

The Path Forward

A Year of Growth, Challenges and Vision for The PlaidPath

2024 ANNUAL REPORT: THE PLAIDPATH TRAILS AND TREKS CORP.











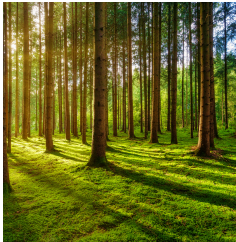

A Year of Discovery and Growth



As we reflect on our first year at The PlaidPath, it's clear that this journey has been one of both transformation and evolution. From the spark of an idea to the development of a vision that connects travelers with Canada's spirit, we've navigated the challenges, embraced the unknown, and are now poised to continue our trek forward. This annual report is not just a look back—it's a celebration of the steps we've taken and a map for the path ahead.

Thank you for walking with us.

At a Glance

The Journey Begins	Our Path Forward	Treading New Ground	Lessons from the Trail	Detours and Triumphs
				
Reflections from the Founder	The Story of The PlaidPath	A Year of Growth and Discovery	What We've Learned So Far	Navigating Challenges Along the Path
Voices from the Trail	Building the Foundation	The Road Ahead	Gratitude for the Journey	Let's Stay Connected
				
Feedback and Validation for The PlaidPath	Our Financial Journey	Our Vision for the Year to Come	Thanks to Those Who Walked with Us	Reach Out to The PlaidPath

The Journey Begins



Matthew Cugnet
Founder and CEO

"The PlaidPath is more than a business; it's a passion project—an ode to the way I choose to walk through life. There is no rush. I trust the journey."

When I first walked the Camino de Santiago in 2012, someone shared a piece of wisdom with me: *to keep the spirit of the Camino alive, you must find a project that embodies it every day*. For years, through trial and error, I did what I could to maintain that spark. But it wasn't until I returned from the Shikoku pilgrimage in 2023 that the idea for *The PlaidPath* truly came to life.

Inspired by *osettai* and motivated by the word *ganbatte*, a call to persevere no matter the challenges, I let the teachings of pilgrimage guide my next steps. Almost naturally, and seemingly overnight, *The PlaidPath* was born.

Having trekked around the world, I became deeply passionate about creating a national pilgrimage experience here at home—one that could connect Canadians and visitors alike through an authentic, homegrown journey. Today, seeing how *The PlaidPath* has evolved fills me with pride and gratitude.

This past year has not been without its challenges. From navigating the complexities of a startup to finding my rhythm in marketing, it's been a season of immense learning and growth. I start my day with a to-do list and end my day with a million-and-one more things I need to accomplish tomorrow. But it's not a sprint, it's a long-distance trek.

One of the greatest lessons has been the power of community and the courage to reach out for support. Through programs like the Firecircle Entrepreneurial Program and collaborations with several digital marketing agencies, I was able to refine my business plan and sharpen the strategy behind *The PlaidPath*.

There is still much to accomplish. With the launch of our tours on Vancouver Island, the work is just beginning. Yet, I remind myself to take it one step at a time. *The PlaidPath* is more than a business; it's a passion project—an ode to the way I choose to walk through life. There is no rush. I trust the journey. Through every success and every setback, *The PlaidPath* continues to grow and evolve.

To those who have supported and encouraged this project from day one, thank you for believing in this vision. And to those who are just discovering *The PlaidPath*, thank you for joining us. The journey is just getting started.

Our Path Forward

The PlaidPath is a Canadian travel company offering exclusive trekking experiences along the iconic Trans Canada Trail. Blending adventure with holistic wellness, we present the Trail as more than just a route—it's a destination for those seeking meaningful, transformative getaways.

Our thoughtfully designed tours go beyond the typical trek, immersing travelers in Canada's rich culture, history, and breathtaking landscapes. With a commitment to making transformative travel accessible, we shine a light on the hidden beauty of

Canada's rural heartland, inviting travelers to experience the country in a deeper, more authentic way.

At *The PlaidPath*, we are redefining travel—offering affordable, adaptable journeys that prioritize comfort while nurturing personal growth, community connection, and well-being. Our vision is to unite Canadians and international travelers through *The Provincial Pilgrimage Project*, fostering purposeful holidays, sustainable tourism, and pathways toward reconciliation with Canada's Indigenous communities.

