

Call for Inputs

Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Report to the 78th Session of the UN General Assembly

Responses from the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC)

About ITAC

We are an Indigenous-led organization that supports the growth of Indigenous tourism, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis, in Canada and addresses the demand for authentic Indigenous experiences through development and marketing initiatives. We are focused on creating partnerships between associations, organizations, government departments and industry leaders from across Canada. We support 1,900 tourism businesses that are Indigenous-owned and controlled – from every province and territory in the country.

1. What are the positive and negative impacts of tourism on Indigenous Peoples' rights? Please illustrate with concrete examples.

Indigenous-led tourism can bring many positive impacts. One of the most important positive example is that tourism has allowed communities and nations in repatriating some of the land back and helping them protect sacred areas from any larger development.

We strongly believe that tourism can have a positive impact on Indigenous People as long as the industry is Indigenous-led. We have found that with many of our member businesses are located in remote parts of Canada, regions that are often overlooked by our government and tourism industry partners. Tourism can bring economic stability, awareness and support to these parts of the country.

We estimate that Indigenous tourism can contribute \$1.9 billion in direct GDP contributions, support 1,900 Indigenous tourism businesses (defined as being 50% or more Indigenous-owned), and employ close to 39,000 Indigenous tourism employees.

If Indigenous-led, tourism can also enable Indigenous Peoples to share our stories in our own voice, preserve our languages and culture and promote understanding amongst travellers. When travellers understand us, they are more inclined to support us in securing funding for our communities and ensure our rights as people.

Indigenous tourism can also contribute to ecological rights. An example of this would be land rights and environmental conversation and increased biodiversity. Spirit Bear Lodge and Wanuskewin Heritage Park are two examples of this.

Having Indigenous employers also creates empathy and understanding for Indigenous employees that are not found in mainstream employment.

Non-Indigenous led tourism can negatively impact Indigenous Peoples by perpetuating negative stereotypes that could impact the safety and rights of Indigenous Peoples. Nothing about us, without us.

2. Are Indigenous Peoples participating in the development, implementation and management of tourism projects? Please provide recent concrete examples. If not, what are the barriers to participation and to obtaining their free, prior and informed consent?

At ITAC, we strive to hire a predominately Indigenous team — First Nations, Inuit and Métis — to lead specific programs and initiatives that benefit Indigenous businesses. This is extremely important to help us understand the intricacies and unique challenges so we can ensure the Indigenous tourism industry thrives.

Here are some specific examples of Indigenous Peoples leading tourism projects:

Marilyn Jensen is one of the many great examples of how Indigenous people are reclaiming their own stories and histories. In 2007, Marilyn learned of an inauthentic tourism initiative within the community and that inspired her to create the Dakhká Khwáan Dancers. The group provides an opportunity to reclaim their languages and values and revitalize the art of singing, drumming, dancing, storytelling and making regalia. The dance group continues to put on performances and create new songs and regalia to share with the world.

Another example is David Daley of [Wapusk Adventures](#). Wapusk Adventures quickly grew to become Churchill, Manitoba's largest sled dog kennel where their offerings include learning about the dogs, sledding, snowshoeing, e-bike tours around the region, Churchill and Metis culture, making this a fun learning experience to see everything through an Indigenous lens.

[Klahoose Wilderness Resort](#) tours are primarily led by Klahoose guides who are trained to share legends, stories, language, and songs. Owned by the Klahoose First Nation, Klahoose Wilderness Resort, has recently launched a new project in which it uses water coming down from the mountain to generate power for the lodge. Currently, they're using diesel generators making the lodge completely self-sufficient.

[Nemiah Valley Lodge](#) is an Indigenous wilderness escape. The lodge sits in the heart of the traditional territory of the Xeni Gwet'in First Nation in the beautiful Nemaiah Valley. It is Indigenous-owned and operated by the Xeni Gwet'in First Nation. They offer immersive experiences like learning how to drum, dancing and singing Tsilhqot'in, a traditional cleansing ceremony, kayaking on Chilko Lake, taking a hike to visit unique columnar basalt formations, or meeting with a Xeni Gwet'in Knowledge Keeper who will share one of their traditional skills.

[Hotel-Musée Premières Nations](#) is a 4-star boutique hotel with architecture inspired by longhouses surrounded by thematic gardens and hiking trails. Visitors can enjoy a spa day with treatments in the outdoor Nordic baths and end their day with an evening with traditional stories inside the longhouse.

These are just a few of the 1,900 Indigenous-led tourism businesses found across Canada.

Some barriers that exist is a lack of infrastructure, lack of public awareness, lack of marketing investments, limited air access to rural and remote communities and lack of access to capital funding. Within Indigenous tourism is a hesitation of inviting travelers to Indigenous lands or communities. There is a notion that tourism might not bring benefits and instead be more exploitative than regenerative. This is in part due to the impacts of colonialization on many communities.

On the flip side, Indigenous-led tourism and community-based models show, when done right, that tourism can have many benefits to the business and the community. That's why ITAC believes that Indigenous tourism is reconciliation in action.

We estimate that with proper support by our governments and the private sector, Canada could be the world leader in Indigenous tourism by 2030. This could mean a contribution of \$6 billion to the annual GDP, 2,700 Indigenous-led tourism businesses and 60,000 jobs in the industry.

3. What is the role of UN specialized agencies and of international financial institutions in ensuring that tourism development respects Indigenous Peoples' rights? Examples include but are not limited to the UN World Tourism Organization, and the World Bank Group

ITAC currently relies on the Canadian government and Canadian tourism partners to financially support us and the work we're doing. We understand Canada is one of the few governments supporting Indigenous tourism in this way. However, there are many challenges with this model, including instability in funding that prevents long-term planning, and bureaucratic barriers that prevent more Indigenous leaders from developing businesses.

