

# Chamber of Commerce wants 'tourism gap' closed



ROSEANN DANESE, WINDSOR STAR

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In this August 2012 photo, a sparrow sits atop a parking sign at Windsor's downtown Ontario Tourism office. *NICK BRANCACCIO / WINDSOR STAR*

Ontario and the Windsor-Essex region are losing out on tourism dollars by not keeping up with global

## growth in the sector.

A report released Thursday by the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, shows a significant tourism gap here when compared to international growth rates.

Ontario has foregone nearly \$16 billion in visitor spending between 2006 and 2012 by not keeping up with global growth trends, according to the report Closing the Tourism Gap. Figures examining dollars lost in Windsor-Essex were not available, but Matt Marchand, president of the local chamber, said the provincial numbers reflect what's happening here.

"Part of the exercise today is to put it on the agenda, to say, 'look, we're definitely under performing. How do we work together to get that number back up so more tourists come to Ontario and more tourists come to Windsor-Essex?'"

The report calls on the province to develop an Ontario tourism strategy, with targets and timelines for reaching those targets. It also wants less red tape for tourism operators and more funding for marketing campaigns.

Marchand said steps need to be taken to increase the number of same-day visitors entering Ontario, which has dropped from 22 million in 1998 to seven million in 2015.

Marchand said it's the first time the chambers have collaborated with local tourism bureaus to gather data to present to the Ontario government. The exercise has been eye-opening.

"We see this as an opportunity to get in front of the provincial government and say, 'hey look, here's the actual hard data,' because often times policy is driven by data."

The report found the domestic tourism sector (which involves Ontario residents visiting other parts of the province) has increased. It's the one piece of positive news, but domestic tourists do not generate the same amount of dollars from foreign tourists.

"Domestic tourism has been holding the tourism sector up across Ontario," Marchand said. "But the biggest bang for the buck is from foreigners staying here."

Gord Orr, CEO of Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island, said 16,000 jobs in Windsor-Essex are in the tourism sector, or one in every 20 jobs.

"Tourism is without question an economic driver and a job creator," Orr said. "A lot of those jobs are seasonal, but at the end of the day, our attractions, our hotels, our destination points, they all have people who are working on a year-round basis."

[rdanese@postmedia.com \(mailto:rdanese@postmedia.com\)](mailto:rdanese@postmedia.com)

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**Gregory Paul Heil** · Principal Architect at Heil Partnership, Inc.

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