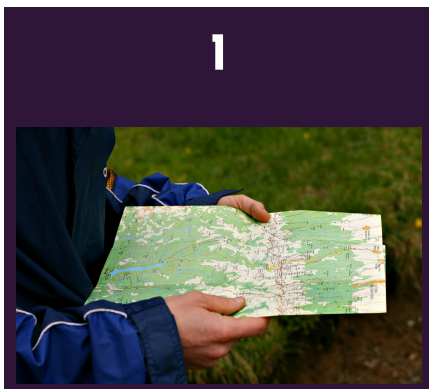
Join us and discover a new way to walk through Canada's backyard—where every step tells a story.



Treading New Ground

In our first year, our focus was on navigating the startup process—from incorporation and domain registration to building the foundation of our online presence. It was a year of laying groundwork, testing ideas, learning from experience, and letting *The PlaidPath* evolve organically.

Some of our key milestones include:



Developing The VAN to VIC Trek:

I embarked on several research trips between Vancouver and Vancouver Island, building partnerships and establishing relationships with local tourism offices and small businesses. Every connection and conversation helped shape a more thoughtful, meaningful experience for future guests.

Participating in the Firecircle Entrepreneurial Program:

Throughout the year, I worked through Firecircle's structured program, watching *The PlaidPath* grow from an initial concept into something truly special. Each exercise refined my ideas, and by the program's end, I had developed a comprehensive business plan. Thanks to ongoing mentorship, I continue to reflect, adapt, and build *The PlaidPath* into a business of lasting significance.

2



3



Creating Tours and Experiences:

I designed three day-tours along The VAN to VIC Trek, as well as shorter multi-day adventures. These offerings provide guests a taste of what *The PlaidPath* is all about—transformative travel in Canada's backyard.

Evolving Our Approach:

Initially, my tours included as many tourist activities as possible, aiming for a rich, packed itinerary. However, reflecting on my own pilgrimage experiences, I realized the importance of creating space for pause and reflection. True to the heart of pilgrimage, I restructured the tours to balance adventure activities like kayaking and whale watching with moments of rest, self-discovery, and holistic healing. At the end of 2024, I paused bookings to ensure every offering resonated deeply with *The PlaidPath*'s mission.

4



5



Building Meaningful Partnerships:

I'm proud of the partnerships formed with Island Romer Adventures, By the Bay Lavender Villa, and Oceanfront Suites Cowichan Bay. These relationships were built with shared values in mind: a belief in slow tourism, authentic connection, and the future potential of *The PlaidPath*.

Learning Through Trial and Error:

Not every connection turned into a partnership. Some explorations led to different directions, but each conversation and experience, including those that didn't lead to collaboration, helped refine and shape The VAN to VIC Trek into what it is today. This process of trial and error has been essential to the development phase, offering invaluable lessons that have shaped both the business and my approach to connecting with the communities we serve.

6



7



Fostering Relationships with Indigenous Communities:

An important ongoing focus is building relationships with local Indigenous communities to incorporate Indigenous teachings into the tours — creating a more enriching, respectful, and culturally authentic experience for all travelers. Over the past year, I have reached out to several Nations across Vancouver Island and the surrounding areas, initiating conversations and extending invitations for collaboration. While many responses are still pending, I remain committed to listening, learning, and building these relationships thoughtfully and at the pace that honours their timelines and protocols.

Connecting with the Trans Canada Trail Organization:

One of my proudest accomplishments this year was forming a partnership with the Trans Canada Trail organization. As the TCT is the backbone of our treks, it was essential to me to contribute to its development. This connection has opened the door to many future collaborations that will support both *The PlaidPath* and the wider trail community.

8



9



Launching and Evolving Our Online Presence:

Building our website and social media platforms was a major undertaking. While the first version of the website launched near the end of 2024, it is undergoing a refresh in early 2025 to integrate more storytelling, community resources, and connection-focused features. Finding the right structure and aesthetic for social media was a challenge, but it was an important journey toward building content that feels both resonant and meaningful.

Trail Testing and Iteration:

After developing The VAN to VIC Trek, I set out solo to walk the trail myself. Initially, I envisioned a route that could be completed entirely on foot, like the Camino. However, I quickly learned that, much like *The PlaidPath*, the TCT is still growing and evolving. Some sections were difficult to navigate on foot, leading to the integration of transport support for certain parts of the journey. This pivot not only addressed accessibility challenges but also allowed me to offer enhancements like luggage portage and easier access to key experiences along the trek.

10



Lessons from the Trail

The Path is Never Straight

Trekking, much like entrepreneurship, is rarely a straight line. You can plan the route, study the maps, and prepare for every possibility, but the true journey only begins when you set foot on the trail. This year taught me that it's not only okay to change course — it's necessary. Sometimes the unexpected detours, the ones that feel like setbacks, are the very moments that lead you to where you were meant to be all along.

