



ANNUAL REPORT

DECEMBER
2024

Visit
OSHAWA



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2024 Oshawa Tourism Annual Report showcases a year of growth and community impact driven by the 2023-2026 Oshawa Tourism Strategic Community Tourism Plan. Key initiatives and partnerships positioned Oshawa as a vibrant and inclusive destination. Highlights include:

Visitor Experience:

- Conducted the Oshawa Visitor Experience Study to better understand the perceptions of residents, visitors and non-visitors.

Content and Outreach:

- Published 51 blog articles, 20 consumer-facing newsletters, and 12 B2B newsletters, fostering engagement with residents, visitors and businesses.

Event and Community Partnerships:

- The Convergence Music and Art Festival welcomed 23,955 attendees, generating \$1.16M in single-day economic impact.
- The Oshawa Santa Claus Parade of Lights saw record participation with 65 floats.
- The Holiday Shop Local Event revitalized downtown Oshawa, boosting sales for 17 businesses.
- The Oshawa Food Fight Campaign attracted over 302.5 social media views, culminating in a sold-out Boujee Bites event at the Robert McLaughlin Gallery.

Digital Growth:

- The Oshawa Holiday Experience Website recorded 6,804 sessions, promoting 80 holiday events across the city.
- Social media campaigns achieved 712.7K views and a 158.8K reach.
- The website saw a 66% session increase (21,958) due to SEO improvements and event partnerships.

Strategic Impact:

In 2024, Oshawa Tourism further fostered pride of place, contributed to economic growth, and helped elevate the city's reputation as a compelling destination. These successes set a strong foundation for continued innovation and engagement in 2025 and beyond.



STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

OSHAWA VISITOR EXPERIENCE STUDY

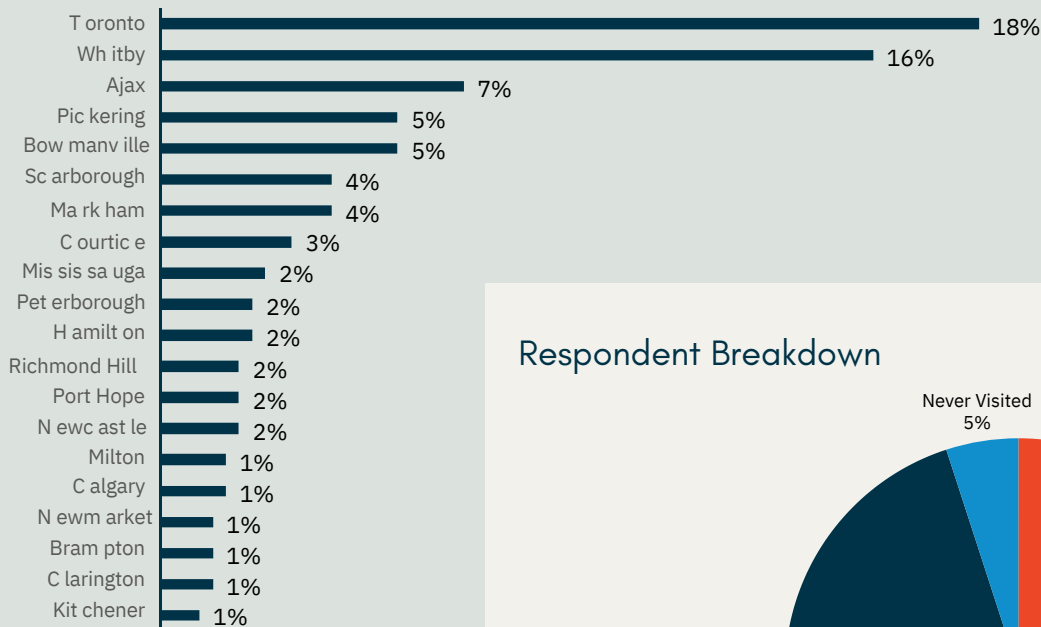
[VIEW FULL REPORT](#)

In 2024, Oshawa Tourism collaborated with 1964 Consulting Group to lead the Oshawa Visitor Experience Study—an initiative designed to unlock Oshawa's full tourism potential. The project examined every stage of the visitor journey—pre-visit, during visit, and post-visit—to identify opportunities for growth and areas for enhancement.

