



INDIGENOUS **Startup TOURISM** **Workbook**

Canada  Alberta 

May 2019

The Indigenous Tourism Startup Workbook was created collaboratively by Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) and Indigenous Tourism Alberta (ITA) to provide a high-level introduction for starting your Indigenous tourism business. The information and exercises in this workbook are designed to prepare you to take the next step in turning your business idea into reality!



Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC)

is the national industry association representing, supporting and growing authentic Indigenous tourism across Canada through member development, marketing, leadership and partnerships. As an industry association, ITAC showcases “market ready” First Nations, Inuit and Métis tourism businesses from across Canada to visitors from around the world. The Association presents a unified Indigenous tourism industry voice to visitors, organizations, government departments, and industry leaders to support the growth of Indigenous tourism in Canada.

ITAC is a membership-based organization and any person or organization with an interest in advancing Indigenous tourism in Canada may apply to become an ITAC member. Membership costs only \$99 per year, and some of the membership benefits of ITAC, depending on the “market-ready” status of your business include:

- National advocacy and political representation
- Basic or enhanced listings on [Indigenoustourism.ca](https://indigenoustourism.ca)
- Basic or enhanced listings in ITAC's National Guide
- ITAC national trade and media outreach exposure
- Discounted rates to attend International Indigenous Tourism Conference
- Ability to apply for ITAC development grant
- Ability to apply for subsidized registration at travel-trade shows such as Rendezvous Canada and Showcase Asia, etc.



Indigenous Tourism Alberta (ITA) is a member-based organization providing support to Indigenous tourism businesses that are independently or community owned or controlled. ITA is the provincial destination marketing organization for Indigenous tourism in Alberta. Through innovative partnerships, ITA provides leadership in the development and marketing of authentic Indigenous tourism experiences. ITA's goal is to create a thriving Indigenous tourism economy sharing authentic, memorable and enriching experiences.

Membership with ITA provides helpful and useful support that can help you build the success of your business through development & training, marketing and partnerships. Membership fees and benefits are based on the current status of your business from “In Development” to “Visitor and Market Ready”. Each membership category has specific benefits based on your business' current needs including:

- Access to research and studies
- Eligible for ITA training and capacity development programs
- Link on ITA website
- Eligible for ITA marketing programs
- Eligible to participate in media and travel trade programs
- More information on [Indigenoustourismalberta.ca](https://indigenoustourismalberta.ca)

The Province of Alberta is working in partnership with the Government of Canada to provide employment, support, programs and services.
Cover photo: Jasper National Park

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This workbook was developed (in part) by using information from the Tourism Business Planning Guide and the Tourism Development Guide. These free resources are referenced throughout the workbook, and can be accessed for more detailed information at www.alberta.ca/tourism-entrepreneurship.aspx.



Head Smashed in Buffalo Jump
Travel Alberta / Mike Seehagel

1 INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

BY THE END OF THIS SECTION YOU WILL:

- Understand the purpose of the Workbook and how to use it.
- Know the impact tourism has on Canada and Alberta's economies.
- Understand Indigenous Tourism definitions and economic impact.

Who Should Use This Workbook?

The Indigenous Tourism Startup Workbook is written for Indigenous people and entrepreneurs across the Province of Alberta who want to join or expand their business in the vibrant tourism industry.

Whether you already have an idea for a business or not, completing this workbook will help you explore opportunities in the tourism sector, understand what it takes to be a tourism entrepreneur, and know what you need to have ready prior to starting your own Indigenous tourism business. The workbook can also be useful for those who already have a tourism business, but want to explore new ideas.

The workbook is designed to get you thinking about important questions that all Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs must ask themselves.

After finishing the workbook, you will have simple and clear answers to all of the following questions, making sure you are well on your way to starting your own authentic Indigenous tourism business!