The Opportunity in Canada's Rural and Wellness Tourism

As I stepped fully into the world of Canadian tourism, I learned how vast and largely untapped our rural and wellness travel potential truly is. Canada's natural beauty is profound, but it's the experience of moving through it — slowly, intentionally — that leaves a lasting impact. Trekking in Canada is not just about seeing the landscapes; it's about feeling them, connecting with them, and in many ways, connecting more deeply with yourself. Wellness tourism is growing rapidly around the world, and here in Canada, there is an incredible opportunity to shape it into something authentic, inclusive, and grounded in community and reconciliation.

The Changing Needs of Today's Travelers

Through countless conversations, research trips, and personal experiences, I learned that today's travelers are seeking more than just a vacation — they're seeking transformation. They want to return home feeling changed, with stories to tell and a sense of connection they didn't have before. This insight shifted how I approached building The PlaidPath. I

realized that offering a trail to walk is only part of it; I also need to offer space for reflection, moments of pause, and experiences that allow personal growth to take root.

Finding My Confidence as an Entrepreneur

On a personal level, my biggest growth this year was in finding the confidence to call myself an entrepreneur and to fully step into this career path. Leaving behind other careers wasn't easy. For a long time, I felt caught between the familiar and the unknown. But just like walking a long trail, you have to trust that forward is still forward, even when the way ahead isn't perfectly clear. Every meeting, every workshop, every trial and error along the way helped me build not just a business, but belief in myself as its founder and guide.

Embracing Flexibility, Resilience, and Trust

Flexibility, resilience, and trust — these became my compass points. When I allowed myself to embrace detours, to redesign tours that no longer felt aligned, or to pause and reassess rather than pushing forward blindly, I found that I wasn't losing my way — I was finding a better one.

Key Lessons from This Year

The lessons of this year will continue to guide The PlaidPath as it grows:

- **Stay flexible:** The journey will unfold differently than planned, and that's where the magic often happens.
- **Stay connected:** Relationships, both with guests and partners, are at the heart of meaningful tourism.
- **Stay true:** The mission matters more than the metrics; when the heart leads, the business follows.

A Stronger Sense of Self and Purpose

I step into the next chapter of The PlaidPath with a deeper understanding of the industry, a greater respect for the travelers who choose this kind of journey, and a stronger sense of who I am — both as a person and as an entrepreneur.



Detours and Triumphs

"The secret of life, though, is to fall seven times and to get up eight times." - Paulo Coelho

Building *The PlaidPath* has been anything but easy. Financial limitations were the first and biggest wall I ran into. From day one, I knew I wanted to build something meaningful — something rooted in accessibility, not just for guests, but in how the business itself grew. I wasn't interested in going into heavy debt just to "look accomplished" on paper. I chose to move slow, to build something real, even if that meant working twice as hard for half the visible results.

FIELD NOTE: The pace may be slower than you planned. That just means you're noticing more along the way.

Every decision became an exercise in discipline. I couldn't afford a full digital marketing team, so I became the marketer. I couldn't outsource website development, so I became the designer. I learned that resourcefulness isn't just a nice quality — it's survival. And through that survival, something authentic took root. *The PlaidPath* isn't the product of fast money or polished optics. It's the result of showing up every day, building step by step, even when the progress felt invisible.

FIELD NOTE: Resourcefulness isn't just survival – it's the seed of authenticity.

Marketing *The PlaidPath* — especially through social media — became another slow-burn challenge. I didn't come into this as a natural marketer. Finding my voice took time. Experimenting and failing took guts. Sometimes it felt like shouting into the void, wondering if anyone was even listening. But the deeper I leaned into the truth of what *The PlaidPath* offers — transformation, connection, healing — the more I realized that this isn't meant for the masses. It's meant for those ready to walk a different kind of path. I've stopped chasing numbers. I'm building a space that will call the right people at the right time, even if it takes longer than I thought.

FIELD NOTE: Growth isn't always visible from the trail. Trust that the roots are deepening where you can't see.

Designing tours along the Trans Canada Trail brought its own rough edges. Not every stretch of trail is easy to navigate with a group. Some areas simply don't have the

resources needed yet. It would have been easy to see these challenges as signs to quit or pivot into something easier — but that's not the story *The PlaidPath* is here to tell. I adapted. I forged new partnerships. I found creative ways to weave transportation, local businesses, and trail sections together into journeys that are both rugged and restorative.

FIELD NOTE: Challenges aren't roadblocks. They're invitations to innovate.