The study's findings, informed by surveys, stakeholder interviews, and sentiment analyses, provide actionable insights to elevate Oshawa's tourism landscape. The research methodology included an in-depth survey, on-site conversations with visitors at major Oshawa events and attractions and one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders in the local tourism sector.

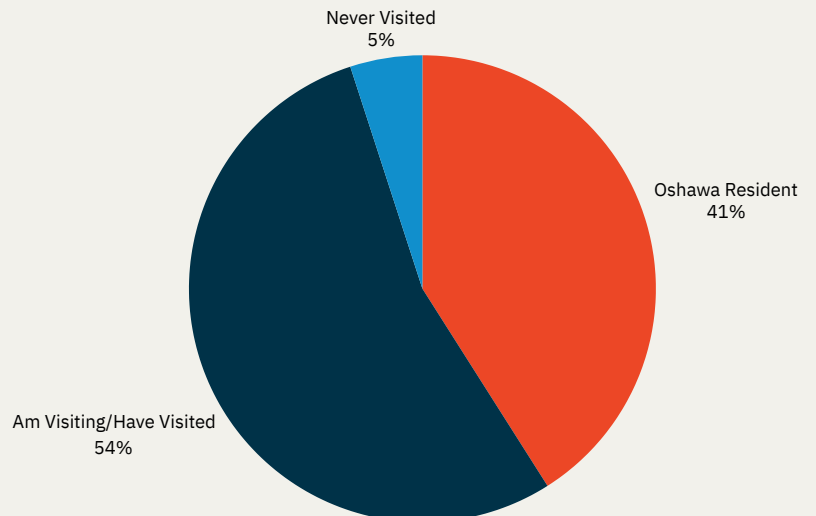
The Visitor Experience Project **survey collected 594 responses**, offering valuable data on visitor perceptions, behaviours, and recommendations for improvement. Highlights of the key findings are outlined below:

Visitor Origins - Top 20



n=276

Respondent Breakdown



STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

OSHAWA VISITOR EXPERIENCE STUDY

KEY FINDINGS:

Resident Pride and Place Branding

- **Residents significantly influence Oshawa's tourism image.** Strengthening local pride and addressing concerns about Oshawa's reputation is vital.
- Unified branding and instilling pride in residents can help create a welcoming environment for visitors.

Visitor Awareness and Engagement

- **Oshawa's attractions, though diverse, suffer from low awareness.** Promoting these “hidden gems” through social publishing, earned media, SEO, collaborative marketing, and word-of-mouth is critical.
- Enhancing the visibility of local assets can position Oshawa as a key destination within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Increasing Visitor Dwell Times

- The city attracts many day-trippers, limiting economic benefits. **Offering connected and engaging experiences can extend visitor stays** and promote repeat visits.

Downtown Oshawa Challenges

- **Downtown Oshawa remains a significant detractor** due to safety and aesthetics concerns. Improving this area is crucial for attracting and retaining visitors.

Infrastructure and Connectivity

- Investments in wayfinding, transportation, and accommodations are needed to improve visitor accessibility and satisfaction.
- Enhancing connectivity between attractions, particularly in under-advertised areas like North Oshawa, can boost exploration and engagement.

Enhancing Dining and Nightlife

- A shortage of diverse dining and nightlife options limits visitor satisfaction. Developing these sectors is essential to expanding Oshawa's appeal.

Resident Sentiments



68% of residents would recommend Oshawa as a destination.

90% of respondents agreed that tourism positively impacts Oshawa.

