
VALLEY VISITOR SERVICES 2019

Year End Report
January - December 2019

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Tourism Radium and Chamber of Commerce
Valley Wide Visitor Services Committee

Executive Summary

This was our 4th successful year operating as Valley Visitor Services. Since 2016, we have seen exciting growth, not only in visitor numbers across the Columbia Valley but also in the collaboration between organizations and visitor services centers.

The total number of visitors in 2019 was 82,731. Unlike previous years, there were no major incidences such as wildfire activity and we saw consistent numbers across all service areas.

While spring and summer were strong for visitation, closures of both the Radium Hot Springs pools and the Fairmont Hot Springs Resort pools did pose visitation challenges to the region. The Radium Hot Springs Visitor Centre fielded an increase in the number of calls inquiring about the status of the pools and changes to travel plans were made while staff continued to invite visitors to explore the many other varieties of exciting opportunities available across the Columbia Valley.

Overall visitor statistics were down 4600 year over year from 2018, 82,731 vs. 87,352.

The total number of parties that visited the four locations during July and August was 15,674 which equaled 37,620 Visitors.

A slight decrease was noticed in the Radium Hot Springs Visitor Centre visitor stats this year. This was also evident with the three other locations as they also saw a small decrease of Visitor numbers for July and August 2019. (See visitation stats breakdown document in the year-end report).

The number of visitors accessing services in the visitor center continues to rise. These services include free wifi, washrooms, interpretation and museum services as well as accessing our knowledgeable staff to learn about everything from where to hike to road conditions and accommodation opportunities.

Staff survey: The staff exit survey has been continued as is helping us gauge the successes of the program through the eyes of the staff performing the service and helps us determine what items need to be touched on more during new staff training and returning staff refresher days. Please see the survey results attached to the report.

Scheduling: In all locations, scheduling is a time-consuming process especially with trying to schedule rotating staff for all locations due to constraints in staff transportation or ability to work across locations. We found it to be continually simpler to schedule location staff in coordination and through online scheduling software. The online scheduling tool has continued to work very well as all locations were able to access and view scheduling information and work together to meet staffing requirements as needed. This online system will be administered and maintained to provide the most current access for employees and managers.

Grants: Each Chamber was successful in obtaining staffing grants for students. Each had an Industry Canada (HRDC) grant along with a CBT summer student grant that helped offset the Chamber's portion of the wage costs and allowed for more staff coverage at the discretion of the visitor services manager.

Staffing: In 2019 both the Radium Hot Springs Chamber and Columbia Valley Chamber saw staff transitions with CVCC's Executive Director departing in January and Radium Hot Springs Chamber Manager leaving in June. Existing visitor services staff provided support and capacity to ensure the delivery of services were maintained

throughout both transitions. With two new Executive Directors in place, we see further opportunity to increase collaboration and support across Valley Visitor Services.

Once again, 2019 was another great success for Valley Visitor Services. In 2020 we are looking to further collaborate to support visitor services across the region.

Background

The Valley Visitor services network consists of four visitor centers/kiosks, two year-round locations; Radium Hot Springs and the Invermere Crossroads as well as the two summer-season Kiosks in Fairmont and downtown Invermere

The RDEK provides a staffing grant of \$100,000 that is collected in the Columbia Valley Economic Development Service Area to the Radium Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce to administer and manage the valley visitor service network in co-operation with the Columbia Valley Chamber of Commerce, Fairmont Business Association and the Valley Visitor Service committee.

In addition, each Chamber receives a grant from Destination B.C. to be used to support the Visitor Center operations.

Note that the kiosks operate to solely provide visitor services, whereas both the Radium and Crossroads locations have additional functions including Chamber, Tourism, Business Services, Retail and Events Co-ordination operating out of their office space.

