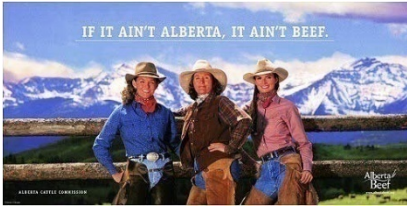


# ALBERTA CULINARY TOURISM STRATEGY

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*Alberta Beef*



*Pyrogies*



*River Café, Calgary*



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Over the past five years, a variety of foodservice and tourism constituents in Alberta have supported programs, namely Dine Alberta, ChompAroundAlberta.com, and Growing Alberta, all of which helped to lay a strong foundation to further develop culinary tourism in Alberta. As interest in culinary tourism grew among consumers, a momentum was building among the trade in Alberta to take advantage of the same. The seeds of a more formal development of Alberta's culinary tourism strategy were finally sown in February 2008 with a full-day workshop for Alberta's foodservice and tourism partners, hosted by Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. A subsequent meeting in April was followed by a request for a proposal in July 2008. International Culinary Tourism Development was selected to complete the culinary tourism strategy for Alberta. The strategy was delivered to key stakeholders in February 2009.

The preparation of the Alberta Culinary Tourism Strategy included an analysis of best practices in culinary tourism development in specific culinary tourism destinations: British Columbia, Indiana, New Zealand, Ontario, Oregon and Scotland. Scotland continues to be the leader in culinary tourism for several reasons: consumer marketing; cooperative marketing with other tourism niches; market ready criteria; and investment of time, money and effort. Scotland's success is largely attributable to its investment of financial and human resources in culinary tourism. While the other destinations are at various levels of development, one common denominator is clear. Programs without sufficient funding die on the vine.

An evaluation of the demographics and psychographic profiles of culinary travellers themselves was undertaken. This analysis largely drew on excellent Canadian data from 2003 and 2006, as well as newer data from a 2007 report by the U.S.-based International Culinary Tourism Association. Data were consistent over the years and across reports, viz. culinary travelers are largely similar in their preferences and tend to be better educated with more money to spend. They also enjoy equally both culture and recreation experiences. The data also showed that culinary travelers are explorers, and cuisine is a product that can be applied to almost all travelers to a destination, not just wealthy ones.

Market ready criteria were compared for British Columbia, Indiana, Nova Scotia and Scotland. The conclusions from this review were clear. Visitors, and also residents, expect some kind of assessment, at the very least for restaurants. Criteria can, and should, be applied across the entire spectrum of culinary tourism experiences. The most common criteria relate to food quality and service, but components such as ambiance,

authenticity, and the overall experience are also important. Transferring qualitative criteria assessments into a rating system will help consumers choose the culinary tourism experiences that best match their quantitative needs and expectations.

A SWOT analysis was completed with key stakeholders at two different working sessions. Stakeholders felt Alberta's strength lies in the momentum established by the people passionate about culinary tourism. Seasonality will always be a limitation. The lack of a coordinated, integrated effort to develop and promote culinary tourism was identified as a current weakness. Opportunities for culinary tourism lie in the talented chefs found in the province and the numerous unique culinary experiences.

The best practices review, input from stakeholders at the two working sessions as well as additional information gleaned from telephone interviews with other key stakeholders and secondary research were used to arrive at recommendations for the overall culinary tourism strategy for Alberta. These are summarized in the chart below.

The recommendation for the best organizational structure is to use an existing non-profit society such as the Alberta Hotel and Lodging Association or Growing Alberta. An existing organization would need to slightly reorient its mission and activities to carry out the work. Funding analysis revealed that the project needs financial commitment from all key stakeholders, and largely Travel Alberta; Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation; and Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. While budgets are tight, food and drink are products that 100% of visitors utilize. Therefore maintaining a sufficient financial commitment over time for culinary tourism development and promotion should be regarded by provincial leadership as critical to the best interests of Alberta's economy throughout the province.

A Culinary Tourism Readiness Index (CTRI) assessment was also undertaken. The CTRI is a unique algorithmic tool that ranks and compares the various stages of culinary tourism development and promotion among destinations. Alberta received a 50/100 score and this is in line with our initial expectations. Interestingly, Alberta is much closer in index to other well-regarded culinary destinations such as Oregon and British Columbia, largely because of Alberta's foundation in culinary tourism development and the willingness and eagerness of provincial stakeholders to collaborate. In this way, Alberta is in an excellent position to propel forward with its own culinary tourism development and promotion.

