

By The Numbers: Tourism - How Are We Doing?

Tourism is an important export for many communities. It is often seen as an essential component of economic development initiatives, and this is especially true for Grey and Bruce counties.

But how are we doing?

First, let's take a look at the big picture. The Ontario tourism "pie" includes domestic, over-seas, and US markets. Ontario draws most of its tourists from within the domestic piece, primarily from the rest of Ontario. This portion of the domestic tourism pie has increased from an average of less than 70% in the 1980s and 1990s, to about 74% in the late 2000s. Since 2001 there has been a steady increase in the share of home-grown tourism, partly due to a decrease in the number of US tourists and an increase in the number of domestic tourists. In 2009 the share of domestic tourism was 82% (about 83.7 million visits). The US share has seen a steady drop since 2001, from 26% to 11% (2009). The overseas market has remained steady since the 1980s, at about 2%. A high for over-seas was reached in 1997 (2.4% or 2.6 million visits) and a low in 1983 (1.0% or 1.3 million). In 2009, over-seas tourism to Ontario accounted for about 1.9% or 1.9 million.

In the context of Ontario's domestic tourism environment, how are Grey and Bruce doing? We draw tourists from within Ontario, almost exclusively, with an average of 99.9% of tourists coming from elsewhere in Ontario (2006 to 2008). In the period 1996 to 1998, Grey and Bruce attracted an average of 4.2% of all Ontario's tourist visits, and for the period 2006 to 2008, the average dropped to 3.8%. Bruce had done better than Grey in the first period, (average of 2.6% versus 1.6%), with the reverse being true for the second period (Bruce at 1.7% versus Grey at 2.1%).

Looking beyond the percentages, what do the actual numbers look like? Combined, Grey and Bruce counties have increased about 5.5% over the two periods (1996-1998 and 2006-2008) to an average of 3.1 million annual visits. Separately, Grey did better with an increase of about 58% to an average of 1.7 million visits compared to Bruce which saw a 26% decrease to an average of 1.3 million visits. During this period, Ontario tourist visits increased about 15% to an average of 81.0 million domestic visits.

What does the economic impact look like? Tourism generated about \$774 million for Grey and \$537 million for Bruce for the period 2006 to 2008. This averages out at about \$258 million per year for Grey and \$179 for Bruce. At present, Grey's tourism receipts are trending higher and Bruce's are trending lower. The same trend is seen with average spending; Grey's was about \$185 per person in 2008, up from \$130 in 2006, and Bruce's was \$120, down from \$140 in 2006.

Other indicators help us understand the Grey Bruce tourism industry. Same-day travel, (or day-trippers), has remained about 50% for Grey when comparing the two time periods. Bruce has seen a shift to more day-trippers, which averaged 28% in the first period and about 37% more recently. Seasonality certainly has an impact on tourism for Grey and Bruce. The strongest season for Bruce continues to be the third quarter (July-September). About 58% (2001) of all travel occurs then and now averages 52% (2006 to 2008). In 2001, Grey's tourism was pretty much distributed evenly across the seasons (22% to 28%), but this has changed somewhat. Recently, Grey has two seasons (January to March and July to September) trend higher, averaging out at 30% and 33% respectively. Keeping in mind that a three-year period does not provide enough data to establish statistically significant seasonal trends, there are some general observations that can be made. Bruce has two