- What defines Indigenous Tourism?
- Why do you want to start an Indigenous tourism business?
- What do you want your business to be?
- Is it appropriate for your community?
- Is your experience authentic?
- How does your experience present and share your culture?
- Who will buy your experience?
- Who are your potential partners - Indigenous and local/regional partners?
- What is your competitive advantage?
- How is your experience sold?
- How are you going to promote your business to customers?
- How will your business operate?
- What is the operating budget of your business?
- What are your startup costs?
- How will you finance your business?
- How will you know you are successful?

Icons in the Workbook

Icons have been placed throughout the workbook to help you identify important information. The workbook utilizes the following icons:



The Tip icon identifies a useful piece of information that will help you when starting a tourism business.



The Exercise icon indicates an activity. Completing the activities in the workbook will help you develop your business idea.



The Warning icon identifies a common problem tourism entrepreneurs face. Knowing these in advance will help you avoid pitfalls during your business startup.



The Milestone icon indicates the end of a section in the workbook. When you reach a milestone, you are asked to summarize your answer to one of the main questions listed on the previous page.



The Idea icon encourages you to write down your ideas in the space provided. Writing down your ideas will help you remember and build on them later.

Indigenous tourism offers the experiential traveller a cultural, spiritual and meaningful tourism experience that they cannot get anywhere else. Arts, crafts, food, music, dance and cultural experiences bring the visitor closer to a proud and compelling culture. This is an experience that cannot be found anywhere else.

Our Ancestors have shared our culture with visitors to our traditional territories since time immemorial, closely guided by their community values of respect, honour and integrity. To succeed, our industry needs to respect those same values. It makes for an “authentic” experience for our visitor, while helping to ensure that future generations have that same opportunity.

From the *Alberta Indigenous Tourism Strategy*. <https://indigenoustourism.ca/corporate/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ITA-Strategy-2019-2024-FINAL.pdf>



Get involved in the Tourism industry! You do not have to do this alone as others have been down this path before you and are more than willing to share their expertise. Start by reaching out to both ITAC and ITA to see how they can support your business plan, development and marketing. As you will note throughout the guide, there are also many provincial resources available to support your journey.

Indigenous Tourism Defined

ITAC launched a national consultation with industry members, Elders and community to create and endorse the following definitions of Indigenous Tourism. ITAC recognizes that each nation, culture or community can choose to adopt or adapt these definitions to best suit their needs:

Indigenous Tourism – all tourism businesses majority owned, operated and/or controlled by First Nations, Métis or Inuit peoples who can demonstrate a connection and responsibility to the local Indigenous community and traditional territory where the operation resides.

Indigenous Cultural Tourism – meets the Indigenous tourism criteria and in addition, a significant portion of the experience incorporates Indigenous culture in a manner that is appropriate, respectful and true to the Indigenous culture being portrayed. The authenticity is ensured through the active involvement of Indigenous people in the development and delivery of the experience.

Indigenous Cultural Experiences – does not meet the Indigenous tourism criteria however offers the visitor a cultural experience in a manner that is appropriate, respectful and true to the Indigenous culture being portrayed.

Indigenous Culinary Tourism – provides culinary experiences, including foraging and preparing food that represents and respects Indigenous culture and traditions.

Authenticity is at the heart of Indigenous tourism

A culture belongs to the community and its people. When developing Indigenous tourism, it is essential to ensure the culture is protected for future generations.

With the diversity of Indigenous cultures across Canada, it is impossible to define universally what is “appropriate” to share, as something may be appropriate in one community and not in another. ITAC supports the authority of each community to determine its own cultural protocols and boundaries, and recognizes all of the diverse values and beliefs of our First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

Authentic Indigenous Cultural Tourism is BY Indigenous peoples, not ABOUT Indigenous peoples.

The following criteria are required for your business to be considered an authentic Indigenous experience by ITAC's National Standards.