81% acknowledged residents' role as key promoters of the city, aligning with strategies to build pride of place and local engagement.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

OSHAWA ATTRACTIONS GUIDE

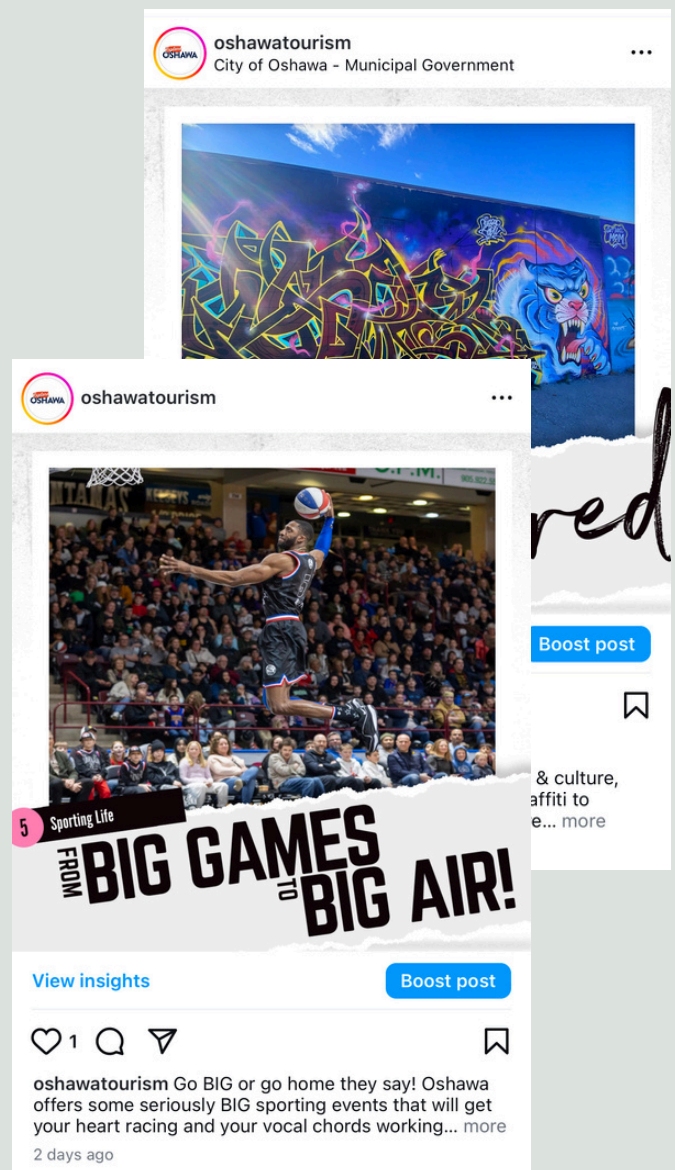
VIEW FULL GUIDE

As part of the ongoing strategic mission to enhance Oshawa's tourism presence, Oshawa Tourism released the 2024 Oshawa Attractions Guide. This publication **showcases over 50 attractions across nine categories**, including arts and culture, nightlife, family-friendly activities, and outdoor adventures. It also highlights Oshawa's key annual events, shopping, dining, and accommodations, making it a one-stop resource for visitors and residents alike.

To ensure broad reach and engagement, the guide is supported by a dedicated always-on Attractions Guide Social Media Campaign, which leverages Oshawa Tourism's digital platforms to promote featured attractions. This campaign includes:

- Regular posts and stories spotlighting individual attractions.
- Thematic features like "Arts + Culture: Be Inspired" and "Sporting Life: From Big Games to Big Air!" to inspire exploration.
- Direct links to the digital guide for easy access and trip planning.

Aligned with the 2023-2026 Oshawa Tourism Strategic Community Tourism Plan, the Oshawa Attractions Guide and promotion campaign foster pride of place, encourage collaboration with local businesses, and position Oshawa as a vibrant destination. By bundling attractions and curating itineraries, the guide enhances the visitor experience while the campaign expands visibility and drives traffic to key tourism platforms.



