



AtBC Blueprint Strategy Interim Tourism Performance 2006-2011

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Prepared by:

Dr. Peter Williams

Beverley O'Neil, O'Neil Marketing & Consulting

www.designingnations.com

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AtBC Blueprint Strategy

Interim Tourism Performance Summary 2006-2011

The AtBC Blueprint Strategy was prepared in 2005 during a time of robust economic growth, strong consumer optimism, and overall tourism prosperity. It was built to systematically guide and accelerate the growth of Aboriginal cultural tourism in British Columbia. Through the creation and implementation of a targeted combination of product development, human capacity building, marketing, and industry partnership initiatives, the overriding goals were to help Aboriginal cultural tourism stakeholders capture the many potential economic benefits of this emerging business sector and position it as an integral contributor to BC's competitive advantage on the global tourism stage. Over the ensuing years, AtBC pursued the Strategy's goals and objectives. This report highlights key performance outcomes and strategic actions associated with AtBC's activities during this period (2006-2011) and suggest prospects for the future. Its findings are based on a review of AtBC reports and records concerning the organization's activities during this period, as well as broader economic and tourism industry performance indicators provided by other related government and industry agencies.

1 The Changing Economic and Tourism Landscape

Regional tourism performance is greatly influenced by local as well as external economic conditions. Tourist expenditures are discretionary. During periods of economic expansion, spending on tourism goods and services tends to increase; however, tourist spending retracts quickly when the economy is not performing well. Despite the emergence of the significant worldwide economic recession in 2008 and its dampening effects on tourism industry performance in most tourism destinations around the globe, AtBC moved forward with laying a strong foundation for future growth when economic conditions changed for the better.

Fortunately the depth of BC's economic retreat (while significant) was softened by increased construction, service and consumer expenditures related to preparations for and delivery of the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games. While Canada's overall overnight tourism visits spiraled downwards during this period, BC's visitor volumes were less adversely impacted. The province experienced an estimated increase of 2.4% in overnight stays between 2009 and 2010. While data for domestic overnight estimates are incomplete for 2010 forward, international overnight visits declined about 2.3% between 2010 and 2011, but are trending towards an increase of about 0.2% for the period 2011 to 2012. (BC Min. of JTST, October 2012).

2 Aboriginal Tourism Association of BC (AtBC)

The Aboriginal Cultural Tourism Blueprint Strategy (2005) laid the foundation to the development of Aboriginal cultural tourism in British Columbia. Created through the involvement of Aboriginal tourism operators, First Nations, youth, community leaders, travel trade operators, the tourism industry, the Canadian Government, and the exceptional support of the BC government's tourism staff, the Strategy was built on intelligence gathered from extensive research conducted with visitors to BC, wholesale travel trade operators promoting travel to BC, Aboriginal tourism operators, supplying products and services to travelers, and Aboriginal community leaders interested in increasing tourism job opportunities for their citizens. From these sources and review of other indigenous tourism experiences worldwide, the Blueprint Strategy emerged. It defined what Aboriginal tourism and Aboriginal cultural tourism is, provided a vision for what it could become in BC, and listed the principles and values that

would guide the implementation of three tiers of programming that became the roadmap for Aboriginal cultural tourism growth in British Columbia. Consequent to the first five years of its implementation, the Strategy and the approach to its development and implementation is increasingly recognized as a 'success story' in indigenous tourism development around the globe.

Each of the Strategy's tiers had specific overriding goals:

- **TIER 1 – Awareness:** create awareness and understanding of tourism and the benefits to and opportunities for Aboriginal people and First Nations;
- **TIER 2 – Product Development/Capacity Building:** build the skills and knowledge needed to increase the quality of the Aboriginal tourism experiences and the professionalism of their delivery, and work with other industry partners to jointly develop strategies to take advantage of emerging opportunities; and
- **TIER 3 – Marketing:** promote the Aboriginal cultural tourism industry in BC.

Based on these Tiers, AtBC (the lead Aboriginal administrative organization for this initiative) developed and implemented many tools, training programs, workshops and promotional activities designed to help First Nations and Aboriginal businesses, community members participate in a meaningful way in the tourism industry. Through these programs and activities the network of stakeholders pursuing Aboriginal tourism opportunities has grown to include not only Aboriginals but also stakeholders outside the Aboriginal community (e.g. travel trade, regional tourism organizations, local governments, and tourism operators).

Since AtBC's inception in 1996, it has grown in strength and reputation and is recognized as one of the top Indigenous tourism organizations in existence. Its transition from a volunteer administration to a staff of eight with support contractors, and a Board of Directors that represent tourism operators in each of BC six tourism regions demonstrates the commitment of not only Aboriginal tourism operators, but also First Nations leaders to tourism and AtBC's role in guiding its development. Highlights of AtBC's activities and the overriding outcomes of its Blueprint related activities follow.