We also organize an annual International Indigenous Tourism Conference (IITC) that brings together Indigenous tourism leaders and allies from across the globe to speak on the topic.

There could be opportunities for the UN and the World Bank Group to work with Indigenous-led organizations like ours to ensure stable funding and to initiate programming that combats the unique challenges Indigenous tourism businesses face. As well as support global initiatives such as IITC that enable global Indigenous organizations to better work together.

4. Please describe any measures taken by States to adopt legislation or other measures to ensure the protection of Indigenous Peoples' rights in regulating the tourism industry including rights to equality; culture; lands, territories and resources; participation in decision-making and meaningful consultation/consent; intellectual property; and labour rights.

Indigenous human rights are not directly part of ITAC's mandate. Our mandate is focused on improving the socio-economic situation of Indigenous people within the 10 provinces and 3 territories of Canada through the provision of services to Indigenous tourism operators and communities.

With that said, we strongly believe that when travellers experience Indigenous culture and learn about our unique challenges and our history from our own voices, they are much more inclined to support our rights. Travel enables connectivity and storytelling that is often missed in mainstream culture.

We do focus on intellectual property (IP) rights for owners on Indigenous-led content. This includes IP and copyright protection. We work with suppliers to help deliver plans and programs.

5. What has been the role of corporations in the context of tourism? Please, provide examples, if any, of the private sector consulting with Indigenous Peoples and encouraging their participation in the

creation, implementation and management of tourism projects. Do sustainable tourism certifications incorporate the rights of Indigenous Peoples?

A big part of our work is a mix of advocacy and working with senior levels of government to communicate and support Indigenous-led solutions. We have seen an approximate increase in investment in Indigenous tourism by 493% from 2014-2022. The annual national investment was \$29 million in 2022. This is a direct result of ITAC's work.

Some examples of tourism projects that we worked on with the private sector include:

- ITAC's accreditation program: This has set new national standards for Indigenous tourism that enables businesses to evaluate their market readiness and apply for accreditation. This was developed in partnership with Tourism HR Canada and reflects ISO standards.
- Working with Destination Canada, we were able to expand our marketing efforts internationally to include working with major media outlets to promote experiences, host the trade industry at key events, partner on advertising campaigns, and even be recognized by SKIFT as an award winner.
- We also work with companies like Westjet, Parks Canada and more to support Indigenous tourism and awareness of Indigenous experiences.

6. Please identify specific examples of good practices led by States or international organizations to promote, protect, and fulfil the rights of Indigenous Peoples in the sustainable development of tourism, including management or co-management of tourism projects, incorporation of indigenous scientific knowledge, benefit sharing, funding of Indigenous-led tourism projects etc.

In Canada, ITAC leads the conversation and is the voice for Indigenous tourism therefore our partners and members are the ones leading these conversations to promote, protect and manage tourism projects.

The Indigenous Tourism Best Practices Mission held on Wendake – Nionwentsïo – Huron-Wendat Territory June 13-15, 2018, is a good example of this. We had a mission to showcase well-developed Indigenous tourism products and experiences that would act as a catalyst for further discussions on how participants can work together to grow Indigenous tourism offerings in Atlantic Canada. We focused on a consultative approach for a working/advisory group in Atlantic Canada to move forward on Pan-Atlantic Indigenous programming. ITAC worked with government and Indigenous representatives and the days were broken into experiences and facilitated around Indigenous development in Atlantic Canada.

ITAC, along with our President & CEO led participants through a series of experiences and discussions focused on developing and growing Indigenous tourism experiences.

7. Please identify specific examples of good practices by Indigenous Peoples who are developing and managing tourism projects on their lands. What factors have furthered these initiatives?

[The Original Original Accreditation program](#) is a great example of a program that helps consumers identify which experiences are authentic. Trade associations, international tour operators, travel agents, Destination Canada, destination marketing organizations and local communities rely on this mark of excellence as it helps promote authenticity and a quality Indigenous tourism experience while giving access to lucrative travel trade networks and new visitor/consumer markets.

The Original Original Indigenous led marketing campaign also offers a great platform for Indigenous operators to tell their stories on their terms, in their way and share stories that they want.

The program and campaign also was designed to steer away from harmful stereotypes of Indigenous people and focus on how we are today, resilient and modern.

8. What social or economic benefits do Indigenous Peoples receive from tourism projects (e.g. royalties, employment, improvements to infrastructure, education and training opportunities, etc.)? Are these benefits culturally appropriate and gender inclusive, and do they take into account intergenerational impact? Please describe how measurable project results are being shared with Indigenous Peoples.'

The reason we do the work we do at ITAC is to ensure that we have Indigenous-led tourism businesses that directly benefit Indigenous Peoples and to ensure it is culturally appropriate and shares our stories in our own voices. This directly supports truth and reconciliation.

Indigenous-led tourism also helps Indigenous Peoples preserve and share our languages and cultures, whether it's through a culinary experience, outdoor adventure or cultural centre. It promotes education and understanding.

Economically speaking, we believe Indigenous-led tourism projects could provide \$1.9 billion in direct GDP contributions, support 1,900 Indigenous tourism businesses and employ 39,000 Indigenous tourism employees.

We believe with proper investment we can bring these numbers up to an annual GDP of \$6 billion, 2,700 Indigenous tourism businesses and employ 60,000 tourism jobs by 2030.

Many of our member businesses are in remote parts of Canada often overlooked by our government. Indigenous tourism brings economic stability to these parts.