The truth is, this dream has been shaped as much by the detours as by the original plan. Every time I thought I was off track, it turned out I was just finding a better one. I've learned that entrepreneurship — like trekking — demands resilience. It demands patience. It demands faith in the unseen path ahead.

I'm not the same person who started *The PlaidPath*. I'm not just building a company anymore. I'm building a movement — one that invites people to slow down, reconnect, and heal through the land we call home. The obstacles didn't break me; they revealed the trail I was always meant to walk.

Voices from the Trail





Foundations First:

- **Vision over Velocity:** In 2024, I prioritized building The PlaidPath's foundation before bringing it fully to market. Rather than rushing, I focused on crafting an offering grounded in meaning and long-term sustainability.
- **Landscape Literacy:** Through deep market research, I explored traveler interests in Canadian tourism — particularly the growing desire for restorative, experience-rich journeys that go beyond surface-level sightseeing.
- **Budget-Conscious, Soul-Full:** I studied regional travel budgets to ensure our offerings would remain accessible while retaining their authenticity, quality, and connection to place.
- **A Grounded Beginning:** Research trips across Vancouver and Vancouver Island offered crucial context. The places, people, and pace of these regions shaped how The PlaidPath would begin its journey.



Building Before Selling:

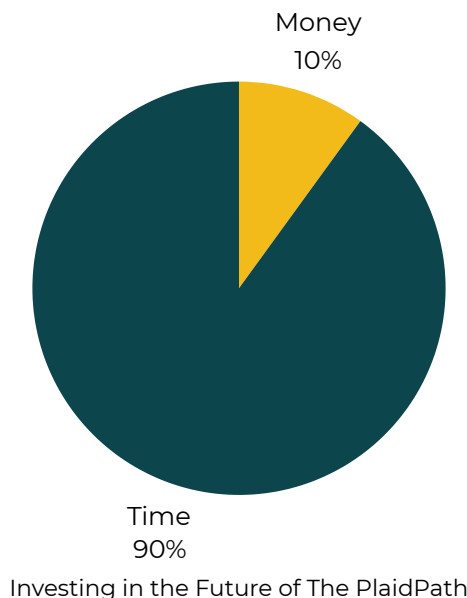
- **Conversations that Count:** Dialogue with small business owners, tourism operators, and entrepreneurs across the island revealed enthusiasm and alignment. Their energy affirmed that The PlaidPath filled a real need for community-first, mindful tourism.
- **Roots of Support:** The encouragement I received from regional partners confirmed we are walking a path others are excited to join — particularly those invested in sustainable travel and local storytelling.
- **Quiet Momentum:** Even with a modest social media footprint, the early resonance was clear. Followers responded to our tone, our purpose, and the invitation to travel differently.
- **Testing the Waters:** While formal feedback awaits the launch of our 2025 tours, the response so far has validated our direction: people are hungry for connection, reflection, and authenticity in their journeys.



Community Insights:

- **Echoes from the Trail:** Insights emerged through every interaction — informal chats, online messages, and shared reflections during research journeys.
- **Voices of Place:** Stories from Indigenous collaborators, local guides, and business owners shaped our approach to walking with, not just through, the land.
- **Themes We Heard:** A call for slower travel, deeper cultural engagement, and more space for personal reflection was consistent across conversations.
- **The Trail Teaches:** Community input has already influenced our offerings — including how we pace our treks, share regional stories, and center wellness and intention.
- **Roots & Relationships:** Building relationships with place-based partners continues to be a cornerstone of our work, grounding us in trust and reciprocity.
- **Walking Together:** A shared identity is forming — one built by those choosing this path with us: reflective travelers, passionate hosts, and communities eager to be seen.

Building the Foundation



Our first year wasn't about turning a profit — it was about pouring everything I had into building something that mattered. Working within a tight \$10,000 budget, I funded *The PlaidPath* entirely from personal savings, choosing to invest not just money, but time, heart, and belief into the foundation of this company.

I logged over 1,000 hours building *The PlaidPath* — hours carved out after long days at a full-time job, hours stolen from weekends, evenings, and moments of rest. It meant sacrifice. It meant trusting that the work I was putting in, quietly and consistently, would one day speak louder than any quick win ever could.

There were no shortcuts. Every research trip, every late-night website tweak, every conversation with potential partners was a brick laid in a path I could only partially see ahead of me. I wasn't just investing money; I was investing my future.

We didn't generate revenue this year, and that was by design. The goal was never fast money — it was longevity, authenticity, and creating something that could grow slow and strong, like the best journeys do. Now, standing on the other side of our first year, I can see that the sweat equity was worth it. *The PlaidPath* isn't just an idea anymore — it's real, and it's ready to walk further.