Despite a short growing season and limited diversity in agricultural products, Alberta has the history, vision, and momentum to achieve great success as a culinary tourism

destination. We wish Alberta’s project stakeholders and constituents all the best in the implementation of this culinary tourism strategy.

## SUMMARY CHART OF RECOMMENDATIONS

#	RECOMMENDATION OVERVIEW	RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY/BRIEF ANALYSIS
1	Agree on organizational structure.	Don’t create a new organization, at least not at first. Use either Alberta Hotel & Lodging Association or a newly reinvented Growing Alberta. Assign/hire someone to lead the projects.
2	Agree on funding mechanism.	Membership is not the way to go. Charge a fee for products and services to supplement consistent, ongoing government financial support.
3	Codify initial mission statement.	We suggest:  <i>“The purpose of the [name of organizing entity] is to increase the recognition and appreciation of Alberta’s produce and value-added culinary tourism experiences. The [name or organizing entity] does this through research, which supports sustainable program development, and innovative marketing that reaches today’s demanding consumers and culinary travelers.”</i>
4	Agree on Alberta’s culinary tourism goals.	We recommend the following goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase brand name recognition for Alberta’s produce and value-added culinary experiences. “Products” includes all 13 of the culinary tourism product categories found in Appendix E, not just food and drink products per se.</li> <li>• Increase consumer awareness and appreciation of Alberta as a culinary destination.</li> <li>• Increase consumer spending on Alberta’s produce and value-added culinary experiences.</li> <li>• Develop culinary tourism products to support the goals and mission.</li> <li>• Promote these newly developed culinary tourism experiences.</li> </ul>
5	Agree on target markets for Alberta’s culinary tourism promotions.	Focus on Alberta residents and outside the province, focus on foodie meccas that also have non-stop air service into Alberta.
6	Integrate all culinary tourism products under one roof.	Existing programs and products from organizations such as Dine Around Alberta, Growing Alberta, Chomp Around Alberta, and Great Chefs of Alberta, should be integrated

		with individual DMO's with their own messages about cuisine in their specific area of Alberta, as well as with intra-provincial culinary media.
<b>7</b>	Agree on a unique selling proposition.	Focus on unique culinary talent rather than specific agricultural products.
<b>8</b>	Build a solid and meaningful Alberta culinary tourism brand, then nest it within a larger provincial brand.	We prefer AlbertaFresh as the best choice for a sustainable Alberta culinary tourism brand. Savor Alberta could also be used, but with caveats.
<b>9</b>	Develop and promote quality & service standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service Training: Reevaluate existing Service Best training; add improvements from other quality service training programs.</li> <li>• Menu Messaging: Work harder to ensure more restaurants comply with using their menus as a tool to educate AB residents and consumers about AB food and drink.</li> <li>• Mystery Shopper: Implementing a mystery shopper program is recommended. If that's not possible, use the power of the people – social networking – to keep underperforming businesses in check and acknowledge the ones that do perform well.</li> <li>• Service Standards: A robust standards-setting program is extremely expensive and cumbersome to administer. Instead, again, give the power to the people set the standards through feedback on social networks websites.</li> </ul>
<b>10</b>	Provide infrastructure and training to support small producers.	Introduce a micro-loan/ -grant program to help small, local producers compete better. Include measurement and accountability. Require education/training classes as a condition of the loan/grant.
<b>11</b>	Develop signature culinary <i>experiences</i> .	Focus on signature locations, such as charming, picturesque inns and lodges; and restaurants in unexpected structures. Farm to Table style events could work but might be best suited primarily for Alberta residents.
<b>12</b>	Package culinary attractions with other nearby attractions.	Seek ways to tie culinary attractions into well-known attractions such as Edmonton's festivals, the Calgary Stampede, West Edmonton Mall, and resorts in the Banff/Jasper area.
<b>13</b>	Link complementary tourism products together.	Alberta's food and drink should always be a sub-theme of other travel promotions that feature Alberta's culture or recreation first.
<b>14</b>	Judiciously develop strategic	Develop 4 trails that make a quadrangle between

