



# INDIGENOUS TOURISM BEST PRACTICES

CASE STUDIES

The Indigenous tourism industry is rapidly growing in Canada as more people seek out authentic, meaningful experiences when they travel. The growth of the industry is also a result of the organized efforts by Indigenous communities and leaders who are actively creating opportunities in the sector.

The first Indigenous tour operators learned through trial and error, eventually developing strong businesses that utilize the best practices to honour Indigenous traditions and culture. As more communities and individuals become involved in the tourism industry, there are opportunities to build Indigenous businesses that utilize this acquired knowledge to build a growing and thriving industry built on the best management practices.

This case study examines the following best practices:

**Community involvement**

**Cultural sustainability and authenticity**

**Environmental sustainability**

**Succession planning and youth engagement**

**Indigenous employment**

**Diversification of revenue streams**

**Reciprocal relationships**

The best practices examined are defined as follows:

**Community involvement** is active involvement of the community in planning, development, and execution of the tourism business. This may be done through community planning sessions or in the way the tourism business gives back to the community. When there is community involvement, the community is supportive of the business operation and celebrates its success. The most important step in developing grassroots tourism is to involve community members and invite them to share their insights, ideas, and opinions. This includes Elders, Youth, and everyone in between. Open, transparent dialogue from the beginning instills community pride and ownership and assists with creating a collective voice for tourism in a community. The information gathered from engaging the community forms the foundation for growing the local tourism industry. Community involvement ensures that tourism supports local entrepreneurs and is developed responsibly and sustainably.

**Cultural sustainability** involves maintaining cultural beliefs and cultural practices and cultural authenticity is the accurate representation of culture. Indigenous tourism allows for Indigenous people to make a living through practicing their traditional ways. It actively promotes and fosters cultural connection and teaching of culture.

**Environmental sustainability** is responsibly interacting with Mother Earth to maintain natural resources and avoid jeopardizing the ability for future generations to meet their needs. The United Nations (UN) World Commission on Environment and Development, defines environmental sustainability as acting in a way that ensures future generations have the natural resources available to live an equal, if not better, way of life as current generations.

**Succession planning and youth engagement** is an important benefit of Indigenous tourism. Through Indigenous tourism, communities and individuals can reconnect and pass on culture to younger generations. It provides opportunities for intergenerational learning and bridging the gap between Elders and youth. This revitalizes Indigenous ways of knowing, doing and being and can help teach the next generation. It also ensures the continuity of traditional knowledge into future generations by creating a demand and assigning value to it.

**Indigenous employment** opportunities can be generated through Indigenous tourism businesses. Authenticity in Indigenous Tourism is ensured through the active involvement of Indigenous peoples. It is important to maintain authenticity through hiring practices and training of Indigenous employees.

**Diversification of revenue streams** is a wise practice for any business. Putting all your eggs in one basket can be problematic. COVID forced many businesses to diversify their revenue streams and this has made them more resilient in times of economic fluctuation. Tourism in Canada is seasonal, with majority of visitation happening in the summer months. By diversifying revenue streams, it will help keep your business afloat during the non-peak season.

**Reciprocal relationships** can have far reaching benefits and can help a business to grow. Reciprocity is the practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit. Developing partnerships and agreements with other companies and organizations can help a business have a stronger voice, save money on marketing and advertising, find more business opportunities, and work with others to grow an industry for the benefit of all.

# 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.



**MÉTIS CROSSING**  
JAY R. MCDONALD



# HAIDA NATION

Located off the northwest coast of British Columbia, Haida Gwaii is a chain of rugged and remote islands that are the traditional home of the Haida Nation. It is one of Canada's most historically, culturally, and geographically unique areas. The Haida Enterprise Corporation (Haico) is the business entity of the Haida Nation. Its role is to manage and grow the business enterprises of the Haida Nation in order to develop a sustainable economy on Haida Gwaii. The two main goals of the enterprise are to strengthen the local economy and generate career opportunities for Haida citizens. The Council of the Haida Nation works with Parks Canada to manage Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve. Haida Tourism is a key component of Haico's portfolio, offering destination accommodations and a number of authentic Haida eco-cultural experiences to visitors - including some tours inside the national park.