- At least 51% owned by Indigenous individuals OR majority owned Indigenous companies OR Indigenous controlled organizations such as Bands and Tribal Councils.
- Use cultural content approved by Keepers of the Culture (i.e. Elders, hereditary Chiefs, families, etc.) and developed under the direction of the Indigenous people who are from the culture being interpreted.
- Offer cultural activities for guests led by Indigenous people (an exception may be when foreign languages are required although the interpreter should still have access to an Indigenous host for questions related to the culture and community).
- Provide opportunities for visitors to interact face-to-face with Indigenous people such as artisans, craftspeople, Elders, storytellers, hosts or entertainers whose origins are those of the culture being shared.
- Ensure that heritage interpreters and presenters have suitable experience, knowledge or formal training related to the Indigenous culture that they are sharing.

Below are our recommended protocols to ensure your tourism experience is authentic.

- Work with the local Indigenous community and its Elders to ensure that they are aware of (and generally supportive of) your tourism initiative.
- Ensure that your tourism experience impacts the community's culture and economy in a positive way. Think about how the community can benefit from sharing its culture with visitors, i.e. jobs, suppliers, supporting other businesses in the region, etc.
- Invite or welcome Indigenous community input and feedback on your cultural programming.
- Consider how to reduce negative impacts on daily life for the community and environment, i.e. visitor codes of conduct, clear signage, environmentally friendly practices, etc.
- Take steps to protect and preserve sensitive cultural activities and sites from visitors through guest orientation, fencing off sensitive areas, erecting signs, staff training, etc.
- Ensure front-line staff and interpreters understand which sites and activities are deemed inappropriate for tourism purposes by the community.
- Do your part to protect Mother Earth, i.e. recycle, use recyclable and biodegradable products, package items in reusable bags, etc.



ITAC has released National Guidelines for creating an authentic Indigenous tourism experience. These National Guidelines are your tool to help you to develop and deliver a “market ready” and authentic ICT product. You can find more information in *Appendix A* or download the fillable PDF here:

<https://indigenoustourism.ca/corporate/itac-national-guidelines-now-available-online/>.

Alberta's Tourism Industry

Since the first travellers visited the Banff Hot Springs in the railway era of tourism, Alberta has been a favourite destination for visitors from around the world. Over 100 years later, Alberta is an established four-season destination with much to offer through an Indigenous lens: the iconic Canadian Rocky Mountains, the alluring Canadian Badlands, peaceful prairies, placid lakes, a diverse cultural history and vibrant urban and rural community experiences. Alberta's Indigenous tourism industry delivers the “goosebump” moments that bring visitors back again and again.

Tourism is an “industry of industries,” meaning tourism is a collection of activities, services and industries that deliver a travel experience, including transportation, accommodations, eating and drinking establishments, retail shops, entertainment businesses, activity facilities and other hospitality services provided to tourists.¹

Indigenous tourism in Alberta generates \$130 million of spending in the province, providing jobs in our communities and supporting Indigenous entrepreneurs.

According to the updated 2017 Indigenous tourism research completed by the Conference Board of Canada, the Alberta Indigenous tourism industry presently has the following impact:

- 125 Indigenous tourism businesses (in all stages of development)
- \$108.8 million generated annually in labour income
- \$38.7 million generated annually in business revenues
- 2,939 jobs in Indigenous tourism (2,395 are full-time equivalent)
- \$116,711 million in GDP annually

Conference Board of Canada. <https://indigenoustourism.ca/corporate/conference-board-of-canada-research/>

The Annual Economic Impact of Tourism in Alberta is:



\$8.3 billion



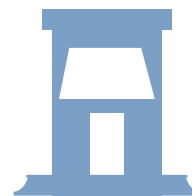
\$4.1 billion

- \$8.3 billion tourism expenditures
- \$4.1 billion in tax revenue (all levels of government)

Alberta's Indigenous tourism industry is part of the fastest growing tourism segment in the world. And it continues to grow each year!



34.1 million



19,000



127,000

- 34.1 million person visits
- 19,000 tourism businesses
- 127,000 tourism jobs

¹ Northern Arizona University. (nd). Ecotourism Course Material.