TOURISM EVENTS

BOUJEE BITES

The 2nd Annual Boujee Bites event celebrated Oshawa's culinary diversity and cultural vibrancy, offering attendees an evening filled with exceptional gourmet experiences. Held at the Robert McLaughlin Gallery (RMG), the event featured tasting stations from Oshawa's top restaurants alongside live music performances. Guests savoured a curated selection of tasty bites while exploring the most recent exhibits at the RMG.

Strategic Contribution to Oshawa Tourism Goals

The Boujee Bites event aligns with the 2023-2026 Oshawa Tourism Strategic Community Tourism Plan, advancing key objectives:

Engage: By showcasing Oshawa's talented culinary community and vibrant cultural offerings, the event fosters pride of place among residents, inspiring them to serve as ambassadors for their city.

Collaborate: Boujee Bites engaged and united local restaurants, cultural venues, and creative talent to deliver a cohesive and memorable experience, strengthening cross-sector partnerships and amplifying the visibility of local businesses.

Promote: Through the event and its lead up campaign, Oshawa Food Fight, Oshawa's burgeoning culinary scene was spotlighted, positioning the city as a dynamic and culturally rich destination for food enthusiasts.

Additionally, the 2024 event achieved a remarkable **94% increase in ticket sales**, underscoring growing demand from both residents and visitors while reinforcing Oshawa's status as a must-visit culinary and cultural hub.



TOURISM EVENTS

CONVERGENCE MUSIC + ART FESTIVAL

The Convergence Music and Art Festival 2024 continued its mission of fostering pride of place, driving economic impact, and celebrating the roots and diversity of Oshawa's arts and culture scene. With vibrant performances, interactive exhibits, and dynamic community engagement, the festival attracted close to 24,000 attendees—a remarkable 85% year-over-year growth—while showcasing Oshawa as a leading cultural destination in the region.

Key Highlights:

- **Attendance and Reach:** The festival welcomed 23,955 attendees, of whom 33.2% travelled over 40 km to participate (a core tourism industry metric), highlighting its regional draw.
- **Economic Impact:** Generated an estimated \$1.16M boost in local business revenue and a 391% increase in foot traffic during the event.
- **Community Engagement:** Featured 36 local performers, 21 community groups, and **145 local businesses**, supported by 75 dedicated volunteers.
- **Media and Digital Presence:** Reached over 275,000 users across social media platforms, with 27,832 website sessions—a 45% increase from 2023.
- **Cultural and Visitor Impact:** Expanded programming included 28 music performances, 6 art installations, and 11 cultural experiences, with 87% of attendees visiting the Main Stage.



TOURISM EVENTS

SANTA CLAUS PARADE OF LIGHTS

The 2024 Oshawa Santa Claus Parade of Lights set new benchmarks for success, drawing significant uplift in participation and delivering an enhanced spectator experience. This year, the parade featured a record-breaking 65 floats, surpassing last year's total of 55 floats and showcasing the growing enthusiasm from local businesses, community organizations, and residents.

The parade also celebrated a milestone in community involvement, with approximately 1,000 participants walking, marching, dancing, or riding along the route. From vibrant marching bands and energetic dance troupes to creative-themed floats, the parade highlighted the diverse talents and spirit of the Oshawa community.

In addition to the record turnout, the implementation of the new one-way parade route proved to be a major success in addressing safety concerns raised with the former route. This new configuration streamlined the flow of the event, allowing for better crowd management and creating a safer, more enjoyable experience for attendees, participants, and event organizers. We look forward to implementing a similar one-way route structure on King St. in 2025.



TOURISM EVENTS

HOLIDAY SHOP LOCAL EVENT

On Saturday, December 14, 2024, downtown Oshawa celebrated the inaugural Oshawa Holiday Shop Local Event. The event transformed the downtown core into a festive destination, complete with live music performances, character visits, and warm holiday touches like free hot chocolate and cookies for attendees.