## Identifying a Heritage Site and Cooperatively Managing it

In 1981, SGang Gwaay was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site and in 1985, the Council of the Haida Nation designated the land and sea of Gwaii Haanas, which included SGang Gwaay, as a Haida Heritage site. This was done to ensure that these traditional Haida lands would be preserved. In 1988, the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia committed to establish Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve. In 1993, the Council of the Haida Nation and the Government of Canada negotiated the Gwaii Haanas Agreement, a landmark cooperative management agreement for the new park. This agreement ensures that both western knowledge and Haida traditional knowledge inform management decisions for the park.

## Cultural Sustainability and Authenticity

Tourism has helped to revitalize Haida culture and improve the lives of the Haida people. Here are a few of the ways Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and other tourism efforts have worked to improve cultural sustainability and authenticity.

- As part of the cooperative management agreement for the national park, a Community Development Fund was established to stimulate the economy of the island and “enhance understanding between the communities and cultures of the islands through the process of joint community economic planning and development” (Gwaii Trust Society 2009). The Gwaii Trust Society operates the fund, using funds to subsidize educational, cultural, and social programs in the community.
- Parks Canada has become one of the major employers on the island. More than 40 employees of the government department are Haida staff and more than \$2 million in salaries is brought into this Indigenous community annually. The [Haida Gwaii Watchmen](#) are a unique feature of this national park sharing their culture and their knowledge of the land and sea, their stories, songs, dances and traditional foods. They help to ensure visitors have an authentic Indigenous experience.
- Located near the historical village site of Kay Llnagaay, the [Haida Heritage Centre](#) is an award-winning cultural tourism attraction operated by the Skidegate Band Council on Haida Gwaii. It celebrates the living culture of the Haida people and helps to keep that culture alive by sharing and reaffirming Haida traditions and beliefs and encouraging artistic expression. There's a museum, a carving shed, and six poles to represent six of the southernmost villages on Haida Gwaii. Locals can take part in language and artisan classes offered at the Haida Heritage Centre. Both locals and visitors can enjoy artisan studio tours offered through the centre.

## Youth Involvement/Succession Planning

Since the tourism operations are largely seasonal on Haida Gwaii, there are quite a few employment opportunities for students and young people. This provides an opportunity for them to have a job that allows them to learn more about Haida cultural history and take pride in sharing it with visitors. Youth stewardship programming is also supported in the community through Haida House at Tllaal, a resort property operated by Haida Tourism (HaiCo).

## The Haida Gwaii Pledge

Visitors to Haida Gwaii are invited to review visitor orientation information before they arrive, sign the [Haida Gwaii Pledge](#), and contribute to the Haida Gwaii Stewardship Fund. This process allows for greater understanding and invites visitors to tread lightly respecting the history, culture, people, land and animals found in the traditional territory of the Haida Nation.

HAIDA HERITAGE CENTRE  
MARY HELMER



Haida Gwaii Museum at Kaay Llnagaay  
Saahlinda Naay – Saving Things House

In the beginning it was  
both light and dark,  
they say...



# TSUUT'INA NATION CULTURE MUSEUM

Surrounded by stunning mountain scenery, the [Tsuut'ina Nation Culture Museum](#) connects visitors and Indigenous youth with the culture and history of the Tsuut'ina Nation. The museum is located on the beautiful Tsuut'ina Nation just outside Calgary. Visitors can take in stunning mountain scenery and see Chief Bull Head's homestead, which is located beside the museum. The museum contains hundreds of historical artifacts including a rug that hung in Chief Bull Head's tipi more than a century ago. Museum staff can give guided tours that explain the history behind the artifacts and delve deeper into the culture. The museum also has a gift shop that features authentically handmade Indigenous goods such as clothing, jewelry, and moccasins made by over 40 artisans. The store supports local artisans by providing beading and regalia-making supplies to the Treaty 7 area.

