

Growing Indigenous Tourism in Canada

A Tourism & Hospitality Case Study

The direct economic benefits attributed to the Indigenous tourism sector in Canada rose 23.2% between 2014 and 2017, growing from \$1.4 billion to \$1.7 billion.

Accelerating indigenous tourism growth in Canada¹

Research released by the Conference Board of Canada in February 2019 identified the Indigenous tourism sector as growing at a rapid rate, outpacing Canadian tourism activity overall. The direct economic benefits (GDP) attributed to the Indigenous tourism sector in Canada rose 23.2% between 2014 and 2017, growing from \$1.4 billion to \$1.7 billion. Compared with a 12.0% increase in overall tourism activity in Canada, this growth highlighted the recent and momentous acceleration of the Indigenous tourism sector across the country.

- The main barriers to Indigenous tourism growth identified by business owners included access to training, financing and marketing support.
- International travellers were also identified as particularly important to the growth of Indigenous cultural tourism growth. Demand for Indigenous tourism in Canada continues to exceed expectations as more international visitors seek authentic experiences.

Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC): 5 Year Strategic Plan 2019-2024²

1. Development:

- **Indigenous Culinary Experiences:** Develop Indigenous culinary experiences to leverage extensive consumer interest in meaningful and quality culinary experiences.
- **Artisan Authenticity:** Educate consumers on the importance of the authenticity of Indigenous artisan products and promote authentic Indigenous artisans and craftspeople to increase their sales and revenues.
- **Micro Grant Program:** Expand the Experience Development Micro Grant Program to help a larger proportion of the applicants and also assist those in the initial stages of business planning.

2. Leadership:

- **Provincial & Territorial Support** for Indigenous tourism associations across Canada.
- **Delivery of Annual International Indigenous Tourism Conference** to ensure national coordination of ITAC strategy, marketing, product development, leadership and partnerships.
- **Invest in Research** to support informed and defensible decision making and the ongoing tracking of Indigenous tourism performance.

- Ongoing Sustainability of ITAC to continue to maximize the economic impact of the Indigenous tourism industry across Canada as it grows.

3. Marketing:

- Increase International Tourism Trade Shows presence and preparedness.
- Increase Digital and Social Media Assets and Distribution to better tell the stories of Indigenous peoples, businesses, and experiences.
- Drive Sales through Promotion and Marketing directly to consumers and travel trade through targeted marketing, packages, and media partnerships.
- Build Multi-Language Platforms to address rapidly growing demand from overseas markets.
- Airports & Cruise Ship Terminals Presence to increase Indigenous tourism awareness and to target new visitors to Canada.
- Niche Marketing Campaigns for unique and differentiating experiences for winter experiences, fishing, etc. that visitors are seeking.

Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC): Industry Development Programs³

- International Indigenous Tourism Conference

The International Indigenous Tourism Conference (IITC) is an annual conference bringing together people interested and invested in creating and contributing towards a growing Indigenous tourism industry in Canada and around the world.

- The RISE of Indigenous Tourism – Supporting the Industry by Recognising Excellence

ITAC, in partnership with Tourism HR Canada, is looking to develop Canada's first Indigenous tourism standards recognition program, entitled RISE. This project will aim to support Indigenous tourism businesses of all kinds, from authentic cultural experiences to essential tourism services in Indigenous destinations to community-based initiatives in the planning stage.

RISE will provide precise, measurable, actionable, and easy-to-implement criteria to ensure that Indigenous tourism operators are wholly prepared for today's travellers.

- Tourism Development Funding Support Program

ITAC's Product Development Fund, with co-contributions from a range of supporting organisations, includes the 'Experience Development Micro Grant Program', with rounds activated in 2017, 2018 and 2019, responding directly to the demonstrated need of the support to guide and prepare Indigenous tourism businesses to reach a market-ready state and develop sustainable growth for economic success.

*Note: ITAC evaluated 139 applications and awarded 62 micro grants in 2018-2019.

ITAC invites Indigenous tourism businesses to apply for up to CAD \$10,000 to support tourism product development support to increase the market or export readiness of their business.

As part of the application process, eligible projects proposed must clearly demonstrate how the grant will increase revenues, increase the number of jobs or make the business more market or export-ready.

Example of an Experience Development Micro Grant Program Project Plan inclusions:

- Staff Training
- Website Upgrades
- Infrastructure Upgrades
- Expanding your current business
- Administrative/Financial Advisory Assistance
- Marketing and Sales Planning
- Business Assessment
- Health and Safety Equipment
- Other projects related to improving market/export readiness.

Successful applicants will work with ITAC staff to confirm the amount of investment; availability of any matching funding programs; confirm the project plan; selection of suppliers/contractors necessary for the project; the specific payments required for suppliers/partners/trainers/contractors; and, the schedule for start and completion of the project. Successful applicants will also be responsible for reporting back to ITAC regarding the project progress, results and financial details of funding investment.

*Eligibility for this program is restricted to Canadian Indigenous tourism businesses that are at least 51% Indigenous-owned or controlled and who operate within one of the 13 provinces and territories of Canada.

- Indigenous Cultural Experiences – National Guidelines

The Guidelines were created through national consultation with ITAC partners, industry, and support from the Federal Government through Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC). The goal for ITAC was to create a user-friendly self-assessment and reference tool that would be valuable for both the Indigenous tourism industry and the Indigenous economic development community across Canada in the creation and expansion of Indigenous cultural tourism experiences.

- Manitoba Indigenous Summit

The 2019 summit shared Manitoba's Indigenous Tourism Strategy, focus on providing professional development opportunities to Indigenous tourism stakeholders, and providing opportunities for Indigenous tourism stakeholders to develop relationships and/or business with existing tourism operators.

Application in WA

Insights gained from strategic actions set by the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada may expand Western Australia's scope and guiding principles to future training, workforce and Aboriginal tourism development.

The most significant opportunity for the Indigenous Tourism industry lies in its ability to motivate and inspire their guests, visitors and fellow industry partners to tell others about their story.

The impact of all market ready members generating 2-3 online conversations a week, would cause the overall conversation around Indigenous Tourism experiences in Canada to grow by approximately 30%.⁴

References

1. Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada, 2019
2. Accelerating Indigenous Tourism Growth in Canada: Five Year Strategic Plan Update 2019-2024, Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada, 2019
3. Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada, 2019
4. Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada: Sentiment Analysis Summary, Destination Think! October 2018