A total of 17 local businesses participated, offering unique in-store experiences and special promotions to draw in holiday shoppers. To further engage the community, a passport trail encouraged visitors to explore each participating business, collecting stamps along the way for a chance to win exciting prizes.

Many participating businesses reported that this was one of their top-performing sales days of 2024, showcasing the event's positive impact on local commerce and its role in strengthening the downtown economy.



OPERATOR ENABLEMENT

OSHAWA TOURISM STAKEHOLDERS MEETUP

On March 27, Oshawa Tourism hosted its inaugural Oshawa Tourism Stakeholders Meet-Up at Neb's Fun World, a strategic initiative aligned with the 2023-2026 Oshawa Tourism Strategic Community Tourism Plan. **Welcoming over 45 tourism operators and contributors from across the city**, the event marked a significant step toward fostering collaboration and innovation within the local tourism sector.

Attendees engaged in thought-provoking expert-led learning sessions, including:

- Working **Together to Build Local Pride of Place**: Highlighting the importance of pride in building Oshawa's tourism reputation.
- **Leveraging Arts and Culture as a Catalyst for Economic Development**: Exploring arts and culture's role in enhancing Oshawa's economic vibrancy.
- The Power of Online Advertising: Providing tangible tools to amplify digital presence.

STRATEGIC OUTCOMES:

The meet-up addressed several goals from the Strategic Community Tourism Plan:

- Fostering Stakeholder Collaboration: Building relationships to encourage cross-promotion and joint initiatives, supporting the plan's 'Collaborate' objective.
- Enhancing Resident Engagement: Strengthening pride of place and promoting the role of residents as tourism ambassadors, contributing to the Engage objective.
- Growing Digital Capacity: Equipping stakeholders with skills to boost their online presence, aligning with the Promote objective.
- By prioritizing collaboration, education, and innovation, the meet-up serves as an example of Oshawa Tourism's commitment to positioning the city as a dynamic, year-round destination and advancing the community's tourism potential.



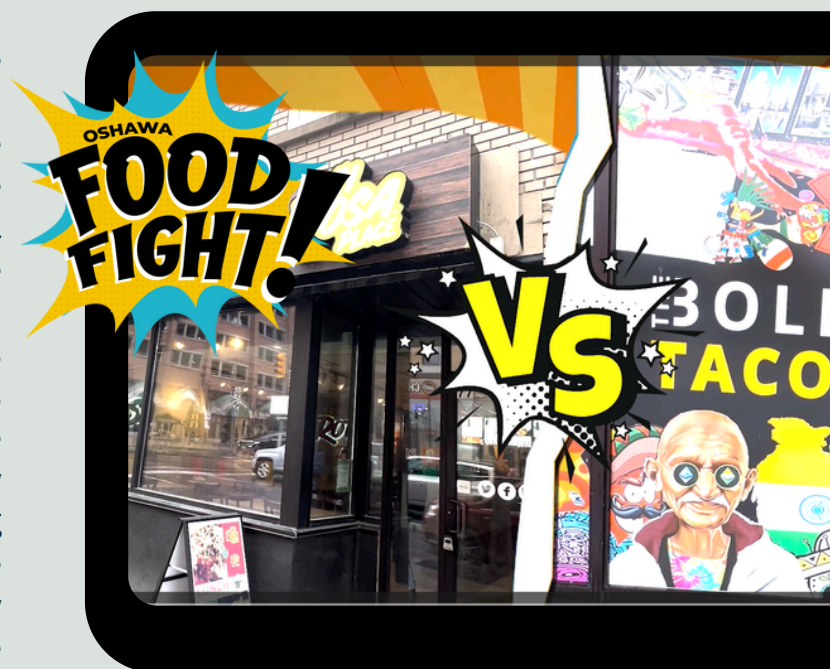
CULINARY TOURISM

The Oshawa Food Fight Campaign exemplified Oshawa Tourism's innovative approach to promoting culinary tourism and supporting local restaurants. This campaign provided a unique platform for Oshawa's vibrant culinary scene to shine, offering participating restaurants an opportunity to showcase their creativity and connect with broader audiences.