## Cultural Sustainability and Authenticity

Cultural sustainability and authenticity are at the heart of the Tsuut'ina Nation Culture Museum. All tours of the museum are led by Tsuut'ina staff who have a deep understanding of the history and culture behind the many artefacts contained therein. The museum also operates special programs for groups that take place in tipis and include traditional songs, dancing, and storytelling. To increase the connection to culture in younger members of the Tsuut'ina Nation, youth groups come into the museum in the evenings for special tours and programs. An emphasis is placed on the participation of young people who are in foster care and are disconnected from their culture. In addition, the community uses revenues from the museum to fund programs of the [Tsuut'ina Gunaha Institute](#), which is committed to language revitalization. The teaching of the Tsuut'ina language is offered to all interested individuals, but is particularly focused on children and youth.



**TSUUT'INA NATION CULTURAL MUSEUM**  
INDIGENOUS TOURISM ALBERTA

# WENDAKE

Just outside Quebec City, the community of Wendake owns and operates four major tourism attractions, the Hôtel-Musée Premières Nations, the Huron-Wendat Museum, the National longhouse Ekionkestha' and Restaurant La Traite. Since 2008, \$26 million has been invested to help grow and improve these attractions. The quality of these attractions led to Wendake being named a Canadian Signature Experience in 2010, one of a small collection of once-in-a-lifetime travel experiences found only in Canada. Through these world class attractions, guests can learn the history of the Huron-Wendat people, experience their culture and taste Indigenous cuisine.

## Community Involvement

Historically, tourism has been an important economic driver in Wendake. Before there were major tourism attractions, there were shops selling Indigenous handicrafts to visitors. Members of the community understand the importance of tourism and are actively involved in the industry. The community of Wendake established their own destination marketing organization (DMO) to support the four tourism attractions and that are owned by the community of Wendake as well as other tourism-related businesses within the community.

## Indigenous Employment

Wendake has made First Nations employment a priority. In addition to hiring Huron-Wendat people, they offer internships to other nations, so they can learn about the tourism industry and bring back this knowledge to their communities. Since the internship program began, they have welcomed more than 30 interns from different First Nations in the province of Quebec. Wendake has also worked with other Indigenous groups and tourism businesses to train their staff and help to ensure there is an abundance of qualified Indigenous workers.

## Cultural Authenticity

Wendake welcomes over 34,000 visitors from all over the world every year to have an authentic cultural experience. They share Huron-Wendat culture without crossing the line of mixing business and spirituality. For example, many customers have requested to rent the longhouse for a private cocktail party, but this has never been done. The longhouse has been purified and alcohol is not allowed inside it. They also respect the traditional ways during their annual pow-wow and have worked to ensure the information presented in the museum is completely accurate. The text accompanying all artifacts is double verified by a committee to confirm accuracy in terms of anthropology, ethnology, and archeology.



HÔTEL-MUSÉE PREMIÈRES NATIONS  
STÉPHANE GROLEAU



# SQUAMISH LÍLWAT CULTURAL CENTRE

Located in Whistler, BC, the Squamish Lílwat Cultural Centre (SLCC) was built as a partnership between the Skwxwú7mesh Úxumixw (Squamish Nation) and Lílwat7úl (Lílwat Nation), that have coexisted respectfully as neighbors since time immemorial. The cultural centre was built to preserve, grow, and share the traditional cultures of these unique nations and inspire understanding and respect among all people who visit it. In 1997, the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) met with the Lílwat Nation to discuss opportunities for the Nation's participation and presence in Whistler BC. The idea of a cultural centre sprang from these discussions. Visitors to the centre enjoy fascinating educational displays, cultural programming, a giftshop and a café that serves Indigenous inspired cuisine.

## Two Nations Working Together – A Historic Cooperative Agreement

In 2001, the Squamish and Lílwat Nations signed a historic Protocol Agreement, which formalized their mutual relationship and committed both nations to cooperate in matters of cultural and economic development and management of shared territory. It is the only agreement of its kind in Canada.

## Youth Involvement and Succession Planning

The Squamish and Lílwat Nations developed a youth ambassador program in 2008 that has helped youth in both nations connect with their culture and their ancestors. The program lasts for about three months and during that time youth work at the cultural centre and participate in a variety of activities designed to connect them with their culture and learn valuable skills that help them understand what it takes to run a business, learn leadership skills and helps them become more employable. Close to 600 graduates have participated in the program and most of the permanent staff at the Squamish Lílwat Cultural Centre are graduates of the program. “Graduates of the program are immersed in their culture and spend time learning from Elders and Nation leaders,” said Heather Paul, Executive Director of the Squamish Lílwat Cultural Centre. “They are the ears and voice of their ancestors. They gain confidence and skills that make them an asset to their community and to any employer.

