



**TOURISM**  
**BOWEN**  
**ISLAND**

**2023 Visitor Services Report**  
**Tourism Bowen Island Association**  
**Submitted: March 28, 2024**





## 2023 Visitor Information Services Report

### Introduction

Tourism Bowen Island Association (TBI) has operated the seasonal Bowen Island Visitor Information Centre on behalf of the Bowen Island Municipality since 2016 based on a Fee-for-Service agreement.

Visitor Services Counsellors provide valuable frontline services that facilitate responsible visitations and community economic development. All Counsellors are trained in accordance with industry best practices through Destination BC's educational programs and are given extensive Bowen-specific training. The goal is for each employee to become a "Bowen Island knowledge expert." Fostering community wellbeing and sustainability are foundational values. Counsellors only direct visitors to public amenities, locations, services, and resources that can adequately accommodate visitors. We're consistent and accurate with the information that we disseminate, communicating municipal bylaws, and amplifying safety guidance, such as fire danger.

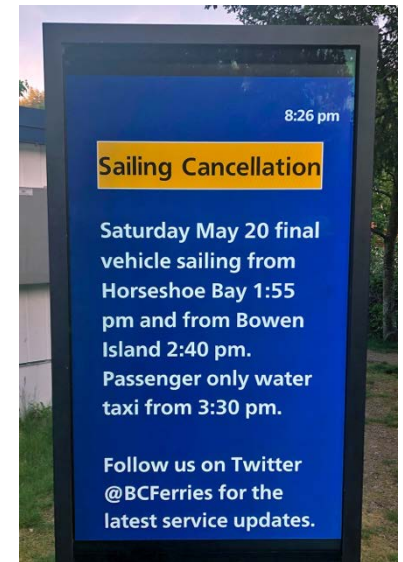
When Visitor Services Counsellors "capture" visitors we inform and educate, sharing valuable information and tips that support responsible, value-added experiences. Visitor services is composed of proactive strategies and practices that touch virtually every aspect of our community: from natural amenities, such as beaches, trails, and parks, to practical how-to-guidance regarding cars, dogs, buses, ferry lineup, and other. Visitor services help to mitigate problems, protect environmental habits, and preserve our community.



## 2023 Overview:

For 2023, the Bowen Island Visitor Information Centre was open to the public from Friday May 19 through September 4, a total 15.5 weeks / 109 days. Saturday May 20 was a long and challenging day due to the ferry cancellations. Staff worked extended hours assisting visitors, finding accommodations, and solving a variety of issues.

Visitor Centre staff included a part-time supervisor who hired and trained staff and managed all operations. In addition to the supervisor, there were three part-time staff and one-full time employee who worked a total of 7 weeks. It takes a significant amount of time and effort to train staff. Thankfully, two were returning employees. The combined total staff hours for 2023 were 1,240. The following chart shows key statistics for the years 2016 – 2023.



### Notes:

- The following data represents the number of people/parties that VIC staff personally assist.
- 2019 is the year that we had the most funding/staff, resulting in the highest interactions.
- The Kiosk's higher interactions is due to its prominent location, but its operation is limited and dependent on funding/staff.

Visitor Information Centre Year-over-Year Comparisons 2016 – 2023

Year-over-year Comparison	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	For same period % difference 2020 / 2019	2021	2022	% difference 2022 over 2021	2023	% difference 2023 over 2022
VIC Hours								704		869	23%
Kiosk Hours								57		155	172%
Staff Hours								1,021		1,240	21.5%
Total Hours*	938.5	1,003.5	1,123	1,049	755	7	888	761	-15%	1024	35%
Total VIC Parties	2,928	5,177	6,770	7,438	3,999	-26	4,924	5,591	13%	6,152	10%
Total Parties Kiosk	307	363	1,533	4,099	1,796	-48	1,935	766	-87%	2,180	184%
Total Parties (VIC & Kiosk)	3,235	5,540	8,303	11,537	5,795	-35	6,859	6,357	-8%	8,332	31%
Total VIC Visitors	7,311	13,329	17,064	19,654	9,867	-32	12,936	14,716	13%	17,058	16%
Total Visitors Kiosk/roaming	743	1,023	4,075	11,442	4,785	-50	5,604	2,200	-87%	8,001	263%
<b>All Visitors Combined</b>	<b>8,054</b>	<b>14,352</b>	<b>21,139</b>	<b>31,096</b>	<b>14,652</b>	<b>-39</b>	<b>18,540</b>	<b>16,916</b>	<b>-9%</b>	<b>25,059</b>	<b>48%</b>

The above statistics reflect staff interactions only, not all visitors to Bowen Island. For the peak summer months July and August 2023, the estimated visitors to Bowen Island were 62,747, based on BC Ferries statistics and Experience Card versus full fare data. For the same two-month period, Visitor Centre Staff interacted with 17,149 visitors or 27% of estimated total visitors.