The campaign invited restaurants to either nominate themselves or be nominated by the public in one of five food categories, creating excitement and anticipation within the community. Participants competed for the coveted title of Ultimate Oshawa Food Fight Champion, with semi-finalists receiving professional video content produced and promoted by Oshawa Tourism. This high-quality content significantly enhanced the visibility of these restaurants, showcasing their culinary offerings to a wide audience.

A key highlight of the campaign was the 2nd Annual Boujee Bites event, where the semi-finalists competed in a live, interactive setting. Event attendees voted for their favorite restaurants in each category, turning the competition into a community-driven celebration of local cuisine. The campaign successfully generated buzz, with promotional **Food Fight reels reaching a total of 302.5k views across Oshawa Tourism's social media platforms.**

Campaigns like the Oshawa Food Fight are invaluable for driving tourism and economic growth. By showcasing Oshawa's culinary diversity, these initiatives draw food enthusiasts from both the region and beyond, fostering a vibrant promotional platform for local small businesses. Winners of the Food Fight Challenge were also presented with branded social media assets and physical trophies to display proudly within their locations, serving as a lasting testament to their excellence. These trophies provide an additional marketing boost by sparking conversations with customers, enhancing credibility, and building a sense of pride within the community. Collaborative efforts like this not only amplify restaurant visibility but also create impactful, low-cost marketing opportunities, solidifying Oshawa's reputation as a premier culinary destination.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

COMMUNITY EVENTS/ HOMETOWN TOURISM CHALLENGE

A core objective of the 2023-2026 Oshawa Tourism Strategic Community Tourism Plan has been to strengthen resident perceptions of Oshawa and cultivate a sense of pride in the city. This goal has been central to Oshawa Tourism's initiatives, with significant progress achieved in fostering community engagement and encouraging residents to explore the diverse attractions the city has to offer.

One of the standout programs in this effort has been the Hometown Tourism Challenge, launched in 2023. The program was designed to inspire residents to rediscover Oshawa's beloved attractions and destinations while incentivizing participation through weekly local prizes. In its inaugural year, the challenge saw 135 unique teams explore the city, with opportunities to check in at 45 businesses and attractions. Building on this success, the 2024 challenge expanded to include over 60 businesses and attractions, with 201 unique teams taking part. This year-over-year growth highlights the program's impact in engaging residents and showcasing Oshawa as a vibrant place to live, work, and play.

Beyond the Hometown Tourism Challenge, Oshawa Tourism supported several signature events that have become cornerstones of the community's cultural calendar. Events like the City of Oshawa's Kars on King, Peony Festival, and Canada Day Celebrations received robust support from Oshawa Tourism through promotional campaigns, dedicated blog posts, and the presence of interactive booths at each event. These efforts not only enhanced event visibility but also offered opportunities for direct engagement with residents, further promoting Oshawa's attractions and building a deeper sense of pride in the community.

Through initiatives like the Hometown Tourism Challenge and support for signature events, Oshawa Tourism has made significant strides in achieving its mission to elevate pride of place among residents. By celebrating the city's unique attractions and fostering connections within the community, these programs continue to strengthen Oshawa's identity as a dynamic and welcoming destination.