- Accessible Transportation: Getting to the cultural centre was one of the greatest challenges for youth who wanted to participate in the youth ambassador program and for Indigenous employees who work at the centre. Most staff live in community, up to a 2 hour drive away, with no public transportation and most without driver's license or vehicles. This issue was solved by providing transportation for youth ambassadors and for staff. The nations purchased four vans, trained and hired qualified drivers, and made transportation accessible.



SQUAMISH LIL'WAT CULTURAL CENTRE  
LOGAN SWAYZE

- Cooperative Carving Project: Covid presented challenges for indoor attractions like the Squamish Líl'wat Cultural Centre. “We had to bring our experiences outside and we started with a very large carving project,” explained Paul. “The municipality of Whistler supplied the cedar, and youth had the immersive summer experience of carving a pole alongside experienced cultural ambassadors and artists from their Nations. Part of Truth and reconciliation is about building bridges, respecting and listening to the voices of the original peoples of this land while creating opportunities for the voices of ancestors to be heard and the future of great grandchildren to be protected.” The finished piece will be installed as public art in the community of Whistler. The outdoor carving project was so successful that it will be continuing this year with visitors being invited to also participate in the carving process under the watchful eyes of master carvers, apprentices, and youth ambassadors. They will be carving a reconciliation canoe and visitors can not only carve, they can take their cedar shavings home with them as reminder of their own connection to the land.

## Indigenous Employment

Ninety percent of the permanent staff at the Squamish Líl'wat Cultural Centre are Indigenous. One of the missions of the cultural centre is to create meaningful employment for Indigenous People – especially those from the Squamish and Líl'wat Nations.



**SQUAMISH LIL'WAT CULTURAL CENTRE**  
INDIGENOUS TOURISM CANADA

# SPIRIT BEAR LODGE

Spirit Bear Lodge lies in the heart of the Great Bear Rainforest in Kitsoo Xai'xais traditional territory. The Indigenous-owned lodge offers incredible wildlife tours and unique Indigenous cultural experiences that allow guests to reconnect with nature and with themselves. It's a wilderness experience like no other that guides guests into a pristine landscape to see grizzly bears, black bears and spirit bears in the Great Bear Rainforest and whales, porpoises, sea lions and other marine life in the Great Bear Sea.

## Choosing Environmental Sustainability

Spirit Bear Lodge opened more than twenty years ago as a small ecotourism operation of the Kitsoo Xai'xais Nation and it has since become world famous. The nation could have chosen to earn extra funds via resource extraction on their traditional lands, but they decided instead to share the beauty of their lands, to teach visitors about the flora and fauna, and to share their knowledge and culture. From the very beginning, the nation made a choice that supported environmental stewardship and sustainability. Those principles are at the heart of the culture and the tourism operation.

## What Environmental Sustainability Looks Like

Environmental sustainability is at the heart of Spirit Bear Lodge operations and you can see it in many different ways both big and small. Here are a few of the things Spirit Bear Lodge does to improve environmental sustainability.

- Reusable lunch containers and utensils have decreased the amount of disposable plastics used.
- The lodge participates in composting and recycling programs that are run by the community.
- The lodge instituted a conservation fee (\$200 per guest). One half of the conservation fee goes to support local conservation activity and organizations that work on conservation projects in the area. The other half of the fee is used to purchase carbon credits to offset the energy used in operating the lodge.
- The lodge moved to set departures for operations. By having guests arrive and depart on only certain days per week, they were able to improve efficiency and reduce fuel consumption.
- Spirit Bear Lodge and the Kitasso/Xai'xais Stewardship Authority work to limit and reduce the impacts of logging in the territory.
- New heating pumps were recently installed in the lodge to improve energy efficiency and reduce the need for the use of furnace fuel.