	culinary trails.	Edmonton, Calgary, Banff and Jasper. Introduce 2 themed trails such as a “Fusion Footpath” that celebrates Alberta’s immigrant culinary influences.
<b>15</b>	Add value to existing events before creating new ones.	Provide publicity support for existing events such as the Rocky Mountain Food & Wine Festival and events produced by Slow Food Edmonton and Slow Food Calgary. Consider a Tasting Alberta type event based on the format of Tasting Australia and/or the Gilroy Garlic Festival.
<b>16</b>	Develop appropriate positioning & messaging.	There are at least 13 kinds of culinary traveler behaviors. Positioning and messaging should emphasize non-elitist choices with something to fit every budget and preference.
<b>17</b>	Social networking is the single most important tool to develop & promote Alberta’s culinary tourism to both consumers and trade.	Alberta needs a robust social networking website with the content of the Dine Alberta online directory and the Excel culinary tourism asset inventory, with the consumer-facing look and features of the Foodland Ontario website, combined with social networking features of a website like MySpace, and with the matchmaking features of a site like Match.com. A lead generation and management system and reporting should be woven into the platform for maximum effectiveness.
<b>18</b>	Commit to trade education.	Create a series of “how to” educational workshops that teach a variety of skills, from brand building to writing a press release. Create an annual culinary tourism symposium with educational sessions. Include a match-making component to help match Alberta suppliers to Alberta buyers.
<b>19</b>	Market campaigns in multiple waves.	Once is not enough. Include frequent messaging - the amount of time your promotion is before consumer eyes.
<b>20</b>	Overcome email fatigue with point-of-purchase promotions.	Create an in-province point-of-purchase awareness campaign with restaurants and grocers. Include table top displays and menu messaging, and possibly a promotion or giveaway to increase consumer recall and penetration.
<b>21</b>	Use product placement to raise profile of Alberta’s unique products.	Place products in cooking and TV talk shows in Toronto and New York City. Partner with suitable retail gift shops to promote Alberta’s agricultural and kitchen-related products in Alberta. Get products on the shelves in culinary retail stores outside Alberta.
<b>22</b>	At trade shows package culinary products with culture and recreation products.	Rather than attending a list of consumer culinary shows, package Alberta’s food and drink as part of attendance at other shows.

<b>23</b> Forge supportive partnerships outside of Alberta.	New partnerships should include other Canadian provinces, the CTC, and the International Culinary Tourism Association.
<b>24</b> Build metrics into all promotional efforts.	Projects are not worth doing if they cannot be measured. Interactive marketing is the easiest and most precise way to measure your return on investment. Direct respondents to a website and use Google Analytics to measure results.
<b>25</b> Justify all marketing expenditures (use cash sparingly).	Grant money is hard to come by. Use cash sparingly and carefully weigh every expenditure. Consider barter arrangements to keep cash outlays at a minimum.
<b>26</b> A brief word on media relations.	Execute an in-province media relations campaign built around a new culinary tourism brand. Keep a consistent message over several years.
<b>27</b> Perform new research.	Current culinary tourism data are good but will become outdated over time. As Alberta’s culinary tourism strategy matures and needs to be updated, combine analysis of Alberta’s regular tourists and overlay a culinary profile in order to gain additional insight into suitable target markets and product packaging ideas. New Alberta-specific research should tie together culinary and non-culinary questions.

## **PROPOSED TIMELINE TO IMPLEMENT STRATEGY**

The timeline below shows the proposed time to implement the strategy. “Q” stands for the quarter of the year. For example, Q1 is first quarter, which equates to January through March. Second quarter, or Q2, equates to April through June. Third quarter (Q3) equates to July through September. Q4 is the last quarter and represents October through December. If the implementation does not begin with the start of Q2 in April 2009, then simply add the number of months in the next line to arrive at a recommended duration for that activity. For example, “+ 0-3” signifies that these activities should take place between the time when the project starts and up to 3 months after the project start. If a bar spans multiple columns, the implication is that the task is intended to take that many months to complete.

Q2 2009 + 0-3	Q3 2009 + 3-6	Q4 2009 + 6-9	Q1 2010 + 9-12	Q2 2010 + 12-15	Q3 2010 + 15-18	Q4 2010 + 18-21	Q1 2011 + 21-24
Consolidate all culinary tourism products under one roof				Commit to trade education			
Agree on: organizational structure; funding mechanism; culinary tourism goals; target markets; unique selling proposition	Link complementary tourism products together					Market campaigns in multiple waves	
		Develop signature culinary experiences				Overcome email fatigue with point-of-purchase promotions	
		Provide infrastructure and training to support small producers				Use product placement to raise profile of Alberta's unique products	
		Develop and promote quality & service standards				At trade shows package culinary products with culture and recreation products	
Codify mission statement		Package culinary attractions with other nearby attractions		Build solid and meaningful Alberta culinary tourism brand, then nest it within a larger provincial brand.			
Forge supportive partnerships outside of Alberta							
			Develop social networking platform				
	Build metrics into all promotional efforts						
	Judiciously develop strategic culinary trails						
	Add value to existing events before creating new ones						
		Develop appropriate positioning & messaging					