CAMPAIGNS + MARKETING

HOLIDAY EXPERIENCE WEBSITE

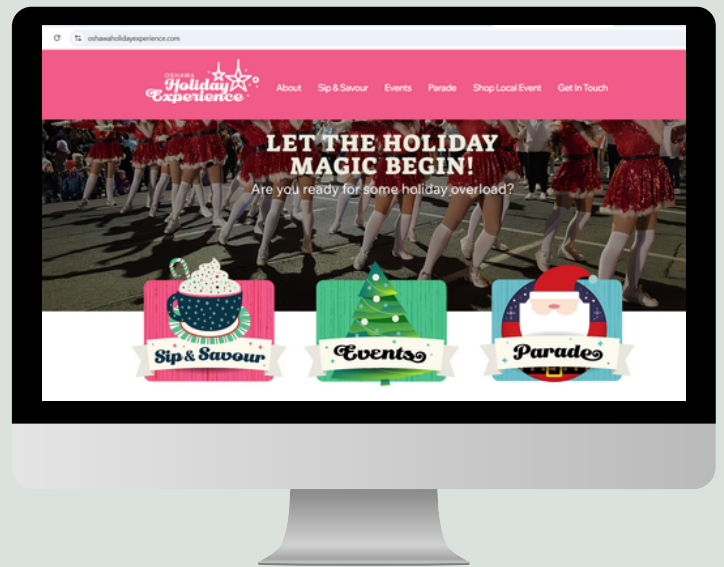
The Oshawa Holiday Experience Website launched on November 1, 2024, as a dedicated marketing tool to promote holiday-themed events and activities throughout downtown Oshawa. Serving as a central hub for seasonal celebrations, the website was complemented by its own Instagram (@oshawaholidayexperience) and Facebook pages, which amplified event visibility and strengthened engagement with audiences across multiple platforms.

A standout feature of the website was its events page, which showcased approximately 80 holiday-themed events taking place throughout November and December.

These events ranged from community markets and live performances to family-friendly activities, positioning the site as a digital guide to holiday happenings in the city. Additionally, the website included a Sip and Savour section, which spotlighted festive dining options, encouraging visitors and residents to explore Oshawa's culinary scene.

Following the November launch, the Oshawa Holiday Experience Website garnered impressive metrics, including 6,804 site sessions and 5,004 unique visits. Traffic sources further highlighted the reach and success of the website:

- 2,553 visits were direct, showcasing the strength of targeted marketing efforts.
- 2,245 visits originated from Facebook, illustrating the impact of social media promotion.
- 1,156 visits came from Google, indicating strong search engine visibility.
- 229 visits were driven by Instagram, emphasizing the importance of visual storytelling on social platforms.
- 144 visits were referrals from Oshawa.ca, leveraging our partnership with the City of Oshawa to generate site visits.



DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

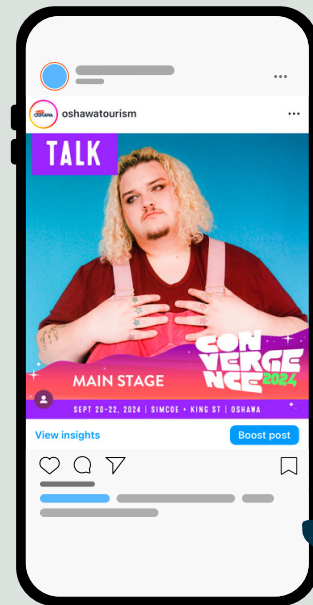
SOCIAL MEDIA



Total views: 259.5K
Reach: UP 48.3%
Visits: UP 24.7%
Follows: Increased by 2.9%



Total views: 421.3K
Reach: UP 57.9%
Visits: Down 4.6%
Follows: New follows 1.1K



Top performing
post of 2024
Paid reach of
54,298

INSIGHTS: The significant growth in reach and views is large credited to successful partnerships with event collaborators who actively shared collaborative posts driving traffic back to Oshawa Tourism. Partnered posts with local social media influencers also amplified visibility effectively reaching new audiences. However, the slower growth in follows suggests an opportunity to better convert engaged viewers into long-term followers.

The decrease in visits to the Oshawa Tourism Instagram account in 2024 can be attributed to the creation of independent accounts for major events, such as the Convergence Music and Art Festival and the Oshawa Santa Claus Parade of Lights (Oshawa Holiday Experience). These events were previously promoted exclusively through Oshawa Tourism's account in 2023 but now have dedicated platforms for targeted content.