**SPIRIT BEAR LODGE**  
INDIGENOUS TOURISM CANADA

- Spirit Bear Lodge’s power comes from a renewable hydroelectricity plant.
- Sustainable programs and projects are funded by the lodge and it also collaborates with the KITASOO Stewardship Authority, which works on a variety of projects designed to improve environmental stewardship and sustainability. The stewardship authority worked to end the grizzly bear hunt in the Great Bear Rainforest and with Raincoast Conservation Foundation to purchase tenures to eliminate commercial trophy hunting. A number of years ago, British Columbia adopted a tenure system to manage trophy hunting. A tenure confers exclusive rights to guide non-BC residents on hunting trips to kill certain species within a specific territory. By purchasing the tenures, the stewardship authority/Raincoast Conservation Foundation eliminated trophy hunting in those territories. They are also working to end the black bear hunt in the territory.
- The lodge also works to educate guests about environmental sustainability and conservation. Guides teach respect for wildlife and have a policy against disturbing or pursuing wildlife.
- For the last two years, the lodge has participated in a coastal cleanup that has seen 300,000 tons of debris removed from BC coastlines.
- The lodge has funded and facilitated a research project with the University of Victoria that is designed to determine how bears are impacted by tourism activities.
- More than 50 percent of KITASOO land is protected.

## The Future of Environmental Sustainability

Spirit Bear Lodge is always looking for new ways to improve environmental sustainability. They are currently considering a partnership with the University of British Columbia to operate some of the first electric boats in Canada.

## Why Sustainable Tourism Matters

Sustainable tourism has truly benefited the KITASOO Xai’xais nation. “Ethical tourism is key for us,” said John Czornobaj, General Manager of Spirit Bear Lodge. “A stay at Spirit Bear Lodge is an unforgettable wilderness adventure that contributes to meaningful environmental initiatives and cultural revitalization. Ethical tourism goes hand in hand with environmental and cultural stewardship.”



**SPIRIT BEAR LODGE**  
INDIGENOUS TOURISM CANADA

# BUFFALO ROCK TIPI CAMP

[Buffalo Rock Tipi Camp](#) offers more than just a tipi camping, it's an educational experience. Located in Southern Alberta along the banks of the beautiful Oldman River, this tipi camp offers educational day programs and Blackfoot cultural experiences including storytelling, ceremonies, traditional games, drum and song demonstrations, guided nature walks and other experiences. Meals can also be included for private venue rentals. The tipi camp has been operating since 2010.

## Environmental Sustainability

Acknowledging and protecting the spiritual integrity of the planet is an essential facet of the traditional beliefs of the Blackfoot Nation. Harley Bastien, owner of Buffalo Rock Tipi Camp, has made it a founding principle of his business and his life. He introduces principles of environmental sustainability to his guests in many ways.

- **Annual Fish Rescue:** In 1990, Bastien founded an NGO called the Piegan Friends Along the River in response to the environmental effects of the Old Man River Dam. The NGO operated until 1999 running baseline studies of the effects of the dam on vegetation and fish in the river and creating awareness of the effects the dam had on the environment. In 1990, the group participated in the first fish rescue at Buffalo Rock Tipi Camp, which is located near an aqueduct for the dam. The fish rescue has continued every year since that time and is currently in its 32nd year. “When they turn off the flow of water in mid-October, the water drains quickly and fish are trapped,” explained Bastien. “Thousands of fish die every year. We’ve saved more than 250,000 fish to date.” The fish rescue drew attention to the issue and as a result newer irrigation canals were built with fish inclusion gates – something that Bastien hopes will be installed at the Old Man River Dam someday.
- **Re-introduction of Indigenous Plant Species:** Cotton trees and willows were planted around Buffalo Rock Tipi Camp as part of an effort to reintroduce native plant species to the land.
- **Elimination of Invasive Species:** There are no invasive species such as leafy spurge and blue weed on the land at Buffalo Rock Tipi Camp thanks to many years of concerted efforts to remove them. These removal efforts were carried out by Bastien and guests at the camp.
- **Educational Plant Walks:** Educational plant walks are one of the programs offered at the camp. They teach people about medicinal plants used in traditional medicines.
- **Volunteer and Advisory Efforts:** Over the years, Bastien has volunteered with many environmental organizations including the Niitsitapi Water Protectors, the Piikani Mountain Child Valley Society, and others.
- **Reconnecting Guests with Nature:** “Buffalo Rock Tipi Camp is a little jewel along the Old Man River that is a reminder of what the land used to look like,” said Bastien. “It’s a venue to introduce people back to nature and help them establish a strong connection to the land.”



