

EMBARGOED MEDIA ADVISORY

Embargoed until 12:01 a.m., November 17, 2016

\$16 Billion Ontario Tourism Gap Requires a Dedicated Government Strategy: Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce **Lost Revenue From the Province's Tourism Industry Impacting Job Creation and Growth**

Windsor, ON – Today, the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce (WERCC) in partnership with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) has released new data that reveals a significant tourism gap when compared to international growth rates.

According to the organization's report, *Closing the Tourism Gap: Creating a Long-Term Advantage for Ontario*, Ontario has foregone nearly \$16 billion in visitor spending between 2006 and 2012 by not keeping up with global growth trends. While this year has been a strong year for tourism in Ontario, it is important that this recent growth is translated into long-term, sustainable gains in tourism visitation.

“The tourism industry is an important economic driver in Windsor-Essex, as in many other communities across the province,” said WERCC President & CEO Matt Marchand. “However, through research outlined in this report, we’ve found that Ontario is missing out on significant tourism growth in comparison to international trends. Industry and the province as a whole must take steps to boost the province as a destination for U.S. and international travelers to close the tourism gap.”

“Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island has long recognized that the tourism industry for our region is an economic generator and job creator,” said Gordon Orr, CEO, Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island. “The recommendations in the OCC report help to shine a spotlight on the need to continue the momentum already underway by the Ministry of Tourism and Ontario tourism partners by elevating the conversation on the desire to focus more resources toward this vital industry,” Orr added.

In Southwestern Ontario, tourism comprises 3.1% of total employment for the region and accounts for 2.2% of the total GDP.

“We also need to take steps to increase the same-day visitors entering Ontario, which have dropped from approximately 22 million in 1998 to 7 million in 2015 (see figure six in the report). Hopefully this report is a first step in improving on these trends,” said Marchand.

While visitation is down, receipts are up due to the domestic tourism sector (see figure seven in the report).

The report identifies a number of challenges faced by tourism operators and the broader tourism community in Ontario, while presenting a series of action items to address them. The WERCC is encouraged that the government is moving ahead with an action plan for the province’s tourism industry, a key consideration highlighted by its membership.

Some of the key recommendations in the report include:

WINDSOR-ESSEX REGIONAL Chamber of Commerce

- Developing an Ontario tourism strategic plan with measurable targets and timelines.
- Working with tourism operators to reduce regulatory and cost burdens, and add tourism to the Red Tape Challenge.
- Creating a predictable multi-year funding model for Ontario tourism marketing.

To produce this report, the OCC convened a group of Ontario's leading thinkers within the tourism community including Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island. The report builds on previous initiatives undertaken by members of the tourism industry and further substantiates the need for a focused and measured approach targeted towards supporting the future of tourism in Ontario.

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