The Road Ahead

Looking ahead, 2025 will be a year of refinement, growth, and expanding *The PlaidPath* into the next phase. Our goals for the next year are focused on fine-tuning our offerings,

deepening our community connections, and amplifying our presence both online and offline. Here's where we're headed:

1. Finalize & Launch Tours

- ☐ Finalize refinements for all tours to ensure they align with *The PlaidPath's* mission of holistic travel and personal growth.
- ☐ Officially launch public tours along *The VAN to VIC Trek*.
- ☐ Host exclusive tours along *The City and Shoreline Trail* (Vancouver day tour) to build reviews and awareness.

2. Website & Digital Presence

- ☐ Complete website refresh to enhance storytelling and provide more user-friendly resources.
- ☐ Relaunch website with a focus on connecting with the community, featuring updated tour info and rich content.
- ☐ Enhance SEO efforts to improve online discoverability and optimize content for better engagement.

3. Strategic Marketing & Partnerships

- ☐ List tours on online travel platforms (e.g., Viator, GetYourGuide) to expand visibility and reach a broader audience.
- ☐ Refine marketing approach, focusing on a consistent, engaging social media presence.
- ☐ Partner with local businesses, organizations, and Indigenous communities on Vancouver Island to enrich the *The PlaidPath* experience.
- ☐ Apply for small grants and funding opportunities to support growth.
- ☐ Apply to Dragon's Den, for fun, to raise brand awareness and network with potential investors.

4. Community Building & Outreach

- ☐ Establish a strong presence within local communities through workshops, walking clubs, and public events.
- ☐ Launch a public walk club and focus on building relationships with local residents and visitors alike.
- ☐ Host community engagement events to strengthen connections and promote *The PlaidPath* as a lifestyle brand.

5. Certifications & Professional Development

- ☐ Obtain certification as an interpretive guide to enhance guest experience and storytelling on tours.

- ☐ Receive Wilderness First Aid certification to ensure the safety and well-being of all guests.
- ☐ Continue learning and growing as an entrepreneur by attending workshops, seeking mentorship, and refining my business strategy.

6. Financial Sustainability

- ☐ Build a sustainable revenue model by focusing on tour bookings, exclusive events, and merchandise.
- ☐ Seek investment or partnership opportunities from individuals or organizations passionate about sustainable, community-driven tourism.

7. Long-term Vision

- ☐ Start planning tours for additional provinces/territories to expand *The PlaidPath* across Canada.
- ☐ Strengthen relationships with the Trans Canada Trail nonprofit and other partners to build long-term collaborations.

Gratitude for the Journey



As I reflect on the journey of building *The PlaidPath* in its first year, I am filled with gratitude for all the support and encouragement I've received along the way.

First and foremost, I want to thank my parents, family, and friends who have stood by me from the very beginning. Your unwavering belief in me, even when the path was unclear,

has been a source of strength. Your encouragement, patience, and love have been essential in keeping me grounded and motivated.

A special thank you to the incredible team at Firecircle for their mentorship and support, especially to Gina VandenDool. Your guidance has been invaluable in shaping the vision of *The PlaidPath* and providing the tools to turn those ideas into a reality. I'm forever grateful for your wisdom and the growth I've experienced through the program.

I also want to express my gratitude to life itself for guiding me down multiple paths and bringing me to this very moment. Every twist and turn, every challenge, and every success has led me here. I believe that each experience, no matter how small or seemingly unrelated, has prepared me for this journey.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge myself. Building *The PlaidPath* has been a labor of love, persistence, and growth. There have been times of doubt, but through it all, I've learned to trust in my vision, push through obstacles, and believe in the process. I'm proud of how far I've come, and I'm excited for the future.

Thank you to everyone who has been a part of this journey. I couldn't have done it without all of you.



Let's Stay Connected

The PlaidPath is more than just a travel experience — it's a community-focused initiative built on connection, discovery, and shared journeying. We believe that meaningful travel has the power to heal, to unite, and to inspire change, both within ourselves and within the communities we touch. We warmly encourage you to reach out, to step onto the trail with us, and to take the PlaidPath — not just as a destination, but as a way of walking through the world.

The PlaidPath: Trails and Treks Corp.

Website: www.plaidpath.ca

Email: info@plaidpath.ca

Phone: +1 236 971 2195

Location: Vancouver, British Columbia

Follow us on Social Media: [Instagram](#) [Facebook](#) [LinkedIn](#) [Patreon](#) [Medium](#)