

Support for big events helps bring tourists

It's important for the federal government to do its part, **Martin Roy** says.

There's every reason for optimism about the tourist season getting underway in Canada with Tourism Week from May 28 to June 3 and the first major events and festivals being rolled out across the country, in this year of the 150th anniversary of Confederation and Montreal's 375th birthday.

This is the most propitious opportunity in a long time for our destination — which has topped the New York Times' and Lonely Planet's annual lists — to attract more international tourists than ever.

Each year, there are more than a billion international tourists who travel the world in search of a change of scenery and new experiences. The World Tourism Organization predicts that this will increase to 1.8 billion in 2030, representing an average annual growth of 3.3 per cent. In 2016, Canada welcomed nearly 20 million foreign visitors, the most in the past 14 years, and this could see it climb a few rungs up the list of the top 20 international destinations, after ranking 18th in 2015.

“In addition to their positive social and cultural benefits, festivals and events act as very appealing products to help market destinations. They help turn vague intentions to travel to Canada into concrete plans to attend not-to-be-missed events.

As the festival and events season gears up, Festivals and Major Events (FAME) asks that the federal government take a step further in promoting the arrival of international tourists and generating benefits.

What is needed is a program to help foster the growth of major events like the Ottawa Bluesfest, the Montreal International Jazz Festival, Just For Laughs Festival, Fredericton Harvest Jazz & Blues Festival, Vancouver International Jazz Festival and Festival d'été de Québec. Such events are held in most provinces. To this end, FAME suggests using part of the 150th anniversary budget allocation to start a permanent fund.

In addition to their positive social and cultural benefits, festivals and events act as very appealing products to help market destinations. They help turn vague intentions to travel to Canada into concrete plans to attend not-to-be-missed events. In 2009, we estimated that a group of 15 major events would alone generate more than \$1 billion of spending and \$650 million in GDP for the country. It has also been established since then that each dollar invested by government in festivals pays off 2 ½ times in terms of tax revenues and incidental taxes. More than 10 per cent of the festivalgoers at many events come from outside the country. Osheaga, where more than two-thirds of participants come from outside of Quebec, shows what can be done.

Elsewhere, various jurisdictions have understood the importance of investing in festivals and events, which are increasingly becoming worldwide social phenomena as well as significant tourism opportunities, as evidenced by the success of Coachella in California, Tomorrowland in Belgium, and SXSW in Texas. The Lone Star State alone invests nearly \$40 million annually in a fund for various events, while the city of Austin contributes more than \$12 million annually.

In Canada, Quebec and Ontario recently announced reinvestments, each increasing their program budgets to more than \$20 million, but the federal government has not moved forward since the end of the Marquee Tourism Events Program in

2010. Through Canadian Heritage and economic development agencies, Canada indirectly supports up to four per cent of a sector that in other countries — France, Sweden and Ireland, to name a few — is proportionally funded to a greater degree.

In the United Kingdom, the public revenue share in British Arts Festival Association members is as high as 28 per cent.

The Canadian Council of Tour-

ism Ministers is already evaluating the possibility of collaborating with this significant, but fragile industry.

To enable Canadian festivals and events to be more attractive and competitive on the international scene and offer a higher quality “product” and enhanced experience to their client base, FAME asks the federal government to do its part.

Martin Roy is executive director of

OPINION

Festivals and Major Events (FAME) and Regroupement des événements majeurs internationaux (RÉMI). FAME represents 22 festivals and major events across Canada while RÉMI is active in Quebec, with 27 members.

You only use quality tools you can trust. Your network should be a part of that.

Power your business with the network you can count on. Get blazing-fast Fibe Internet, advanced phone services, data security and more, all delivered on Canada's largest fibre optic network. Do more and make more with Bell.

Business Fibe Internet and phone bundle.

FROM **\$84.95/MO.!**
For new customers on a 36-month term.

Call 310-BELL or visit bell.ca/thenetwork to learn more.

Bell doing business just got better

Offer ends May 29, 2017. Available to new business customers in Ontario, where access and technology permit and where Business phone service is not CRTC-regulated. Subject to change without notice and cannot be combined with any other offer. Installation fees of \$80 for Internet and \$125 for Bell Total Connect. Max. of 8 phone lines per modem. Limitations apply when dialing 9-1-1 from outside of your service address; see bell.ca/emergencyservices. Taxes extra. Other conditions apply, including minimum system requirements. Fibe is a trademark of Bell Canada. (1) Subject to a 36-month term with Business Fibe Internet 25 and Bell Total Connect Go package. Early cancellation charges apply. Wi-Fi modem rental included.