2.1 Aboriginal Tourism Operator Participation in AtBC

Participation of Aboriginal tourism operators in AtBC activities increased since 2005. Initially AtBC began operations as a typical member based organization. Its roughly 40 annual members generated about \$1,500-\$2,000 annually in membership fees. In 2009/10 these fees rose to about \$1810. In 2010/11, AtBC changed its operating structure to a stakeholder model in which participants paid for AtBC services (e.g. advertising and social media marketing etc.) on a program by program basis. As a consequence, in 2010/11 stakeholder fees rose to about \$20,000 (a ten-fold increase over revenues from the preceding year). To date in 2012, stakeholder partners (135) contributed about \$24,000 in fees with additional contributions anticipated.

2.2 Product Development and Support

Tier 2 product development initiatives were emphasized in the early years of the Blueprint's implementation. Particular attention was given to increasing the market-readiness, travel trade relationship management and product delivery capacity of existing and emerging businesses. Examples of AtBC activities pursued in this regard included:

- Delivering 15 training sessions to about 200 people throughout BC.
- Developing manuals/ guides concerning approaches and tactics for tourism development for or community planning and business operations.

- Partnering with regional economic development organization events to deliver training sessions for target audiences of interested tourism groups. These sessions were offered primarily beyond the Lower Mainland in Prince Rupert, Williams Lake (2), Nanaimo, Osoyoos (2), Richmond, Port Alberni, and Prince George.
- Participating in career fairs throughout BC – including Abbotsford, Vancouver (2), Nanaimo, Prince George, Kamloops and Kelowna.
- Presenting classroom workshops promoting tourism opportunities to Aboriginal youth. For example, presentations were made at post-secondary institutes - BCIT, Camosun College (2), Native Education Centre, and SFU.
- Participating in three major education conferences designed to promote training concerning Aboriginal tourism amongst high school and college level training stakeholders. .

2.3 Industry Relations and Outreach

AtBC engaged in a range of activities with First Nations, the Aboriginal community, travel trade, tourism industry and governments – all designed to increase its network of Aboriginal tourism supporters and stakeholders. It has received endorsement through resolution by the BC First Nations through the First Nations Leaderships Council (which is a partnership of the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and Union of BC Indian Chiefs), and the Métis Federation BC. AtBC maintains its relations with other industry organizations by working closely with planning committees as members and advisors. These include industry organizations like Go2, and the Canada Tourism Commission.

In addition, has made numerous formal presentations (11) at Destination Marketing Organization events in various regions of the province. These include presentations in Clayoquot / Barkley Sound, Port Hardy, Victoria (2), Prince George, 108 The Hills, Sun Peaks/Kamloops, Vancouver, Richmond, Campbell River, and Osoyoos.

2.4 Marketing



AtBC's evolution over the last seven years is especially evident in the transformation of its Tier 3: Marketing programs. In early years, marketing activities focused on establishing connections and building awareness with the travel trade. Typical activities were 'lure' advertisements in tourism and industry publications promoting Aboriginal tourism collectively, general media relations, production of a provincial catalogue of Aboriginal products, fam tours, and attendance at industry and consumer shows. Because of substantial growth in the number of operators; as well as increases in market-ready products including those with greater cultural components, AtBC has modified its 2012/13 marketing activities. It is now focusing its marketing on supporting specific sector and regional initiatives. This change in focus was precipitated by greater awareness of Aboriginal tourism opportunities in the region amongst BC regional tourism organizations and the travel trade. AtBC's consumer marketing campaign, "Our Story, Your Experience" was branded on all AtBC marketing materials, in the production of regional brochures, and purchase of full-page advertisements in regional publications.

2.5 Social Media

Social media has grown in importance in the tourism industry. It is a source of planning information and provides product credibility. AtBC updated its website in 2012 giving the website a new look to complement the consumer campaign “Our Story, Your Experience”, and accommodate Aboriginal tourism stakeholder promotions, as well as to make it easier for industry representatives and consumers. As a consequence, AtBC Website use has greatly increased. Since Google Analytics tracking began in April 2010; both the number of overall and ‘unique’ visitors has risen by about 32% (Table 1).

Table 1 - AtBC Website Google Analytics Report April 2010-March 2012

	April 1, 2010 to March 31, 2011	April 1, 2011 to March 31, 2012
Visitors	43,983	54,366
Unique Visitors	29,586	39,197
Page Views	150,509	150,277
Page Visits	3.42	2.76
Average Visit Duration	00:02:47	00:02:13

In addition Facebook and Twitters initiatives were established that inform AtBC about market and stakeholder activities related to Aboriginal tourism. For instance, Facebook tracks postings by photos, comments, videos and sharing, while Twitter tracks tweets and retweets regarding Aboriginal tourism markets. Over the past year, activities doubled to 1.2 actions per day, while Twitter actions more than tripled (Table 2).

