



Working with Indigenous Communities:

A Guide for Developing Tourism and
Media Relationships in Indigenous Communities



**INDIGENOUS
TOURISM BC**

Many non-Indigenous tourism and media organizations look to develop respectful partnerships with Indigenous communities. In this document, Indigenous Tourism BC has compiled information to help non-Indigenous organizations understand and build relationships with the First Peoples of British Columbia.

Introduction

The First Peoples of British Columbia have lived here for thousands of years, and they are still here today – not in museums but alive and well and celebrating the renaissance of their cultures. They welcome travellers from around the world and share their cultures, values, and relationship with the land, water, and all living things.

Authentic Indigenous cultural experiences not only create memories for BC visitors, but they are also transformative. They restore the feeling of connection with all things and become the highlight of a traveller's experience.

British Columbia is home to more than 200 First Nations, each with its unique language, dialect, and traditions.



Indigenous Peoples of BC

British Columbia is home to the largest diverse assembly of Indigenous peoples in the world. This provides an opportunity for a wealth of unique experiences and stories. Many First Nations belong to the same language families, developed over thousands of years for trade and social functions, but all have distinct cultures born from their territories.

When travelling into any of the distinct BC regions, you will find new ways of understanding the world and new ways to experience it. The relationships to the traditional and ancestral territories of the many Nations of BC have developed over centuries and can bring guests closer to the very spirit of these places.

Peoples of the Coast

Coast Salish, Nuu-chah'nulth, Kwakwaka'wakw, Haisla, Heiltsuk, Wuikinuxv, Nuxalk, Tsimshian, Nisga'a, Gitxsan, Haida, Tlingit

A narrow strip of land between British Columbia's Coast Mountains and the Pacific Ocean is the home of the peoples of the Northwest Coast, a rich and varied group of cultures and languages. The terrain is rugged, and bays, inlets, deep channels, and islands break up the coastline. There are dense stands of Douglas fir, Sitka spruce, western hemlock, and western red cedar trees. Food, building materials, and other natural resources were abundant in many parts of the Northwest Coast and the people built permanent villages and carved massive totem poles, sea-going canoes, and ceremonial masks. They held potlaches and other ceremonies in which dances and singing played an important role in acknowledging significant events and governing the territories. The peoples living here were rich materially and spiritually.



Peoples of the Plateau

St'at'imc, Secwepemc, Okanagan, Nlaka'pamux, Ktunaxa, Kinbasket

Between the Coast Mountains and the Rocky Mountains in British Columbia live the people of the plateau. This land ranges from semi-desert to forests with mountains and rivers. It is rich in salmon-bearing streams and home to deer, moose, elk, and mountain goats, and the homes of the plateau people depended upon the time of year. In the summer, lodges, tents, tipis, or lean-tos were used. In winter, a semi-underground pithouse protected from the winter cold. Today, it is possible to see these pithouses' sunken remains and hear stories of traditional villages.

Peoples of the Sub-Arctic

Tsay Key Dene, Kaska Dene, Dunne-za, Tahltan, Dakelhne, Wetsuwet'en, Tsilhqot'in, Inland Tlingit

British Columbia includes a sub-arctic region—forest, muskeg, mountains, lakes, and rivers. The harsh climate required extensive travel in search of food and other resources, while summer was a time for small family groups to converge at good fishing sites. As many as one hundred people might live in a single camp. They constructed shelters covered with caribou hides or spruce boughs along riverbanks or lakes. The Peoples of the Sub-Arctic used fish weirs and nets to trap fish for drying and eating later in the year. Berries were gathered and preserved. In the fall, the large group broke into smaller family groups and headed to their hunting territories to spend the winter. Men hunted big game animals such as caribou, moose, and mountain sheep for food and clothing.



Indigenous Rights, Title, and Treaties

Archeological evidence show Indigenous peoples presence on the lands that now make up BC for more than 14,000 years—more than 10,000 years before the construction of the Pyramids of Giza, which date back just over 4,000 years. Indigenous oral histories however, speak about the birth of these lands, going back to time immemorial. In the 269 years since British, Spanish, Russian, and American sailors began visiting the area and British Columbia was established, the many Nations signed few treaties across the province. Certain legal rights are guaranteed to the Indigenous peoples in BC, as well as a formal requirement for consultation by Industry and the Government of BC. The passing of Bill 41, a commitment to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples across all legislation in BC, strengthens the need to respect Indigenous traditional territories and rights.



Indigenous Rights

In November 2019, the Government of BC passed the BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which looks to align all legislation with the United Nations Declaration Act on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Federally, many Indigenous rights stem from the Indian Act, which outlines services, the rights of 'Status Indians', on reserve and when doing traditional practices, such as hunting and fishing. The federal framework for relationship building is also informed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action.

An important subcategory of Indigenous rights is Indigenous title. Indigenous title is a unique interest in the land that encompasses a right to the land's exclusive use and occupation. There are currently multiple Indigenous title cases before the BC Courts to reaffirm ownership over traditional territories.