The VVS committee is made up of the following:

- Erin Palashniuk - Committee Chair and Radium Chamber of Commerce President
- Diana Moore - President of the Fairmont Business Association
- Susan Clovechok - RDEK representative
- Andrea Tubbs - President of the Columbia Valley Chamber of Commerce
- Pete Bourke - Executive Director of the Columbia Valley Chamber of Commerce
- Jessica Fairhart – Executive Director, Tourism Radium
- Marie Delorme – Village of Canal Flats representative
- Staff Support - Radium Chamber and Columbia Valley Chamber

The purpose of the funding from the RDEK was to address the following:

- To help offset operational wage costs that the Visitor Information Centers experienced
- Streamlining the training of staff
- Enabling consistent messaging at each location
- Standardization of written materials to be available at all locations
- Creating the environment for all partners to work together for a better valley service
- Allowing non-student hires
- Offering some financial stability
- To ensure that all areas of the valley contribute to the services.

In addition, the valley wide funding model, recognizes that the entire valley benefits from the Valley Visitor service network, whether directly with tourism assets or indirectly with residents that are employed in the tourism sector. The RDEK funding comes from the Columbia Valley Economic Development Service Area.

Operating Hours:

- The Radium Visitor Center is open year around (362 days) and works closely with Parks Canada, Radium Visitor Centre was the 7th busiest Community Visitor Centre in BC in 2019 and is well ahead in visitor stops in 2017.
- The Crossroads Visitor Center is open year-round, 5 days per week September – June and 7 days per week July and August. Extended hours are offered during peak holiday periods.
- The Fairmont Hot Springs kiosk was open during the 2019 busy season starting the last week of June and closed the second week in September.
- The Invermere kiosk is in downtown Invermere and was open July and August this summer.

**Please see the statistical break down of each location in this report on pages 5 & 6.*

Key Findings In 2019

1. The questions asked by visitors were generally pertaining to immediate area. For example; if they stop at the Fairmont Kiosk, they ask about Fairmont, then valley wide, then Provincial, BC or Federal Parks.
2. Radium continues to see large volumes of visitors throughout the summer season
3. Fairmont Kiosk for 2020 summer season will be open 10 am to 6 pm July and August 7 days a week and other strategic weekends as agreed upon by the FBA
4. Invermere Kiosk will continue to operate the same in 2020 as 2019
5. Review data and statistics that are collected
6. Hiring non-school aged, local staff was a benefit as they brought local knowledge and experience to the positions across the outlets
7. Weather and travel events do pose challenges to visitors travelling to the Columbia Valley
8. Was difficult to fully train high school students that start work July 1st after getting out of school at the end of June.

Location Specific Observations

Invermere Kiosk

1. Staff currently rely on their personal cell phones to communicate with their supervisor.
2. Staff and visitors currently are not provided with adequate Wi-Fi
3. Shown by the statistics in 2019 there was an increase of 118 parties and a decline of 113 Visitors over 2018, giving 2.19 visitors per party compared to 2.53 in 2016.
4. Invermere Kiosk staff went with the CV Chamber dress code, no uniform.

Fairmont Hot Springs Kiosk

1. Staff phone line is available (1-778-525-5030).
2. FBA added very adequate display racking prior to the Summer Season.
3. The Kiosk remains to operate successfully through July and August from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and with key weekend openings in June and September.
4. The Fairmont Kiosk was staffed with up to 2 mature staff members, one living in the Fairmont area and the other from Canal Flats.
5. The Staffing grant allocation from the RDEK was used up entirely by the first week in August, FBA share of costs was \$4,000.00.
6. Fairmont VVS staff were VVS uniforms supplied by Radium Chamber.

Crossroads Visitor Center

1. The staffing level at the Crossroads location was good this year with the summer student staff members rotating from this location to the Invermere down town location.
2. There were 151 buses recorded in 2018, and only 43 in 2019, a significant decrease. This may be due to staff record keeping inconsistencies on the statistics sheets, with previous staff recording every local transit bus that stopped in front of the VIC, and 2019 staff only recording those that actually came in to the Visitor Centre.
3. Shown by the statistics in 2019 there was a decline of 510 parties over 2018 and there was a decrease of 1,276 visitors. This equates to a 2.31 people per party in 2019 compared to 2.33 in 2018.
4. Crossroads Visitor Center kept the Invermere Kiosk stocked with supplies The staffing grant allocation from the RDEK grant of \$33,000 (total for both Invermere locations) was used up by the end of July 2019.
5. CV Chamber uses a standard dress code and not a uniform for their location.