What is the Visitor Economy?

The visitor economy refers to the widespread and often unseen benefits to Alberta by dollars spent by travellers. Tourism is more than just a business sector; it is an economic driver that crosses multiple industries and supports growth in multiple ways.²

Here is an illustration:

A family from California comes to the Canadian Rockies to ski. They take a flight, rent a car, stay in an Indigenous owned lodge where they take a tour and enjoy some Indigenous cuisine in the lodge restaurant. This is the “direct” impact of the visitor economy: the lodge is able to make a profit and hire more staff, and local businesses receive money from Indigenous Tourism spending.

This “indirect” impact of tourism spending produces a multiplying effect as an economic driver by increasing wages, salaries, profits and business investment. Also, as more visitors come to the ski resort, more work is generated in the supply chain, as lodge and community are called upon to meet customers’ demands. Other small or community based businesses help to meet

that demand such as gas stations, crafters, attractions and cultural centres, suppliers, etc. The new employee hired by the lodge now has money to spend on clothes, food, transportation, etc., and to pay taxes. This is the “induced” impact of the visitor economy.

The ripple or spillover effects of this induced impact is felt as income and taxes are spent throughout the province on housing, education, transportation, infrastructure, energy, communication, healthcare and other personal expenditures.

The end result is that tourism dollars circulate throughout the economy, amplifying their impact along the way, which supports community building and economic well-being. The community and the whole province benefit.

See the “Tourism Works for Alberta” video at the link below for a quick overview of Alberta’s Visitor Economy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYsCFrh6fAs>



² Travel Alberta Website. (2017).



Metis Crossing /
Victoria Settlement

2 ARE YOU AN INDIGENOUS TOURISM ENTREPRENEUR?

ARE YOU A TOURISM ENTREPRENEUR?

BY THE END OF THIS SECTION YOU WILL:

- Understand the skill set required to be an entrepreneur.
- Explore your own capabilities and capacities.
- Know if your capabilities and capacities are a match for tourism entrepreneurship.

What is an Entrepreneur?

Entrepreneurs are individuals with their own unique strengths. They see opportunities and have the courage to go after them; they are willing to learn from their mistakes and are determined to try again; and they enjoy challenges and finding creative solutions to problems.³

There are many rewards to being a successful entrepreneur. You can run your business according to your values and beliefs. You can also make things happen in your community. There are opportunities for all Albertans to start their own business, but it is not the right choice for everyone. The following Tourism Entrepreneur Self-Assessment Tool will help you decide if entrepreneurship is right for you.

Entrepreneur Self-Assessment Tool

Successful entrepreneurs have many qualities including the following:

DRIVE: energy, commitment, willingness to work hard

PERSONALITY: confidence, leadership, optimism, comfort with risk, ability to make decisions

SKILLS: planning and organization, ability to innovate, communication skills

If you are interested in becoming an entrepreneur but do not have these key qualities, you might consider how you can acquire them through training, experience or modelling successful entrepreneurs that you know. The following self-assessment quiz may help you decide your readiness to become an entrepreneur.

³ Business Link: Indigenous Services. (2017). Is Running a Business For Me?



ACTIVITY Entrepreneur Self-Assessment

The questions below will help you decide if you are a good candidate for starting your own business. Check Yes or No for each statement.

Readiness	YES	NO
I understand the basics of running a business		
I am comfortable investing my money in the business		
I am comfortable borrowing money with an obligation to repay the loan		
I have researched my business idea and conclude it has a good chance of success		
Attitude/Motivation/Personal Skills	YES	NO
I have the confidence to run my own business		
I want the responsibility and potential rewards of running a business		
I am willing to work hard to make the business succeed		
I am well organized		
I am calm under pressure		
Management Skills	YES	NO
I am comfortable making business decisions and sticking by them		
I am open minded		
I enjoy solving problems		
I can manage people including hiring, directing, correcting and firing		
I am able to delegate tasks to others and use the skills of others to benefit my business		
People Skills	YES	NO
I get along with others		
I am comfortable selling my products or services		

If you answered **YES** to most of these questions, then you are a good candidate to become an entrepreneur. If you answered **NO** to any of these questions, it would be a good idea to work on improving those skills or adjust your business idea to play to your strengths. For example, if you are not comfortable managing people, you might decide to run a company where you are the only employee.



