the dated and seasonal Boathouse public washrooms centrally located within Stratford's downtown core by increasing the number of washroom stalls from 3 to 6, winterizing the facility for year-round use, improving accessibility, and creating a safe, attractive space for local residents and visitors.



Community Services and Board of Park Management

Destination Stratford continued its ongoing partnership with the Board of Park Management and Community Services to invest in our park system with 2021 infrastructure projects such as the Porous Pave performance stage, island drainage solution and summer pop-up lighting displays on Tom Patterson Island, along with installing permanent AI Fresco tables in Memorial Gardens.





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