Radium Hot Springs Visitor Center

1. The Radium Visitor center continues to be one of British Columbia's busiest community Visitor center and was the 7th busiest in BC according to Destination BC's statistical data base in 2019.
2. The traffic in the visitor center fluctuates depending on the external circumstances such as highway closures or certain days of the week, having five different entities working out of the same Radium Visitor center location (Radium Visitor Services, Radium Chamber, Tourism Radium, Friends of Kootenay Souvenir store and Parks Canada Visitor Services) and can pose challenges to space and capacity.
3. There was a decrease of 12 Tour Buses from the USA in 2019. In 2019 there were 73 buses recorded, compared to 85 in 2018. On the average buses had up to 50 people per bus. (Parking the big bus close to the Visitor centre was an issue some of the times. Many of the buses were senior tours).

4. Shown by the statistics in 2019 there was a decrease of 1,401 parties and a decrease in 4,162 visitors over 2018. This equates into a party size of 2.21 compared to 2.24 in 2018.
5. Changes in staffing caused challenges and shortages of front line staff at the Radium Visitor Center.
6. Radium VVS staff were supplied with a standard uniform that was worn in Fairmont Kiosk and Radium VC as staff rotated between the different locations, when staff rotated into the CV Visitor center the uniform was worn with the VVS title.

Opportunities for 2020

1. Work is continuing on standardization of materials across the visitor services network.
2. Responsibility of each sponsor organization working closely with the VVS Manager.
3. Valley Visitor Service budget is approved by VVS committee, subject to each committee representative having sponsor organization approve the VVS budget by their respective board of directors.
4. Work with Canal Flats in providing guidance to help them develop print material that would be distributed at all VVS locations.
5. Ensure that all staff are familiar with all VVS locations.
6. VVS Committee will continue to provide basic Governance support through committee member representatives.
7. Research into electronic kiosks and efficiencies for 2020.

Challenges

1. Valley Visitor Services wage costs are underfunded even with the RDEK grant and need funding support from the various organizations that support the cost to operate each location. (Total cost of VVS network in 2019 is approximately \$240,000)
2. RDEK grant of \$100,000 covered ~ 60% of total wage costs of VVS in 2019.
3. Each location is different and unique, while the intent is to have consistent messaging from all locations for visitors, the unique nature of each location needs to be understood and respected.
4. The sponsor organizations are responsible for all capital costs of their respective locations, running a visitor centre or kiosk location is an expensive endeavor.

Overall Conclusion

2019 provided another successful year for Valley Visitor Services and bringing much change with it. With each Chamber having new Executive Directors and Visitor Services Managers, the VVS group is looking forward to new opportunities in 2020 to work better together and increase supports for tourism and businesses through the Valley Visitor Services.

From the Advisory Commission, to supporting Canal Flats, researching digital visitor services as well as increasing support for travelers and referrals to activities, services and businesses in the Columbia Valley.

The RDEK funding continues to allow VVS to not have to only rely on summer student staffing but also be able to hire non-student staff and provide year-round opportunities. This is advantageous as more mature staff bring many years of valley life and recreational understanding to the table.

It is advantageous that each location had a team lead that works closely and reports in daily with the VVS manager with respect to staff scheduling, ensuring that each location has sufficient hand-out material in stock and to inform VVS manager of any issues.

Continuing to support capacity building throughout the network will be important for 2020 and both Chambers would like to see multi-year contracts in place to build stability, staffing, service delivery and opportunities for Visitor Services through the Columbia Valley.