This workbook is designed to help you understand the skills you need to start a tourism business. After completing the workbook, we recommend coming back to this activity to see if any of your answers have changed.



Some new businesses require entrepreneurs to work long hours with varying compensation levels, while others allow you to work less and maintain the lifestyle you want. When starting up a new venture, it is important to match your goals with the requirements of the business.

TOURISM SUCCESS STORY

Mahikan Trails – Advice for Tourism Entrepreneurs

Mahikan Trails is an Indigenous tourism soft adventure company started by Brenda Holder in Canmore, Alberta. The business offers activities for visitors year-round, and specializes in hiking, snowshoeing, Canyon walks, Ice walks and Medicine walks. Mahikan Trails offers both single and multi-day programs. To complement their programs the company has partnered with two other Indigenous tourism attractions, Painted Warriors and Canmore Cave Tours to create packages.⁴

What inspired her to become an Indigenous Tourism entrepreneur?

Brenda Holder is an entrepreneur who, like many, went into business because she realized that she was never going to be happy working for someone else. Various jobs she tried either quickly lost their lustre or were unchallenging and grew boring.

Brenda has never looked back! Starting her own tourism business seemed a sensible option since it matched her experience, interests and skills. She also saw potential in the Indigenous Tourism sector, one of the fastest growing in the industry.

Brenda's advice for fellow Entrepreneurs

Brenda advises aspiring tourism entrepreneurs to embrace and be proud of their decision to start their own business, to strive to always be confident, even if sometimes, you don't feel like it and never be afraid to reach into the community or to other similar businesses to seek advice and support. She encourages fellow entrepreneurs to stick with it even when things seem bleak. In her experience, bad business situations improve and often a great new opportunity is right around the corner.



Moraine Lake



Mahikan Trails

⁴ Business Link: Indigenous Services. (2017). Is Running a Business For Me?

MILESTONE 1



MILESTONE

Now that you have completed the Entrepreneur Self-Assessment Tool, write down your answers to why you are a fit with being an entrepreneur.

Which skills and traits do you have that fit with being an entrepreneur?

Which skills and traits do you need to work on in order to be a more successful entrepreneur?

How can these skill gaps be overcome?

Do you have unique skills, talents and teachings that allow you to become an ambassador for your community and culture?

Unique Opportunities and Challenges of Running a Tourism Business in Alberta

OPPORTUNITIES

Working in Alberta's tourism industry has many opportunity indicators including:

1. **Market Need:** There are currently not enough market-ready Indigenous tourism experiences to meet demand in domestic and international markets.
2. **Trending Upward:** Authentic Indigenous tourism experiences are in high demand to serve existing and new tourist markets in Alberta.
3. **Regional Visitation:** Strong local and regional markets exist in the province. (i.e. high income, young demographic).
4. **Support:** Excellent support systems exist in Alberta including programs offered by Alberta Economic Development, Trade and Tourism; local Destination Marketing Organizations; Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada; and Indigenous Tourism Alberta.
5. **Diversification:** Indigenous tourism is a new and emerging product for Alberta. It will take some time to build awareness in key industry markets as part of the "Alberta experience." There is increased awareness and interest in Indigenous tourism in all communities which recognize the positive economic and social impacts.
6. **Collaborative:** Opportunity exists to make an impact in your community and collaborate with local businesses, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.
7. **A Great Product:** With some of the world's best natural landscapes, Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs have tremendous potential to create exceptional experiences as they welcome visitors to their homeland.
8. **It's Fun!** The opportunity is there to leverage personal interests and passion into self-employment.

CHALLENGES

Alberta's Indigenous tourism industry is not without its challenges. Some of these are identified below:

1. **Seasonality:** Due to our cold climate and present visitation trends, many tourism businesses are over-reliant on visitation in July and August. For some businesses this may be acceptable, but others struggle to make ends meet. Seasonality must be strongly considered by every new tourism business.
2. **Reliance on Oil and Gas Sector:** Alberta's top industry is the oil and gas sector. Although there are many positives to this, during periods where energy prices are high there can be intense competition for business inputs including:
 - High competition for labour
 - High competition for available visitor accommodations
3. **Lack of Understanding of the Tourism Industry:** Although there are excellent examples of Alberta Indigenous communities which have embraced tourism, there are still many that do not fully understand the industry. This can affect a new business owner as support and collaborative opportunities may not be as available in all communities.
4. **Financing:** Some traditional lenders view tourism as high risk. There are other barriers for Indigenous entrepreneurs who have to consider:
 - Land use planning designation - on reserve and Métis settlements
 - Security for loans for businesses based on reserve (e.g. Indian Act barriers) and off reserve (face challenges to secure funding and support)
 - Business owner equity requirement for banks and financial institutions can be a challenge.

Working with one of Alberta's Aboriginal Financial Institutes can be beneficial as they are aware of these challenges. *See a list in the Appendices.*



ACTIVITY Is Indigenous tourism the right industry for you?

The questions below will help you think about whether the tourism industry is a good fit for you. Feel free to jot down your answers directly in the workbook!

A) What opportunities unique to the Indigenous tourism industry are most interesting to you?

B) What challenges unique to the Indigenous tourism industry are of most concern to you?

C) Can you see ways to overcome these challenges or turn them into opportunities?

MILESTONE 2



MILESTONE

Now that you have completed the activities above, write down your answer to why starting a tourism business is a fit for you.

How are you a good fit for running an Indigenous tourism business?



Heritage Park Historical Village
Tourism Calgary

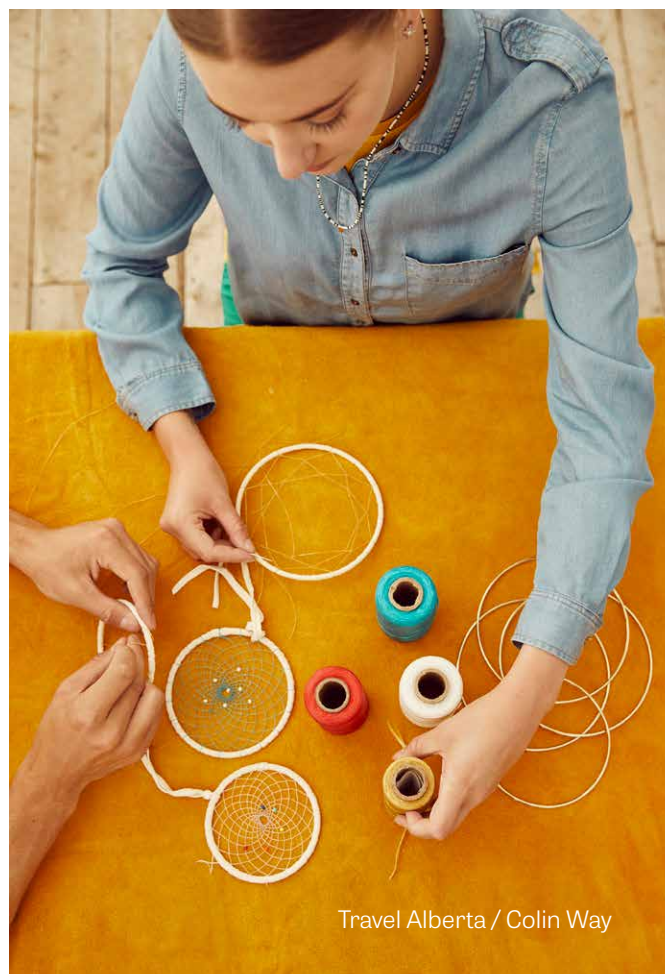
3 WHAT YOU NEED TO START AN INDIGENOUS TOURISM BUSINESS

WHAT YOU NEED TO START AN INDIGENOUS TOURISM BUSINESS

BY THE END OF THIS SECTION YOU WILL:

- Understand the key components of an Indigenous tourism business.
- Have a “road map” for how to start an Indigenous tourism business.
- Have chosen and analyzed your idea for an Indigenous tourism business.
- Understand what steps your business needs to take to become “market-ready”.

Starting a new tourism business can seem like a daunting task. With so many factors to consider, how can entrepreneurs become confident enough in their idea to turn it into a business? The following 14 questions have been developed to help prospective entrepreneurs analyze their business idea. You are encouraged to complete all of the activities and summarize your ideas wherever a milestone icon appears.



Travel Alberta / Colin Way

QUESTION 1:

**WHY DO YOU WANT TO
START AN INDIGENOUS
TOURISM BUSINESS?**

QUESTION 1: Why do you want to start an Indigenous tourism business?

In this section, we will explore why you want to start an Indigenous tourism business. Is it to create income and employment for yourself? Your community? A combination of the two or something different altogether? Working through the following questionnaire will help you explore the answer to this question.

A) Why do I want to start my own business?

I want to be my own boss...

I want to capitalize on an opportunity...

I want to share and promote my culture with visitors...

B) What are the financial goals for the business?

I want to be financially independent...

I want to supplement income with other employment...

I want to create employment and economic opportunity in my community...

C) What personal goals do I want to achieve?

I want to have flexibility to achieve work-life balance...

I want to do more of what I am passionate about ...

I want to find a way to incorporate land, culture and traditional lifestyles into my employment...

D) What outcome(s) do I want to achieve?

I want to enjoy my work more...

I want to have a positive impact in my community...

I want to play a role in preserving the language and culture of my community...

SUCCESS STORY

From Carpentry to Tourism: How an Entrepreneur Built His Dream

Nestled in a coniferous forest, along the banks of the Bow River in the traditional lands of the Blackfoot, rest Tipi accommodations and the River Ranche Lodge. It's where Dion Red Gun and his wife Cherylene Bullbear created the business of their dreams, River Ranche Tourism.

Here in the peaceful and serene territory, visitors can learn about the outdoors and the Blackfoot culture. Outdoor enthusiasts will enjoy fly fishing, kayaking, birding and cross country skiing excursions. Those seeking cultural experiences will learn from Siksika Elders who share their knowledge of healing and wellness. While taking the Majorville Medicine Wheel Journey through Siksika lands, Elders and members share the interpretation of the stones, dances, stories of the dancing regalia, and significant sites important to the Siksika. Sweat lodge experiences are also available upon request.

Dion believes that meeting with visitors and providing them with experiences is like a dream. His days are filled with "floating along the Bow River Valley where time stands as if it were yesterday, revealing ancient buffalo jumps and untouched beautiful places with people who are a living history, or traveling with tourists on wagon trails etched in the prairie." This is Dion's dream: to educate Albertans and all visitors about the culture of his people.

"Indigenous peoples now have the opportunity to share our past and present through our stories and ways of discovering new beginnings through tourism," says Dion. "We are very passionate about learning and sharing the great plains and outdoors with visitors from the global community."

The road to his dream hasn't always been easy, but it's been worth it.



MILESTONE 3



MILESTONE

Now that you have completed the activities above, re-examine why you want to start an Indigenous tourism business and write your answer below. This is an important exercise and it is a personal one. Take the space you need to articulate your reasons for yourself.

Why do you want to start an Indigenous tourism business? List your top three reasons.

1.

2.

3.
