

Tourism Nanaimo Summer 2025 Performance Report

Prepared for: Nanaimo City Council

Prepared by: Tourism Nanaimo

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Land Acknowledgement

Tourism Nanaimo respectfully acknowledges the Snuneymuxw First Nation's enduring connection to this land. We are committed to building relationships rooted in respect, collaboration, and mutual growth. Our work seeks to elevate the stories of the Snuneymuxw people and embrace opportunities to connect with the land and its history. This commitment to learning, compassion, and reconciliation continues to guide our efforts.

Setting the Context

Summer 2025 offered a unique moment for Canadian tourism. The latest [Leger Report](#) on Canadian Travel Intentions and Emerging Trends revealed that 55% of Canadians planned to take a leisure trip this year, up from 47% in 2024. Domestic travel surged, with 77% of respondents planning to travel within Canada — a 69% year-over-year increase, while U.S.-bound travel fell sharply.

This shift was driven by concerns over trade tensions, political climate, safety, poor exchange rates, and a diminished sense of welcome. For Nanaimo, this meant a prime opportunity to capture spending redirected from the U.S. and position the city as a desirable, close-to-home destination for Canadians seeking authentic, experience-driven travel.

Strategic Approach

Tourism Nanaimo's work this summer focused on turning these [national travel trends](#) into local results. Our strategy centered on five key priorities:

1. Capitalize on Rising Domestic Travel Demand

With domestic tourism booming amid growing anti-Trump sentiment, there was a key opportunity to capture spending redirected from U.S. travel. Many Canadians were

seeking local alternatives, making it an ideal time to highlight affordable, culturally rich, and unique experiences across Canada.

- Investments in marketing campaigns promoted “close-to-home” exploration, emphasizing hidden gems, nature, and community-driven experiences.
- Use of “pride and proximity” messaging tapped into national pride and a deeper connection to Canada’s landscapes, culture, and people.

Nanaimo’s Actions: We continued to target Vancouver and Lower Mainland audiences while also broadening our Canadian reach, with a new Brand Awareness Campaign launched in Toronto last quarter.

2. Leverage Younger Travellers as Catalysts

Canadians aged 18–54 continue to lead the surge in interprovincial travel and are eager to explore new parts of the country.

- Continued use of digital-first campaigns to showcase authentic, experience-rich travel – highlighting adventure, culture, and local flavour.
- Featuring user-generated content such as Instagram photos, TikTok clips, and YouTube videos to build credibility and word-of-mouth appeal.

Nanaimo Actions: Our user-generated content continues to be our strongest performing. We are actively building out our social media partnerships and content generation and remain active on major platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok.

3. Strengthen Regional Collaboration

With interprovincial travel on the rise, there’s an opportunity for tourism operators and destination management organizations to collaborate across regions.

- Creation of joint itineraries or bundled promotions that link nearby destinations through themes like food, culture, or nature.
- Cross-promote events and attractions to make multi-stop trips more seamless and attractive.

Nanaimo's Actions: We work actively with Destination BC and other communities to support multi-stop itinerary development and media hosting as well as maintaining active partnerships across the region and Province.

4. Trust and Confidence Among Canadian Travellers

With U.S.-bound travel in steep decline, concerns around safety, political climate, and feeling unwelcome are major deterrents for Canadian and International travellers.

Messaging focused on;

- Prioritizing messaging that reassures Canadians and International travellers about safety, hospitality, and respectful treatment.
- Ensuring transparency in addressing concerns and highlighting the destination's inclusive values and welcoming, cross-cultural environment.

Nanaimo's Actions: "Come as you are, you'll fit right in" messaging is still strong, and we are newly adding accessibility and inclusion resources and information to Meetings/Conferences & Sports Event Planner toolkits.

5. Target the Most Open Segments

Canadian men, younger travellers, and Albertans remain more open to U.S. travel and are less affected by recent barriers.

- Focus marketing on niche motivators such as visiting family and friends, attending sports events, or cross-border shopping.

Nanaimo's Actions: We are always exploring niche markets, focusing on micro influencers and one-of-a-kind events.

