



APRIL 8, 2021

*Greetings from the Honourable Lisa MacLeod  
Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries*

On behalf of the Government of Ontario, I am delighted to welcome everyone taking part in Global Meetings Industry Day.

Business events – from meetings to conferences and major trade shows – are vital to the success of Ontario's tourism industry, which supports hundreds of thousands of jobs in Ontario and generates billions in economic activity.

Our government acknowledges the unprecedented and devastating impacts that COVID-19 has had on Ontario's tourism sector and on the province as a whole. Our number one priority remains the health and well-being of the people of Ontario – including our economic health.

As part of the road back to success, my ministry has released a White Paper called *Reconnecting Ontarians: Re-emerging as a Global Leader*. It's a set of broad-based recovery proposals for the tourism sector, paving the way for a solid five-year strategy to restore Ontario tourism, and even take it to new heights.

I also recently announced the formation of a Tourism Economic Task Force. Chaired by former Ontario minister Tim Hudak, the Task Force will give expert advice and recommendations on how to help the province's \$36-billion tourism industry recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and help us rebuild and reshape the future of tourism in our province.

In the November 2020 budget we set out \$1.5 million in strategic investments in the tourism sector through the Tourism Economic Development and Recovery Fund, an application-based, cost-sharing program for tourism industry associations, for-profit enterprises, municipalities and not-for-profit organizations.

As part of the most recent Budget, Ontario is introducing the Ontario Tourism Recovery Program, a new \$100 million initiative for 2021–22 to help tourism operators, anchor businesses and attractions recover from the impacts of COVID-19.

This initiative will provide support for historically successful businesses that have helped to drive employment and visitation in their regions by assisting with costs related to restructuring, safe reopening, recalibrated marketing activities and partnership development.

Through the 2021 Year of the Ontario Staycation travel incentive, we're encouraging Ontarians to safely discover their province by providing \$150 million to refund up to 20 percent of eligible Ontario tourism expenses.

Ontario is making strategic investments to help our province recover and grow, including the festival and event sector.

We had already committed \$9.75 million to more than 250 festivals and events through Celebrate Ontario 2020 and an additional \$9 million through the new Reconnect Festival and Event Program to help festival and event organizers adapt to new public health measures with virtual, drive-through and other safe offerings.

I know all of us look forward to gathering for in-person events in the future, when it is safe to do so. I know that the meeting and events sector will be an important contributor to the recovery of Ontario's tourism industry. In the meantime, many events, including Global Meetings Industry Day, have done an excellent job pivoting to alternate formats, such as taking place virtually.

I applaud the work that Meetings Mean Business Canada is doing to help rebuild Canada's economy, including the insight and advice that they provided during the development of Ontario's [Guidance for meetings and event facilities during COVID-19](#).

With "We're Ready" as the theme of this event, I know that you are looking forward to exchanging ideas on how we can all innovate and create opportunities to succeed in a post-pandemic world.

When it is safe to do so, we will reconnect tourists from at home and abroad with everything our province has to offer. Together, we will put Ontario and Canada on the path to build back better and stronger in the coming years.

Thank you to Meetings Mean Business Canada and to our tourism industry partners for being part of this important event. I wish you all the best for an informative and productive meeting.

Kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa MacLeod", with a large, stylized initial "L" and a period at the end.

Lisa MacLeod

Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries