

MÉTIS CROSSING

Located 120 kilometres northeast of Edmonton near Smoky Lake, [Métis Crossing](#) is Alberta's first Métis cultural site. It was conceived, constructed and is operated by Métis people on the original river lots of some of the first Métis settlers in Alberta. There are historical structures, farm animals, a cultural centre, a campground with comfort camping as well as RV and tent sites, a wildlife park, a 40-room guest lodge and many outdoor activities and cultural experiences to enjoy at Métis Crossing. In 2022, the site became a year-round cultural attraction.

Community Involvement

Community involvement was key to the establishment of Métis Crossing and efforts were made to engage the [Métis Nation of Alberta](#) from the very beginning. In 1999, the Métis Nation of Alberta undertook a tourism survey and developed a tourism strategy. The survey examined the merits of several sites for a possible tourism attraction. "Connecting with the community was essential when we started dreaming about Métis Crossing and imagining what it could be," said Juanita Marois, CEO of Métis Crossing and a proud citizen of the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA). "We asked MNA members what they wanted this tourism destination to accomplish. They wanted it to educate visitors about Métis culture, support Métis business owners and artists, support Indigenous youth, provide professional development programs and be a place for gatherings."

Métis Crossing features Métis artisans in the giftshop and offers food in the café that supports Métis suppliers such as Elevate Coffee, the coffee on offer at the café in the visitor centre and the coffee bar in the guest lodge.

The visitor centre and guest lodge were designed by Métis architects and built by many qualified Métis tradespeople. The large mural and other art inside the facilities was also supplied by Métis artists. Every bed in the new guest lodge has a decorative quilt handmade by the New Dawn Métis Women's Society. Community involvement is at the heart of everything that is done at Métis Crossing.

Cultural Sustainability and Authenticity

The fact that Métis Crossing was built on the original river lots of early Métis settlers makes the site of the attraction authentic and meaningful. Having Métis people including Elders on the cultural experience team also helps to ensure that the experiences shared are authentic. Hiring youth on the team learning about and experiencing their own culture ensures that those cultural experiences are sustainable.

"Our community was involved in deciding what stories they wanted to share and how they should be told," Marois said. "Everything was done with purpose. We have 15 fulltime staff and only Métis people work on the cultural experience team. We offer multi-generational and multigender teaching. We talk about the past, the present and the future. Youth learn from Elders and Elders learn from youth."

Environmental Sustainability

The Métis Nation of Alberta has developed a [Climate Change Action Plan](#) and environmental sustainability is one of the goals of Métis Crossing. Some of the initiatives include the following.

- The cultural centre and the new guest lodge were both built to be environmentally friendly.
- Métis Crossing sits on 688 acres of land and MNA is building a solar field that will provide enough energy to not only offset the energy usage of the tourism site but offset the usage of the entire nation.
- Haskup berry and Saskatoon berry fields have been planted onsite and can be used as a u-pick operation as well as to supply food for the onsite restaurant.
- Windbreaks at the site are also food forests. Gardens around historical homesteads are filled with traditional food crops and mint, raspberries, apples, plums and other useful plants have been planted around the property. All of these plants are used in the restaurant and for programming.

- Dragonfly gardens and ponds were built to naturally reduce the number of mosquitos in warm weather months.
- In partnership with an area farmer, Métis Crossing established a wildlife park that brought traditional species including bison back to the land.
- Métis Crossing is also installing electrical vehicle chargers on the property.

Succession Planning/Youth Engagement

One of the goals of Métis Crossing is to connect youth with Métis culture. Connecting through Culture Weekends is a time for families to come and make memories. “We want young people to feel a connection to Métis Crossing,” Marois said. “We want Métis families to hold their gatherings here and to make memories.” Every summer, Métis Crossing hires youth as interpreters. Those youth learn about and connect with their Métis culture, provide meaningful guest experiences and make lasting memories.

Indigenous Employment

Métis Crossing provides employment opportunities for Métis people. The majority of the staff at the site are Indigenous and a great deal of planning and effort goes into recruiting Indigenous people for available positions. Reaching out to students in postsecondary programs such as Indigenous Studies, Anthropology, and Archaeology, for example, has been beneficial for Métis Crossing’s summer student staff recruitment. Reaching out to the Métis community has also assisted in recruiting Indigenous staff via word of mouth. Métis Crossing found that hiring first or second-year students and having them return in subsequent summer seasons has helped create ongoing relationships. Returning students also provide mentorship and leadership to new staff, making training more effective throughout the 3-4 month program.

Diversification of Revenue Streams

The Métis Nation of Alberta created a tourism for-profit arm that helps to fund the cultural centre and will also help to fund activities of the nation. The tourism activities offered through the cultural centre, the restaurant, the guest lodge, the campground, the giftshop, the wildlife park, the u-pick operation, the solar field and other enterprises have created a diverse range of experiences and revenue streams. Métis Crossing also rents out its facilities for retreats, business meetings and other gatherings. It has become an important place to discover traditional Métis culture.



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