



Connected Experiences, Sustainable Growth: The Power of Culture and Tourism in Ontario

An outlook from the OCC Arts, Culture, and Tourism (ACT) Working Group



Ontario's culture and tourism sectors generate \$62 billion in GDP and support over 595,000 jobs.ⁱ ⁱⁱ In 2024, Ontario led Canada in tourism, attracting 46.9 per cent of foreign visitors, while its culture sector contributed 45 per cent of the national cultural GDP in 2022.ⁱⁱⁱ Beyond economic impact, these sectors foster belonging, diversity, and community well-being.

Despite their significance, arts, culture, and tourism are often undervalued and treated as discretionary spending rather than essential economic investments. Strengthening these sectors requires strategic investment in workforce development, innovation, market access, and inclusive experiences.

Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) members believe that arts, culture, and tourism are not just nice-to-haves; they are foundational assets that drive regional economic development, attract global talent, revitalize local communities, and improve quality of life. Building on insights from the OCC's *Arts, Culture, and Tourism (ACT) Working Group*, this outlook highlights four strategic imperatives: Culture and tourism as economic enablers; a strong and sustainable culture and tourism workforce; regional economic development, and community well-being; and cross-sectoral benefits for Ontario businesses.

CULTURE AND TOURISM AS ECONOMIC ENABLERS

Ontario's culture and tourism sectors are key economic engines, driving GDP, employment, and government revenue. From world-class institutions to iconic destinations, these sectors fuel vitality across urban, rural, Indigenous, and Northern communities.

In Niagara for instance, tourism supports over 40,000 jobs across 2,800+ businesses, drawing 13 million visitors annually who spend \$2.4 billion in the region.^{iv} Its impact goes beyond hospitality, with every \$100 million in direct tourism revenue generating \$69 million in indirect output across other industries.^v

To unlock these sectors' full potential, Ontario needs a comprehensive strategy that embeds culture and tourism into economic action plans. Strategic solutions include investing in purpose-built cultural infrastructure, boosting off-season growth, and supporting capacity-building for institutions, organizations, SMEs, and artists.

Spotlight: Sudbury's Place des Arts

Sudbury's [Place des Arts \(PdA\)](#) is the first multidisciplinary arts centre in Northern Ontario, driving cultural accessibility, economic growth, and downtown revitalization. With a \$15 million economic output, PdA bridges the arts and business through rental spaces, cross-sector partnerships, and community engagement. To meet rising workforce needs in Sudbury and the province's culture and tourism sectors, PdA is developing the *Institut de professionnalisation artistique et culturelle* (IPAC), a training hub focused on arts management, performance skills, business acumen, and career development for Ontario's Francophone artistic community.

A STRONG CULTURE AND TOURISM WORKFORCE

A strong culture and tourism sector relies on a skilled, sustainable workforce - one that has rebounded since the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2024, Ontario's tourism sector employed over 800,000 workers^{vi}, while the culture sector supported over 273,000 direct jobs - nearly double Quebec's and more than twice British Columbia's.^{vii}

Although these sectors have shown resilience, they continue to face workforce shortages, unclear career pathways, and underfunded post-secondary programs. Ontario also lacks real-time culture and tourism data, especially in rural, remote, underserved, and Indigenous communities, hindering organizations and communities from adapting to changing workforce demands.

Building a future-ready culture and tourism workforce requires sustained investments in innovative solutions that address labour needs. This includes partnering with post-secondary institutions to offer micro-credentials, apprenticeships, and flexible training pathways, and recognizing certain culture and tourism roles (e.g., stage carpenters, exhibit fabricators, woodworkers, lighting programmers) as skilled trades. Modernizing data collection is also key to tracking workforce trends, demographics, and regional investments for better informed decision-making.

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

Culture and tourism assets are powerful drivers of regional development, community revitalization, and quality of life. From Franco-Ontarian hubs to Indigenous and multicultural festivals, they preserve important Canadian identities while fueling local economic growth.