Visitor Statistics 2018-2019

		19-Jan	19-Feb	19-Mar	19-Apr	19-May	19-Jun	19-Jul	19-Aug	19-Sep	19-Oct	19-Nov	19-Dec	Totals	% of Total
Radium	Visitors	1113	1237	1984	2322	5903	9689	14562	13959	10222	3018	1275	1378	66662	81%
	Parties	643	706	955	1170	2754	4366	5969	5947	4556	1661	755	700	30182	
Invermere	Visitors	525	311	650	654	844	1455	1691	1826	1180	459	149	196	9940	12%
	Parties	206	134	275	327	365	554	658	753	566	247	103	119	4307	
Invermere (Sat)	Visitors	0	0	0	0	0	214	1102	1312	83	0	0	0	2711	3%
	Parties						83	483	635	34	0	0	0	1235	
Fairmont	Visitors	0	0	0	0	0	164	1473	1695	86	0	0	0	3418	4%
	Parties	0	0	0	0	0	67	595	634	42	0	0	0	1338	
														Visitor Totals	82731
														Parties Totals	37062

		18-Jan	18-Feb	18-Mar	18-Apr	18-May	18-Jun	18-Jul	18-Aug	18-Sep	18-Oct	18-Nov	18-Dec	Totals	
Radium	Visitors	1170	1268	2106	3117	7383	13127	16988	12420	8058	2943	1094	1150	70824	81%
	Parties	671	685	937	1621	3270	5840	7015	5165	3736	1467	574	602	31583	
Invermere	Visitors	600	567	841	726	1104	1461	1699	1579	1106	628	501	404	11216	13%
	Parties	200	137	283	281	503	685	792	696	529	316	208	187	4817	
Invermere (Sat)	Visitors	0	0	0	0	0	117	1233	1382	61	0	31	0	2824	3%
	Parties						44	501	532	29	0	11	0	1117	
Fairmont	Visitors	0	0	0	0	0	185	971	1168	164	0	0	0	2488	3%
	Parties	0	0	0	0	0	0	723	584	76	0	0	0	1383	
														Visitor Totals	87352
														Parties Totals	38900

Financials

		Actual to Date	To Date Budget	Variance from Budget	Wage Grants	Net Wages (Actual - Grants)	Annual Allocation	Allocation Budget
Wage Costs								
Crossroads		\$ 47,809.36	\$ 32,200.00	\$ 15,609.36	\$ 11,045.00	\$ 36,764.36	\$ 28,000.00	-\$ 8,764.36
Invermere Kiosk		\$ 10,682.94	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,682.94	\$ -	\$ 10,682.94	\$ 5,000.00	-\$ 5,682.94
Total		\$ 58,492.30	\$ 37,200.00	\$ 21,292.30	\$ 11,045.00	\$ 47,447.30	\$ 33,000.00	-\$ 14,447.30
Fairmont Kiosk		\$ 9,429.72	\$ 11,850.00	-\$ 2,420.28	\$ -	\$ 9,429.72	\$ 7,000.00	-\$ 2,429.72
Radium		\$ 102,567.81	\$ 91,220.00	\$ 11,347.81	\$ 3,427.34	\$ 99,140.47	\$ 58,000.00	-\$ 41,140.47
Total Wage Costs		\$ 170,489.83	\$ 140,270.00	\$ 30,219.83			\$ 98,000.00	-\$ 58,017.49
Travel		\$ 1,320.00	\$ 1,320.00	\$ -			\$ 2,000.00	\$ 680.00
Total Expenses		\$ 171,809.83	\$ 141,590.00	\$ 30,219.83			\$ 100,000.00	-\$ 57,337.49
Visitor Analysis Jan 1 - Dec 31		Adj. GrossCosts	Parties	Cost/Party	Visitors	Cost/Visitor		
Crossroads		\$ 47,809.36	4,307	\$ 11.10	9,940	4.81		
Invermere Kiosk		\$ 10,682.94	1,235	\$ 8.65	2,711	3.94		
		\$ 58,492.30						
Fairmont Kiosk		\$ 9,429.72	1,277	\$ 7.38	3,418	2.76		
Radium		\$ 102,567.81	30,182	\$ 3.40	66,662	1.54		
		\$ 170,489.83	35,724	4.77	79,313	2.15		

*Radium staff wages are lower than average due to manager transition

Schedule A

Please indicate which locations you worked in. select all that apply

Answer	0%	100%	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Radium			4	80.0%
Invermere Crossroads			1	20.0%
Invermere Kiosk			0	0.0%
Fairmont Kiosk			2	40.0%
All of the Above			0	0.0%
Totals			5	100%

Please indicate which location you preferred to work in and in the comments section tell us why.