**BUFFALO ROCK TIPI CAMP**  
GRAHAM RUTTAN

# WARRIOR WOMEN

Matricia Bauer is the owner and operator of [Warrior Women](#). She writes and performs songs written in both English and her native tongue, Cree. Matricia offers a variety of experiences including fireside chats, storytelling, drumming and singing performances, medicine walks and corporate training. She originates from the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation and offer Indigenous experiences primarily in Jasper and Edmonton.

## Reciprocal Relationships

Building reciprocal relationships has been the key to success for Warrior Women as a business and it all began with participation in the Jasper Chamber of Commerce. “Participating in the Jasper Chamber of Commerce allowed me to meet local hotel managers and tour operators like the Jasper Park Lodge, Pursuit, Tekarra Lodge, Pine Bungalows, and the Sawridge Hotel,” explained Matricia Bauer. “Those relationships have helped sustain the business. Several hotels and tour operators offer Warrior Women experiences as part of their programming. We’ve also been included in the program offerings for local festivals and events.”

Bauer says there are two main types of reciprocal relationships that have benefited the business – corporate partnerships (hotels and tour companies) and industry relationships (Travel Alberta, Jasper Tourism, Jasper Chamber of Commerce, Indigenous Tourism Alberta, ITAC). Corporate partnerships have led to a direct increase in tour sales, while industry relationships have provided support with marketing that has built the brand.

In addition to establishing both corporate and industry relationships, Bauer has joined other organizations that have helped to support the growth and development of the business. Two examples include the [Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business](#) and the [Storytellers of Canada](#). “Joining the Storytellers of Canada increased income from online storytelling,” Bauer says. “I have had the opportunity to share culture and stories in online presentations across Canada – in schools, universities and at corporate events thanks to joining those organizations, which have increased awareness of what Warrior Women has to offer.”

## Cultural Sustainability

“My business is built on cultural sustainability,” Bauer said. “It’s about sharing our Indigenous stories in our own voice. It’s about being authentic and open.” Bauer is the local knowledge keeper that share her Cree culture in fireside chats and other settings that provide a safe place for guests to ask questions and gain greater understanding of Cree culture. Their mother-daughter partnership ensures that the Warrior Women can go on and continue growing and sharing culture for years to come.



WARRIOR WOMEN  
INDIGENOUS TOURISM ALBERTA

# LAC LA BICHE CANADIAN NATIVE FRIENDSHIP CENTRE

The [Lac La Biche Canadian Native Friendship Centre](#) Association incorporated as a non-profit society under the Alberta Societies Act in 1986, as part of the National Friendship Centre Movement. In 2009, the Friendship Centre became a Canadian Registered Charitable organization. The Friendship Centre works to provide off reserve Indigenous service delivery infrastructure for the urban Indigenous demographic in the Lac La Biche area. It has been providing Indigenous cultural programs and social resource services for more than 35 years. The Lac La Biche Canadian Native Friendship Centre works to share the rich histories of the Northern Alberta Cree and Metis cultures and to instill pride in Indigenous people and help to revitalize traditional practices.

## How a Friendship Centre Got Involved in Tourism

In 2015, renowned chef Alessandro Porcelli chose Lac La Biche as the destination to highlight on his popular online show “Cook It Raw.” The event focussed on Indigenous cuisine and brought chefs from across Alberta to the region. “This event helped us realize that there was an interest in Indigenous tourism and inspired us to start thinking about providing Indigenous tourism experiences in our area,” said Donna Webster, executive director of the Lac La Biche Canadian Native Friendship Centre. “We realized that we could be doing this.”

Since non-profit societies can legally establish a for-profit arm, the next step for the Lac La Biche Canadian Native Friendship Centre was to establish a for-profit arm to handle the operations of their tourism initiatives.