However, many culture and tourism organizations face serious risks from regional disparities, seasonal revenue patterns, transportation challenges, and funding gaps. According to the Ontario Non-Profit Network, 50 per cent of non-profit arts, culture, heritage and tourism, community development, and housing organizations are at high risk of closing within three years, with nearly half unable to sustain operations beyond 12 months.^{viii}

To enhance the economic impact of Ontario's culture and tourism sectors, government should expand marketing funding to support artists and businesses in discovering new customers and markets; Ontario would also benefit from a brand strategy that positions arts and culture at the heart of both visitor experiences and investment opportunities. Targeted financing tools, such as flexible loans, grants, and public-private funds, are also essential to the sustainability and growth of artists and organizations.

■ **Spotlight: Toronto Caribbean Carnival**

Since 1967, the [Toronto Caribbean Carnival](#) has celebrated Caribbean culture and grown into one of North America's largest cultural festivals. It attracts 1.2 million attendees, including 180,000 tourists, contributing over \$500 million to Canada's GDP, generating \$182.7 million in tax revenue, supporting 3,000+ small businesses, and creating 3,300+ jobs. Beyond its economic impact, the festival strengthens community-building, social cohesion, a sense of belonging, and cultural identity, where art and culture converge.

CROSS-SECTORAL BENEFITS FOR ONTARIO BUSINESSES

Culture and tourism create powerful spillover effects that boost competitiveness across Ontario's business community, strengthening hospitality, retail, and local ecosystems while elevating the province's global profile. The Prince Edward County Chamber of Commerce, for example, shared that these sectors act as economic multipliers, with businesses such as restaurants, hotels, and shops seeing 50 per cent higher activity during peak tourist seasons.

Arts and culture tourists spend more, stay longer, and are more likely to visit from overseas. While only 13 per cent of trips to Ontario include arts or culture activities, they account for 30 per cent of total spending.^{ix} Nearly 40 per cent of these visitors stay three days or more, compared to just 13 per cent of non-arts tourists, and one in three international visitors engage in cultural experiences. These trends highlight the strategic importance of arts and culture in driving tourism and maximizing per-visitor returns.

Since culture and tourism have strong cross-sector linkages, policies and partnerships that foster entrepreneurship and business scaling, especially in collaboration with academia, can help organizations explore emerging markets and develop new products, services, and experiences.^x

The OCC's Arts, Culture, and Tourism (ACT) Working Group convenes industry, government, and academia to strengthen sector resilience, advance a comprehensive strategy for long-term economic growth, and enhance community prosperity across Ontario

ABOUT THE ONTARIO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) is the indispensable partner of business and Canada's largest, most influential provincial chamber. It is an independent, non-profit advocacy and member services organization representing a diverse network of 60,000 members. The OCC convenes, mobilizes and empowers businesses and local chambers in pursuit of its purpose: to bring inclusive and sustainable prosperity to Ontario's businesses, workers, and communities.

ⁱ <https://occ.ca/our-publications/ontarios-creative-industries-brief/>

ⁱⁱ <https://occ.ca/wp-content/uploads/State-of-the-Ontario-Tourism-Industry-Report-December-13-2022-FINAL.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.bdc.ca/en/articles-tools/blog/outlook-for-canada-tourism-economy-in-2025>

^{iv} <https://niagaracanada.com/key-sectors/tourism/>

^v <https://niagaracanada.com/key-sectors/tourism/>

^{vi} https://tourismhr.ca/labour-market-information/labour-force-survey/#elementor-toc__heading-anchor-0

^{vii} <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv!recreate.action?pid=1410020101&selectedNodeIds=3D253,3D354&checkedLevels=0D1,0D2,1D1,2D1&refPeriods=20241001,20241001&dimensionLayouts=layout2,layout2,layout3,layout2&vectorDisplay=false>

^{viii} <https://theonnc.ca/publication/2024-survey-policy-report/>

^{ix} <https://www.arts.on.ca/oac/media/oac/Publications/Research%20Reports%20EN-FR/Economic%20Contribution%20of%20the%20Arts/OAC-2025-Impact-Report-web-FINAL-s.pdf>

^x <https://www.arts.on.ca/oac/media/oac/Publications/Research%20Reports%20EN-FR/Economic%20Contribution%20of%20the%20Arts/OAC-2025-Impact-Report-web-FINAL-s.pdf>