Treaty Rights

Treaty rights are constitutionally protected rights set out in solemn and binding agreements between the Crown and First Nations. Historic treaties generally refer to land surrendered by First Nations in exchange for benefits that may include hunting, fishing, and trapping. These include Treaty No. 8 in northeastern BC and the 14 Douglas Treaties on Vancouver Island. These treaties were signed before 1925. Modern treaties set out rights and obligations for all parties, including land ownership and any consultation obligations. The Nisga'a Treaty, signed in 2000, was the first modern treaty in BC. Since then, treaties with Tsawwassen and Maa-nulth First Nations have concluded. Several other negotiations are currently completed or in the final stages of completion.

Visit the BC Treaty Commission website for information on treaties in British Columbia

www.bctreaty.ca





10 Considerations when Working with Indigenous Communities

For tour operators, guest experience is the most important aspect of any tour. For media, access to storytellers and the timely delivery of your story is crucial. Indigenous peoples are active participants in modern business and understand these and other business realities. However, Indigenous communities will often prioritize ancient protocols and customs over western business customs. Knowing how to navigate some of these protocols based on respect may improve relationships and the experience for all involved. The concept of relationship building for trade and business has been present in BC for centuries and continues today.

Here are some tips on how you can successfully integrate into this long held tradition:

1. Respect the People and Culture.

Indigenous communities incorporate traditional practices in their daily lives and place great importance on protocols, art, regalia, ceremonies, celebrations, social structures, and many other aspects of their diverse cultures. It is essential to recognize however, that Indigenous cultures are not static. Indigenous peoples are modern people and reflect that in their lives. The foundation for success when working in Indigenous communities is respect. While you may not understand the culture, protocols, or ceremonies, respect for the people and their way of life provides a better path towards understanding.

2. Recognize Traditional Territory.

Recognition of Indigenous territories is a significant first step in building a relationship with Indigenous communities. It is essential to remember though, it is only the first step. Take it a step further, acknowledge that you are a guest on the territory and thank the host nation(s) who steward(s) it for welcoming you into their territory. Additionally, do the work to understand the history of the place and whether, like the Nisga'a, among others, it is a territory owned under a treaty requiring special permissions to access.

3. Take Time to Understand and Respect Colonial History.

The wounds and repercussions of the colonization of Indigenous Peoples will take many generations to heal. Trying to identify a cause for mistrust, non-cooperation, or caution would not likely lead to an easy answer. Many negative stereotypes remain of Indigenous People—respect this and how stories featuring negative stereotypes can further harm Indigenous People by perpetuating colonial falsehoods and misrepresentations. If you encounter negative repercussions of the recent past, do your best to understand and respect the healing process and consider whether you are unknowingly reinforcing negative stereotypes.

4. Build Relationships for better Engagements.

The mark of a successful partnership with Indigenous communities is one that places greater value on the relationship than on the desired business outcome. Indigenous people have built relationships for trade and politics through marriages, potlatches, powwows, and other formal gatherings for thousands of years, and this practice continues. It is important for anyone seeking positive business relationships in Indigenous communities to focus on the relationship as a whole rather than the business transaction itself.

5. Identify the Governance and Authority Structure.

Band councils are the elected governments of most Indigenous communities and can be a great resource within Indigenous communities to connect you with community members. However, tribal governments act alongside or instead of the band council for some Indigenous communities. Finally, there are Hereditary Chiefs, who hold titles and authorities that have been passed down for thousands of years. They are influential figures in the community who focus on the health and well-being of their people and their territories. A local guide may help navigate governance systems for permissions and participation.

6. Find a Guide to Learn Local Protocols.

Protocols are the complex social orders and procedures that must be adhered to during interactions. Protocols include manners, ceremonial procedures, familial hierarchy, host-guest responsibilities, and a long list of other functions. Entering an Indigenous community and applying knowledge from prior experiences may help, but improving your navigation within an Indigenous community requires the help of an expert. Find a guide to ask questions about protocols and community relations during your visit for your specific purpose, be it tourism experiences, interviews, or knowledge.



7. Ensure Reciprocity.

Within Indigenous cultures, reciprocity, or giving and receiving, is integral to our interactions with one another, and with the natural world. It is often appropriate to give a gift as a show of gratitude and respect for a person's time or knowledge as it is akin to a trade and shows respect and appreciation. It provides you the opportunity to acknowledge the worth of what was received. In cases where you would generally give honoraria, it is appropriate to also offer this to community members. Keep a gift on hand for cases where an honorarium is declined. It doesn't need to be of high monetary value—often, swag or merchandise from the organization you work for might work well.

8. Attend Ceremonies and Celebrations When Appropriate.

For Indigenous communities, ceremonies and celebrations maintain and strengthen a community. Some are private, but you are welcome to ask if your attendance would be appropriate politely. Some ceremonies are available for guests to attend but do not allow photography, video, or recordings. It is crucial that you respect the request of the hosts regarding these matters. If you are uncomfortable with participating in any portion of the ceremony, politely excuse yourself from participation.