## Comparison to other communities

Tourism Bowen Island is part of Destination BC's visitor services network. In 2022, we were asked how Bowen Island's Visitor Information Centre compares to other communities, including operating structure, funding, and statistics. Gabriola Island was suggested as a comparable island community based on population and proximity to a larger metropolitan centre. However, Nanaimo's 100,000 population does not really compare to Metro Vancouver's 2.6 million (2021), as evidenced in the following chart. This chart presents information for 7 communities in addition to Bowen Island and was originally created in 2022 using 2021 data. For this version, 2023 visitor statistics have been added.

### Community Visitor Services Survey – DBC VIC network statistics and telephone conversations

*\*This comparison was originally created based on 2021 statistics & information. For 2023, only VIC hours & total visitors have been added.*

Community	Operational structure	Annual base funding municipal/regional	2021 Hours Operation	2021 Total Visitors	2023 Hours Operation	2023 Total Visitors
Gabriola - pop 4,050; Regional District of Nanaimo	chamber	\$23,000 (2021) \$26,000 (2022) estimate based on 35% of Chamber funding \$65,000 (2021) and requesting \$75,000	543	2,199	933	4,180
Gibsons - pop 4,600; municipality, Regional District	DMO - Sunshine Coast Tourism	\$131,000 (2021) to operate both Gibsons and Sechelt	1,122	3,945	1,813	6,587
Sechelt - pop 10,200; Regional District Sunshine Coast	DMO - Sunshine Coast Tourism	\$131,000 (2021) to operate both Gibsons and Sechelt	1,155	3,673	1,821	6,568
Hope - pop 6,200; municipality	CEDC org – AdvantageHope	\$100,000 (2021)	1,636	24,710	2,508	34,289
Oliver - pop 5,000; municipality, Regional District	DMO - Oliver Tourism Association	\$56,000 (2021)	717	1,956	1,326	7,041
Princeton - pop 2,900 ; municipality	Municipal - Ec Dev	\$124,000 (2021)	2,093	12,183	3,013	22,224
Squamish - pop 19,500; municipality	DMO - Tourism Squamish		2,021	58,532	2,409	63,037
<b>Bowen Island - pop 3,700</b>	<b>DMO - Tourism Bowen Island</b>	<b>\$20,000 (2019–2024)</b>	<b>888</b>	<b>18,540</b>	<b>1,024</b>	<b>25,059</b>



## Nonprofit & Funding

Tourism Bowen Island Association (TBI) was established in May 2015 and is a member-based non-profit organization managed by a volunteer board of directors. TBI operates as the central body for tourism in the community with the goals of facilitating sustainable economic development and managing responsible visitations. TBI is a small nonprofit with an operating budget primarily composed of grants and service contracts. During COVID, TBI successfully received funding and a couple of grants that enabled the organization to hire staff and provide enhanced services and programs. However, those grants have ended and without new funding or revenue streams on the horizon, TBI must restructure.

TBI is grateful for a recent federal grant that enabled the organization to develop a tourism plan and create new visitor resources. The new Visitor Map & Guide provides key information to support responsible visits and to enhance wayfinding. The grant also funded new signage, visitor materials, and display fixtures.



## Fee-for-Service Agreement

TBI has operated the Visitor Information Centre on behalf of the Bowen Island Municipality since 2016. The Fee-for-Service agreement stipulates brick & mortar services for the peak summer months only. The Centre receives high visitor traffic throughout the year and TBI has been maintaining the self-serve information displayed on the front porch.

Each year TBI has leveraged the Fee-for-Service agreement by applying for and receiving a Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) grant. The CSJ grant has enabled TBI to extend days and hours of operation and to hire more staff, resulting in improved visitor services over a longer period. However, the CSJ grant is never guaranteed and since the pandemic the CSJ funding has been significantly less, going from a high of 18,500 in 2019 to \$5,000 in 2023.

The Fee-for-Service agreement has not been reviewed or revised over the years. The following chart shows the BIM Fee-for-Service agreement from 2016 through to 2024. Using BC's minimum wage as a baseline measurement, this chart shows the value depreciation over the years. TBI is aware and respectful of BIM's fiscal constraints. This analysis is offered for information purposes. It is also part of TBI's review and restructuring considerations.

*\*Note: Tourism Bowen Island does not pay anyone minimum wage because it's not a living wage and because it's not realistic in comparison to other employment in the community.*

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Fee-for Service	\$15000	\$15000	\$15000	\$20000	\$20000	\$20000	\$20,000	\$20000	\$20000
BC min wage June	\$10.45	\$10.85	\$12.65	\$13.85	\$14.60	\$15.20	\$15.65	\$16.75	\$17.40
% wage increase over prior year		3.8%	16.6%	9.5%	5.4%	4%	2.9%	7%	3.9%
deficit between agreement & minimum wage		-\$570	-\$3,150	\$125	-\$1,080	\$1,880	-\$2,460	\$3,860	\$4,640

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Tourism Bowen Island Association has been pleased to provide visitor services and support community economic development over the years. Tourism has been and will continue to be a key social and economic driver on Bowen. We welcome opportunities to dialogue and explore collaborative efforts.