Answer	0%	100%	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Radium			3	60.0%
Invermere Crossroads			0	0.0%
Invermere Kiosk			0	0.0%
Fairmont Kiosk			2	40.0%
No Responses			0	0.0%
Totals			5	100%

Overall, how satisfied are you with Valley Visitor Services and the services/information provided to visitors?

1 = Extremely dissatisfied , 2 = Somewhat dissatisfied , 3 = Neutral , 4 = Somewhat satisfied , 5 = Extremely satisfied

1	2	3	4	5	Number of Responses	Rating Score*
					5	4.6

Details

1 = Extremely dissatisfied , 2 = Somewhat dissatisfied , 3 = Neutral , 4 = Somewhat satisfied , 5 = Extremely satisfied

1	2	3	4	5
0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (40.0%)	3 (60.0%)

	Number of Responses	Rating Score*
	5	4.6

Overall, my work experience as a Valley Visitor Services Counsellor is satisfying and rewarding.

1 = Strongly disagree , 2 = Disagree , 3 = Neutral , 4 = Agree , 5 = Strongly agree

1	2	3	4	5	Number of Responses	Rating Score*
					5	4.2

Details

1 = Strongly disagree , 2 = Disagree , 3 = Neutral , 4 = Agree , 5 = Strongly agree

1	2	3	4	5
0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (20.0%)	2 (40.0%)	2 (40.0%)

1 2 3 4 5
Hold the mouse over each color of the bar to see the number of respondents.

	Number of Responses	Rating Score*
	5	4.2

Please rate your satisfaction with the on-line schedule tool When I Work. If you are not Extremely satisfied please indicate in the comment section how scheduling could be improved.

1 = Extremely dissatisfied , 2 = Somewhat dissatisfied , 3 = Neutral , 4 = Somewhat satisfied , 5 = Extremely satisfied

1	2	3	4	5	Number of Responses	Rating Score*
					5	4.6

*The Rating Score is the weighted average calculated by dividing the sum of all weighted ratings by the number of total responses.

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Details

1 = Extremely dissatisfied , 2 = Somewhat dissatisfied , 3 = Neutral , 4 = Somewhat satisfied , 5 = Extremely satisfied

1	2	3	4	5
0	0	1	0	4
(0.0%)	(0.0%)	(20.0%)	(0.0%)	(80.0%)

	Number of Responses	Rating Score*
	5	4.6

Were you provided with sufficient training and were you confident in your knowledge about the entire valley?

1 = Need more training/knowledge , 2 = Knowledgeable , 3 = Very Knowledgeable

Answer	1	2	3	Number of Responses	Rating Score*
Brisco				5	2.0
Canal Flats				5	2.2
Edgewater				5	2.4
Fairmont				5	2.6
First Nations				5	1.6
Invermere				5	2.8
Panorama				5	2.4
Parks (National and Provincial)				5	2.6
Radium				5	2.8
Windermere				5	2.6

Details

1 = Need more training/knowledge , 2 = Knowledgeable , 3 = Very Knowledgeable

Answer	1	2	3
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Brisco	1 (20.0%)	3 (60.0%)	1 (20.0%)
Canal Flats	1 (20.0%)	2 (40.0%)	2 (40.0%)
Edgewater	0 (0.0%)	3 (60.0%)	2 (40.0%)
Fairmont	0 (0.0%)	2 (40.0%)	3 (60.0%)
First Nations	2 (40.0%)	3 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Invermere	0 (0.0%)	1 (20.0%)	4 (80.0%)
Panorama	0 (0.0%)	3 (60.0%)	2 (40.0%)
Parks (National and Provincial)	0 (0.0%)	2 (40.0%)	3 (60.0%)
Radium	0 (0.0%)	1 (20.0%)	4 (80.0%)
Windermere	0 (0.0%)	2 (40.0%)	3 (60.0%)

Answer		Number of Responses	Rating Score*
Brisco		5	2.0
Canal Flats		5	2.2
Edgewater		5	2.4
Fairmont		5	2.6
First Nations		5	1.6
Invermere		5	2.8
Panorama		5	2.4
Parks (National and Provincial)		5	2.6
Radium		5	2.8
Windermere		5	2.6

Were you provided with sufficient training/access to information and were you confident in your knowledge about the various activities throughout the valley?

