

Ontario tourism gap has implications for Windsor region: Marchand

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Windsor and Essex County is in line with the rest of the province's underperformance in the tourism sector relative to global trends, the president of the local chamber of commerce has said.

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce released a report Thursday which estimated Ontario has a gap over \$16 billion in tourism revenue. It found the province showed an increase in 2016 after a decade of "significant decline," but there is still more to be done to catch up with the rest of the world.

"I think the overall trends we're experiencing across Ontario are certainly applicable to Windsor-Essex," said Matt Marchand of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce. "We've seen the decline certainly in day trips in the Windsor-Essex region for the last number of years."

Global trends show international tourism arrivals will grow by 3.3 per cent annually up to 2030, resulting in 1.8 billion total arrivals.

The report does not provide any statistics for the Windsor area, but it does have some information for different regions of the province.

In the area identified as Southwest Ontario, which includes everything south of the London area, tourism accounts for 3.1 per cent of total employment and 2.2 per cent of the total gross domestic product for the area, based on 2012 numbers.

In those respects, Southwest Ontario is the third-lowest performing region in Canada out of the 15 regions identified in the report.

Marchand said Canada's low dollar should be a draw for encouraging Americans to increase their trips to Windsor and the province.

"We have tremendous nature opportunities in the region in addition to the city activities," he said. "We think we've got a great product. The question is how do we collectively market that product into the U.S."

In a statement, Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island CEO Gordon Orr said tourism has long been recognized as an "economic generator and job creator" for the region.

"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," he said.

The report calls on the province to make a strategic plan with actual targets in terms of either number of visitors or revenue. It also asks for more public data to be ready more quickly since the latest data is from 2013, which doesn't help tourism operators planning for 2017, according to the report.

"I think it's a collective effort," said Marchand. "I think we have to come together across the province and have a joint strategic plan that we can all execute and we want targets, we want timelines. A part of that too is we need stable funding that's predictable."

Tom Morrison is a Windsor-based journalist. @TomMorrison12 on Twitter



Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce CEO Matt Marchand speaks during a press conference at the WindsorEssex Economic Development Corporation April 23, 2014.