Despite the shift, the overall impact across all Instagram channels has been significant. The Oshawa Holiday Experience account achieved 40.5K views and 13.9K reach, while the Convergence Music and Art Festival account garnered an impressive 261.8K views and 63.8K reach. Combined with the Oshawa Tourism Instagram's 421.3K views and 83.1K reach, the total social media impact across all Instagram channels in 2024 amounted to 724.1K views and 160.8K.

Total social media views across all Oshawa Tourism platforms including Convergence and the Oshawa Holiday Experience in 2024 amounted to 1,018,000.

OSHAWA TOURISM WEBSITE

In 2024, the Oshawa Tourism website saw significant growth, with site sessions increasing by 66% to a total of 21,958, and unique visitors rising by 55% to 16,584. This growth reflects the success of key partnerships, effective referral strategies, and a strong social media presence.

Social Media Referrals

With 4,120 sessions originating from Facebook, social media continues to play a vital role in growing website visits. Ongoing efforts to create engaging content and cross-promote events through social channels will further amplify this impact.

Partnerships with Local Events

A notable contributor to this increase was the Oshawa Craft Beer Fest, which utilized the Oshawa Tourism ticketing service. This collaboration drove 905 referrals from durhamcraftbeer.ca, demonstrating the value of partnerships in directing event-goers to our website. Building similar partnerships with local events and businesses will be crucial in continuing to drive traffic and grow website engagement in 2025.

Search Engine Optimization

Organic search via Google remains the largest source of traffic, generating 9,375 sessions, representing a 150% increase from the previous year. This highlights the success of SEO improvements and suggests that maintaining a strong focus on optimizing website content will yield continued benefits.

Sessions by Source

- Google (organic search): 9,375 (UP 150%)
- Direct traffic: 4,642 (UP 27%)
- Facebook: 4,120
- Durham Craft Beer Fest referral: 905
- City of Oshawa (oshawa.ca) referral: 468

Traffic Overview by Country

- Canada: 20,939 sessions (the majority of traffic)
- United States: 590 sessions
- United Kingdom, Russia, and China: Combined total of 156 sessions

Next Steps

The strong performance in 2024 underscores the importance of continuing to leverage partnerships with local events, enhancing social media referral strategies, and maintaining a sharp focus on SEO. Expanding the Oshawa Tourism ticketing service to additional events and fostering collaborations with local businesses will further position the website as a central hub for information and activity in Oshawa, ensuring sustainable growth in the years to come.

LOOKING AHEAD

LOOKING INTO 2025

Signature Events

In 2025, Oshawa Tourism will continue to produce and grow our signature events, including Boujee Bites, the Convergence Music and Art Festival, the Oshawa Santa Claus Parade of Lights, and the Oshawa Holiday Shop Local Event.

Expanding the Hometown Tourist Challenge

We are excited to announce significant expansions to the Hometown Tourist Challenge. In 2025, the program will kick off with an Amazing Race-style event, encouraging residents and visitors to discover Oshawa in a fun, interactive, and competitive format. This initiative aims to continue boosting local tourism by highlighting key attractions, and building resident pride of place and referrals.

Introducing the Oshawa Halloween Event

A new addition to Oshawa Tourism's event lineup is the Oshawa Halloween Event, designed to celebrate the spooky season with themed activities, entertainment, and community participation. This event will fill a seasonal programming gap and further establish Oshawa as a dynamic year-round destination.

Website Evolution: Phase Two

Recognizing the importance of providing assistive resources for event planners, Oshawa Tourism will launch Phase Two of its website development project in 2025. The enhanced platform will feature information and resources to support large-scale conference, sporting, and convention planning. This evolution underscores our commitment to positioning Oshawa as a destination equipped to more readily host major events such as sports tournaments and conventions.

Research and Visitor Profile Development

In partnership with 1964 Consulting Group, Oshawa Tourism will undertake a new research project to develop detailed visitor profiles. This data-driven approach will focus on understanding the needs and priorities of visitors travelling to Oshawa for sporting events and conventions. The insights gained will help shape future marketing strategies, ensuring we continue to meet the evolving demands of diverse visitor demographics.

