

# Exploring Opportunities for Cannabis Tourism in the Kootenay Rockies

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## Executive Summary

This project identified and explored opportunities related to the development of cannabis tourism within the [Kootenay Rockies Tourism \(KRT\) Region](#). Through a targeted literature review, this project aimed to address the following questions:

1. What are the drivers and risks of cannabis tourism?
2. What are the models and opportunities for cannabis tourism?
3. Who is the potential target market and what is the cross over with the region's current target market?

To accomplish the goals of the project and answer the research questions a literature review and content analysis were completed and a report summarizing the findings was prepared.

## Key Findings

Cannabis tourism is defined as “the act of travelling or vacationing to a place because of the ability to purchase cannabis legally” (Taylor, 2019, as cited in Kang & McGrady, 2020). Cannabis tourism is a new niche market that has brought business opportunities and operational challenges to the hospitality and tourism industries (Kang, O’Leary, and Miller, 2016, as cited in McGrady et al., 2020).

### Drivers of Cannabis Tourism

- Rural regions benefit from economic diversification due to a more stable economy, and specifically due to new business and employment opportunities. Partnership between the tourism sector and the cannabis industry provides an opportunity for economic diversification.
- To protect the authenticity and brand of cannabis in the Kootenay Rockies while lowering stigma, an appellation framework could benefit the region.

### Risks of Cannabis Tourism

- The difference in perceptions and treatment of cannabis across levels of government, policies, and participating organizations.
- Not acknowledging resident perceptions towards cannabis tourism development or obtaining community support prior to development of cannabis tourism.
- Sufficient digital access is necessary to improve the quality and safety of tourist experiences. Many farms are in remote locations creating barriers of entry for cannabis tourism operators due to connectivity challenges.
- Amenity migration driven by a “green rush” could add to housing issues, including availability and affordability due to an influx of people.
- Indoor cannabis cultivation and the tourism industry both contribute to greenhouse gas emissions posing a threat to environmentally sustainable economic development.

## Models and Opportunities for Cannabis Tourism

- Two comparable jurisdictions in which transferrable cannabis tourism models and opportunities can be developed include Denver, Colorado and Humboldt County, California. Derived from these jurisdictions is:
  1. A model which considers resident perception and place attachment after cannabis legalization and prior to cannabis tourism development.
  2. A model which explores potential future barriers to market entry: legal and financial constraints, lack of infrastructure, and lack of education around recreational cannabis.
  3. Additionally, three comparable tourism sectors from which cannabis tourism sector models can be developed include agritourism, wine and craft beer tourism.
- Opportunities for a cannabis tourism implementation model during shoulder season were also identified. Shoulder season is the “off season” for summer and winter tourism.
- Select models recommended:
  1. An agritourism systems model which considers effective partnerships and communication between tourism providers, DMO’s and tourists.
  2. A model which explores turning steps of the value chain into experiences including touring facilities, learning about cultivation, experiencing how the final product is made, and enjoying tastings.
- A model which explores sensory experiences which uses consumer senses to enhance tourism experiences. Cannabis tourism opportunities relevant for the KRT region were identified and categorized into:
  1. Current opportunities: cannabis tours, educational experiences, museums and art galleries, recreation, camping and cannabis friendly accommodations.
  2. Potential opportunities pending change in policy: farm-gate and direct delivery program, and on-site consumption.

The optimal timeframe identified for cannabis tourism opportunities was shoulder season.

## Demand for Cannabis Tourism

- The current target market for the KRT region is identified using the following [Explorer Quotient \(EQ\)](#): authentic experiencers, cultural explorers, free spirits, and gentle explorers.
- There are three clusters of cannabis tourists identified for a current target market profile: cannabis enthusiasts, diversionists, and those who are cannabis curious.
- Each EQ can fall into a cannabis tourist cluster based on travel motivations:
  - Authentic experiencers and gentle explorers classify as cannabis curious.
  - Cultural explorers and free spirits classify as diversionists.