1 = Need more training/knowledge, 2 = Knowledgeable, 3 = Very Knowledgeable

Answer	1	2	3	Number of Responses	Rating Score*
Accommodation (Hotels, motels, B&Bs, front & back country camping etc.)				5	2.8
Biking				5	2.8
Boating (kayaks, paddleboards, water skiing etc.)				5	3.0
Dining				5	3.0
Fishing				5	2.8
Hiking				5	3.0
Golf				5	2.8
Rainy days				5	3.0
Shopping				5	3.0
Special Events				5	2.8

*The Rating Score is the weighted average calculated by dividing the sum of all weighted ratings by the number of total responses.

Details

1 = Need more training/knowledge, 2 = Knowledgeable, 3 = Very Knowledgeable

Answer	1	2	3
Accommodation (Hotels, motels, B&Bs, front & back country camping etc.)	0 (0.0%)	1 (20.0%)	4 (80.0%)
Biking	0 (0.0%)	1 (20.0%)	4 (80.0%)
Boating (kayaks, paddleboards, water skiing etc.)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (100.0%)
Dining	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (100.0%)

Fishing	0 (0.0%)	1 (20.0%)	4 (80.0%)
Hiking	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (100.0%)
Golf	0 (0.0%)	1 (20.0%)	4 (80.0%)
Rainy days	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (100.0%)
Shopping	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (100.0%)
Special Events	0 (0.0%)	1 (20.0%)	4 (80.0%)

Answer		Number of Responses	Rating Score*
Accommodation (Hotels, motels, B&Bs, front & back country camping etc.)		5	2.8
Biking		5	2.8
Boating (kayaks, paddleboards, water skiing etc.)		5	3.0
Dining		5	3.0
Fishing		5	2.8
Hiking		5	3.0
Golf		5	2.8
Rainy days		5	3.0
Shopping		5	3.0
Special Events		5	2.8

When you worked was there a sufficient number of staff scheduled? In the comments section please provide details such as time of the season and days of the week that most frequently corresponded with your response.

Answer	0%	100%	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Frequently understaffed			1	20.0%

Occasionally understaffed		1	20.0%
Adequately staffed		3	60.0%
Occasionally overstaffed		0	0.0%
Frequently overstaffed		0	0.0%
No Responses		0	0.0%
Totals		5	100%

I feel that my contribution to the Visitor Services team was valued by the organization.

1 = Strongly disagree , 2 = Disagree , 3 = Neutral , 4 = Agree , 5 = Strongly agree

1	2	3	4	5	Number of Responses	Rating Score*
					5	4.0

*The Rating Score is the weighted average calculated by dividing the sum of all weighted ratings by the number of total responses.

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Details

1 = Strongly disagree , 2 = Disagree , 3 = Neutral , 4 = Agree , 5 = Strongly agree

1	2	3	4	5
0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)

1 2 3 4 5

	Number of Responses	Rating Score*
	5	4.0

The various locations have both similar and differing administrative processes. Please tell us in your words what if anything could be simplified, improved upon or more training provided.

Number of Responses
4

Please check all the following statements that are true for you.

Answer	0%	100%	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
I enjoyed my summer at Valley Visitor Services.			4	100.0%
I would like to work at Valley Visitor Services next summer.			3	75.0%
I would recommend working at Valley Visitor Services to my friends & family.			4	100.0%
Totals			4	100%

If scheduling and logistics permitted would you be interested in rotating through the 4 different Visitor Centre locations?

Answer	0%	100%	Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Yes			2	40.0%
No			3	60.0%
No Responses			0	0.0%
Totals			5	100%

Please enter any comments you may have regarding your work experience this summer and things that we could improve upon.

			Number of Responses
			2