Summer Performance Highlights

The results of this change in travel behaviour and the resulting marketing approach were clear. Nanaimo achieved its strongest summer on record, with occupancy reaching 88% in July and 93% in August; the highest levels recorded since tracking began in 2000. This performance not only surpassed pre-pandemic numbers but outpaced comparable communities and the provincial average overall.

Revenue per available room (RevPAR) also grew substantially: up 12% in June, 21% in July, and 20% in August compared to 2024. Visitor data shows that most travelers came from Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland, confirming the effectiveness of our targeting, but also revealed growth opportunities in Alberta, the rest of BC, and international markets.

Key Activities and Engagement

Tourism Nanaimo continued to strengthen its connection with stakeholders and the community throughout the summer.

- **Stakeholder Outreach:** Reached 88 businesses with updates on business listings, Rainbow Registered resources, the LGBTQIA+ Travel Page, and the Nanaimo Unlocked Pass.
- **Industry Engagement:** Completed 21 partner interviews, collected 65 survey responses, and hosted the 2026 Annual Planning Workshop. Among the feedback was a feeling that “Tourism Nanaimo feels more real now — more of a presence in the community, not just a logo.”

- **Sport Tourism and Conferences:** Managed the first Sport Hosting Grant intake, supporting eight events that are projected to generate more than \$3.1M in economic impact. Hosted 14 conferences year-to-date, welcoming over 3,600 delegates and generating 3,510 room nights, with 11 more multiday conferences booked for the remainder of 2025.

Looking Ahead: Opportunities

As we approach the final quarter of the year, several opportunities stand out according to National Reports:

Business & Conventions

- Vancouver is hosting major conventions in late 2025, including the Alcoholics Anonymous Global Convention (60,000 attendees)
- This will create significant spillover demand across the accommodation and hospitality sector
- Positioning other regions (beyond Vancouver) to capture overflow or pre/post-convention travel is a clear opportunity.

Indigenous Tourism Growth

- Federal funding (\$2.7M) is supporting new Signature Indigenous Tourism Experiences, expanding fall/winter offerings and infrastructure
- There's strong potential to highlight Indigenous-led tourism as part of seasonal programming and reconciliation commitments.

International Positioning

- Despite flat growth in 2025, groundwork for 2026 rebound (U.S. visits projected +10.5%, overseas +9.8%) can start now.
- Fall 2025 offers a window to reassure U.S. travelers through marketing campaigns and strengthen overseas partnerships to capture growth in 2026

Domestic Market Leverage

- With strong fall demand, opportunities exist in regional campaigns, shoulder-season packages, and experience-based promotions to convert short-haul travel interest into overnight stays.
- Local events, cultural tourism, and food/wine trails can capture late-season leisure travelers.

Fall Campaign Spotlight: Not a Resort Town

To capitalize on the domestic market opportunity and sustain summer momentum, Tourism Nanaimo launched the **Not a Resort Town** campaign.

This campaign reframes fall as an ideal time to visit Nanaimo. While many resort destinations wind down after Labour Day, Nanaimo remains vibrant, lived-in, and welcoming. The campaign highlights what makes Nanaimo different; its arts and culture, its festivals, and its working-harbour charm, and invites visitors to see fall not as an “off-season,” but as the best time to connect with the city.

A partner playbook is being developed to help stakeholders align their storytelling with the campaign, ensuring a consistent voice across the community and strengthening future marketing efforts.

Conclusion

The summer of 2025 was a milestone for Nanaimo's tourism sector, with record-breaking occupancy and double-digit revenue growth demonstrating the success of our strategies. The **Not a Resort Town** campaign builds on this momentum by converting domestic demand into overnight stays and sustaining economic impact well into the shoulder season.

Tourism Nanaimo remains committed to:

- Aligning campaigns with market opportunities
- Empowering local businesses through shared storytelling tools
- Growing awareness across Canada and internationally
- Keeping Nanaimo top-of-mind for travelers year-round

Together, we are proving that Nanaimo is not just a stop along the way, it is a destination worth staying for.