9. Be Generous with your time.

Indigenous communities can sometimes have a more relaxed attitude regarding time management at events. This view on time management is not intentional disrespect for time or guests but a deep-rooted respect for a protocol that does not allow for important processes to be rushed, including an Elder's blessing, a chief's speech, a youth's learning, or a guest's feasting. To speed these activities is viewed as deeply disrespectful to the culture. In business and media, tight deadlines are often necessary, and this philosophy on time may not fit with your current perspective, but it is essential to respect and adapt to Indigenous views when building relationships with Indigenous communities.

10. Find the Right Person to Ask and Respect their answer.

Indigenous Peoples recognize the value of knowledge and the need to safeguard it against distortion or improper use. The person you are speaking to may be restricted by protocol or cautious due to past experiences with sharing. You cannot take it personally if somebody gives you a negative response when you ask about interviews, event attendance, ceremony inclusion, comments, or knowledge. An aggressive approach is not likely to result in trust, knowledge, or access. Respect that a 'no' will not likely change to a 'yes.' It is probably not a good idea to continue approaching different people in search of a 'yes.'



Ways to Strengthen Your Relationship with Indigenous Nations and Communities

Travel Trade & Tour Operators:

1. Employ Indigenous community members.
2. Include Indigenous community leaders at the decision-making table when looking at tour opportunities within the community or traditional territory.
3. Include Indigenous community members in any training initiatives, both as presenters and as attendees.
4. Leave money in the community by working with Indigenous entrepreneurs

Media & Influencers:

1. Include positive/feel-good coverage about Indigenous communities rather than focusing mainly on issues.
2. Work with respective Indigenous organizations, governments, and Knowledge Keepers to fact check all stories that include content on them and their territory.
3. After a relationship is established, employ an in-community correspondent or have an Indigenous liaison to maintain a relationship with the community.



Benefits of Building Respectful Working Relationships with Indigenous Communities

Opportunities for Travel Trade & Tour Operators that may result from building respectful working relationships with Indigenous Communities:

1. Accurate and appropriate information about Indigenous cultures can add to the overall guest experience.
2. Improved relationships may improve access to Indigenous cultures, oral histories, and traditional Knowledge Keepers at the discretion of Indigenous partners.
3. Trusted and known operators may be invited to community ceremonies and celebrations.
4. Ongoing trust and respect may increase community support for initiatives and tours.
5. Indigenous Communities and Nations may share human resources by providing access to potential employees with unique cultural knowledge and experience.

Opportunities for Media & Influencers that may result from building respectful working relationships with Indigenous Communities:

1. Good relationships may result in improved access to information sources and interview subjects.
2. A track record of trust and respect may increase the overall community trust in you as a storyteller and media representative.
3. You may have an opportunity to network and grow your in-community contacts.
4. Communities may allow greater access to Traditional Knowledge and community events if you build a mutually respectful relationship.
5. You may become a preferred community media partner and increase your chance of inclusion on familiarization tours.

Each Indigenous Nation and Community differ in their approach to partnership. This document was developed to the best of Indigenous Tourism BC's knowledge to respond to common themes and questions we have received from our partners. It is not a substitute for proper communication with Indigenous Nations and Communities.

For further details and community-specific recommendations on building relationships with Indigenous communities, contact:

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Media Conduct and Content Agreement

I _____, recognize that in all interactions between myself and Indigenous community members or Indigenous territories I am a representative of Indigenous Tourism BC. I understand that as such, I will hold myself and the content I produce to the highest standards of professionalism and decorum. I will:

- Share content that I have screened for offensive, off-brand, or damaging material, or any other material which could be construed as perpetuating harmful stereotypes against Indigenous peoples.
- Factcheck any information I share with Indigenous Tourism BC or a senior member of the community I am interacting with to safeguard against false or private information or that is inappropriate to share publicly.
- Seek the council of Indigenous Tourism BC or Indigenous community members belonging to the same community I am interacting with, to ensure respectful and positive collaboration.
- Ensure proper permissions before interacting and capturing content. In the instances where I am unsure of the appropriate Indigenous authority entitled to grant such permissions, I will consult with Indigenous Tourism BC, or a senior member of the community to guide me through protocols and permissions.
- Ensure all images, videos, recordings, interviews, quotes, and any other such content gathered and shared will have the full and ongoing consent of those involved in conjunction with the protocols of the ceremony, celebration, event, or tour I am capturing as decided on by the hosts.

I affirm that I have read and understood the Media Conduct and Content Agreement and Working with Indigenous Communities: A guide for developing tourism and media relationships in Indigenous communities. I understand that any conduct that fails to fulfill this agreement is in contravention of the direction of Indigenous Tourism BC and nullifies this and any other agreements that make me a representative of Indigenous Tourism BC.

Signature: _____ Date: _____