## Reciprocal Relationships - Alberta Parks

“We had a staff member who also worked at a campground,” explained Webster. “The staff member suggested the idea of offering Indigenous programming at the campground and even though that partnership didn’t work out, it inspired us to contact Alberta Parks and propose a partnership with them at Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park. We proposed offering tipi camping in the park as well as Indigenous programming.” This partnership has worked well for both parties. Alberta Parks supplies the shelter, toilet facilities and picnic sites. They also take care of cleaning and maintenance of the facilities. The Friendship Centre supplies the tipis and all of the furnishings that go inside them. They set up the tipis at the start of the season and take them down at the end of the season. The Friendship Centre also offers a variety of programs for guests staying at the park ranging from dark sky programs to storytelling, jigging dance lessons and making and cooking bannock on a stick.



LAC LA BICHE FRIENDSHIP CENTRE  
ROTH AND RAMBERG

## Reciprocal Relationships Hideaway Adventure Grounds

The Lac La Biche Canadian Native Friendship Centre also partnered with Hideaway Adventure Grounds, an Indigenous tourism enterprise owned and operated by John Ritchie that is located on the” Kikino Metis Settlement, 30 minutes south of Lac La Biche. The Friendship Centre provided overnight camping structures and they share in the profits from the tourism operation.

## Diversification of Revenue Streams

In addition to building reciprocal relationships, the Lac La Biche Canadian Native Friendship Centre has also worked to diversify revenue streams. They rent their facilities to organizations as a meeting space. They also have a retail space inside the Friendship Centre called [Indigenous Spirit Creations](#). Authentic arts and crafts from Indigenous Canadian artists, creators, and companies are on sale in this retail space. Sales go to support both the Indigenous artisans and the Centre.

## Community Involvement and Cultural Authenticity - Respectful Sharing of Knowledge

Ensuring the respectful sharing of culture was essential to the Lac La Biche Canadian Native Friendship Centre. “From the very beginning, we worked to ensure that we are being respectful in sharing our knowledge and culture,” Webster explained. “We consulted with Elders and the tipi camping sites were blessed before construction. We are ensuring that we are doing things in a humble way that respects and honours traditions and teachings.”

## Why it Matters

Before the Friendship Centre obtained its status as a registered non-profit charity and before the foray into tourism and other ventures, the organization was entirely dependent upon government funding. When the government chose to no longer fund youth centres, the youth centre for children aged 10-18 closed. The additional revenues from developing reciprocal relationships and diversifying revenue streams gives the Centre unrestricted funds that can be used to fund important programs in the community. In Lac La Biche area, Indigenous tourism is revitalizing Indigenous culture and assisting the community.



LAC LA BICHE FRIENDSHIP CENTRE  
LINDSAY BOND



# PAINTED WARRIORS

Situated in the foothills of the Alberta Rockies, Painted Warriors offers a wide variety of tourism experiences including glamping, horseback riding, archery training, snowshoeing, storytelling, and medicine walks. Wilderness skills certification, hunter skills and education, equestrian skills training, and guide training are also on offer. Traditional methods, skills, and history from the Ojibway, Métis and Cree cultures are woven throughout every experience.

## Cultural Sustainability

Keeping cultural traditions alive and sharing them is at the heart of everything Tracey Klett and her partner Tim Mearns do at Painted Warriors. The business began in 2012 with wilderness education and a guide training program for Indigenous youth and eventually morphed into a full-fledged Indigenous tourism business. As the business grew, it stayed true to the original goal of keeping traditions alive and bringing people back to their roots. Painted Warriors keeps Indigenous language alive by teaching visitors the Cree and Ojibway names for plants and animals. Every tourism experience has an Indigenous name.

## Youth Engagement - Learning Traditional Land-Based Skills Changes Lives

Painted Warriors has developed a guide training program that teaches Indigenous knowledge and skills to youth who want to work as guides in the tourism industry. The guide training program also instills a sense of pride in youth who participate. Traditional learning helps Indigenous youth understand who they are and, in many cases, allows them to reconnect and reclaim their cultural roots.

For Klett, the most rewarding aspect of what she does is seeing how the sharing of traditional knowledge affects people. In 2014, she had a young man participate in the Indigenous guide training who was partially deaf and incredibly shy. He kept his head down and seldom made eye contact in a conversation. Klett was teaching him horsemanship skills and he was a natural. As he gained confidence, passed the written and physical tests, he flourished. “The time with us changed him,” she explained. “It brought him out of his shell and gave him confidence. He went on to be a stuntman in western movies.”

## Hiring Indigenous

Indigenous youth who participate in guide training are also offered summer employment at Painted Warriors. This gives them a chance to put their training to use, spend more time engaged with traditional arts and culture, and allows them to make a living doing what they love. Some of the Indigenous summer students at Painted Warriors have gone on to work for other tourism companies and a few have even started their own Indigenous tourism businesses.

## Staying True to Best Practices

As Painted Warriors expanded into tourism, Klett and her partner stayed true to their original goals of revitalizing and sharing traditional knowledge with Indigenous youth and their guests. Many of the tourism programs they offer have Indigenous names. People from all walks of life come to Painted Warriors Guest Ranch to connect with the land, plants, animals, and themselves and to experience Indigenous culture. Guests can learn archery, hunter skills, enjoy storytelling, medicine walks, snowshoeing, glamping, and other experiences. “I love sharing Indigenous culture and seeing the effect it has,” Klett said. “It’s a healing thing. Deep down everyone needs this knowledge – whether they are Indigenous or not.”



**PAINTED WARRIORS**  
JAY R. MCDONALD

# WAPUSK ADVENTURES

Located in Churchill, Manitoba, Wapusk Adventures began as a dogsledding operation in 2001 and grew into a full-fledged tour company offering dogsledding, aurora viewing tours, e-bike tours and e-bike rentals. The business was founded by Dave Daley and is operated by Daley, his family and his passionate employees. Wapusk Adventures is an award-winning Indigenous owned and operated tourism enterprise that offers unforgettable experiences combined with the sharing of culture.

## Reciprocal Relationships

Known as the polar bear capital of the world, Churchill is a popular travel destination for nature lovers. Several large tour companies offer group tours to Churchill for polar bear tours and beluga whale tours and Wapusk Adventures has benefited by building partnerships with these companies and offering those same clients dogsled tours and other experiences. These reciprocal relationships proved to be the secret to success for the company. “I noticed that these tour companies brought a lot of people to Churchill, so I decided to approach one of them to see if they would like to offer my tours to their guests,” Daley said. “The first company I approached turned me down. They had tried to work with a local company before and found them to be unreliable.”

Daley soon realized that if he wanted to work with larger group tour companies, he needed to build relationships. Joining the Churchill chamber of commerce was a step in the right direction and within three years, Daley was elected as the president of the organization. “The chamber gave me an avenue to network with people who operate group tours,” explained Daley. “Once I established social relationships and began working with business owners through the chamber, it became easier to talk about establishing a mutually beneficial business relationship.”

## Committed to Excellence

Offering a consistently good product, paying commission to partners, being honest and persistently reliable were essential to maintaining and growing mutually beneficial business partnerships. After Daley established a positive working relationship with one tour operator, it became easier to build partnerships with other companies. Wapusk Adventures is partnered with several award winning tour companies and businesses including Frontiers North Adventures, Natural Habitat Adventures, TAUK Tours, Churchill Northern Study Centre, Lazy Bear Lodge and others. Those companies have helped to promote and grow Wapusk Adventures. The vast majority of clients that take tours with Wapusk Adventures are referred by other tour operators.



**WAPUSK ADVENTURES**  
DANIEL RAITI

## Community Involvement

Dave Daley is no longer president of the Churchill chamber of commerce, but he still believes strongly in giving back to the community. Over the years, he has served on many different boards and is currently a regional director on the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) board. Community service doesn't make him money, but it has helped him to build relationships that have helped him to grow his business.

## Hard Work and Perseverance

Building a business takes time, patience and hard work. Daley admits that he's made plenty of mistakes along the way, but building reciprocal relationships was not one of them.

**WAPUSK ADVENTURES**  
DANIEL RAITI