Table 2 - Facebook and Twitter Actions Oct 2011-Sep 2012

Period	Facebook	Twitter
October 1, 2011 to March 31, 2012	106 actions, 0.6 actions per day	96 actions, 0.5 actions per day
April 1, 2012 to September 30, 2012	224 actions, 1.2 actions per day	415 actions, 2.3 actions per day

2.6 Travel Trade Relations

Prior to the Blueprint Strategy’s implementation, general travel trade confidence in the overall quality of existing Aboriginal tourism products was limited and this represented a major impediment to attracting domestic and international visitors. In response, AtBC developed and implemented programs that helped align the offerings of Aboriginal tourism operations with expected industry standards, and promoted awareness of these improved products and services with targeted travel trade companies. Activities pursued to improve the product – market match and strengthen Aboriginal tourism operator relations with the travel trade included: promoting market-ready Aboriginal operations at major travel trade shows such as Canada’s West Marketplace, Rendezvous Canada, and bi-annually at ITB; linking market-ready tourism operations in BC’s tourism regions with high potential consumer generating travel trade operators; identifying and enabling high potential travel trade and media familiarization tour opportunities for tourism operators across the province. In combination these programs are helping strengthen Aboriginal tourism operator understanding of what it takes to meet the needs of the highly competitive travel trade business, and at the same time promotes travel trade awareness of the growing range of existing and emerging Aboriginal tourism options available in BC. AtBC connects its stakeholders with emerging travel trade trends and practices through a weekly on-line newsletter program, and other industry events it sponsors.

2.7 Stakeholder and Industry Relations

Maintaining contact with stakeholders is an important element to AtBC, both for accountability, but also for strategic planning. Through regular e-newsletters updates and stakeholder forums, as well as meetings in regions and presentations at forums and conferences, AtBC is able to retain connections with its stakeholders as well as industry partners.

First Nations are increasingly connecting with AtBC for advice on tourism planning and developing a tourism venture. As for industry, they tend to reach out to AtBC for expertise in tourism and cultural development and to be partners in projects and planning, as well as for project support.

In 2010, AtBC modified its Board structure to return to utilizing the six tourism regions as a basis for electing board members, and to have other positions filled 'at large'. Returning to the six tourism regions enables AtBC and its Board members that represent the region to strengthen the connections of Aboriginal tourism and the products within that region, as well as facilitate strengthened relations of the tourism region with the First Nations in that area.

AtBC's CEO's e-newsletter updates are produced 2-4 times per month. These are distributed to more than 1000 emails, which includes Aboriginal tourism operators and stakeholders, First Nations, travel trade, MLAs, government agencies, and others interested in Aboriginal tourism. These are snapshots providing updates on AtBC activities, its members, industry information and events, and typically contain 2-3 items.

2.8 Aboriginal Cultural Tourism Authenticity Program

AtBC's Aboriginal Cultural Tourism Authenticity Program was launched in time for the 2010 Winter Olympics and Paralympic Games, and featured 5 certified Aboriginal Cultural Tourism products. This first program of its kind, it was designed to recognize, brand and promote Aboriginal owned tourism experiences that fulfilled First Nation and industry expected operating standards. Three years later, the Authenticity program has 15 branded experiences. For others not yet in the program, it is a development tool that outlines for potential and existing Aboriginal operators the elements needed to included in a industry and market-ready, Authentic cultural experience. For travel trade businesses and consumers, business participation in this program provides the 'promise' of a quality, respectful, authentic Aboriginal cultural tourism experience that distinguishes it from that of other less authentic options.

2.9 Klahowya Village in Stanley Park

The Olympic Games demonstrated that interest in Indigenous culture was significant amongst domestic and international visitors to BC. AtBC responded to this reality by establishing Klahowya Village in Stanley Park after the Games. This attraction has become a strategic gateway for introducing visitors to the diversity of Aboriginal tourism opportunities across the Province. In its three years of operations, the Village has become the meeting place for tourists to learn of and celebrate First Nation and Métis cultures in BC. Klahowya was named one of the 100 BC Moments in Tourism BC's summer campaign, one of the 10 BC Moments featured on Vancouver Coast and Mountains website.

3 Aboriginal Tourism Performance

Aboriginal tourism's performance during this same period was affected by broader tourism trends in the region. Yet, despite the general downturn in the rate of growth, this fledgling sector grew significantly in tourism visits, revenues, taxes, businesses and employment, as well as overall capacity. While in absolute terms the gains were relatively small, the foundations laid through the

Blueprint Strategy's implementation generated unprecedented positive effects on Aboriginal businesses, entrepreneurs and communities it touched Aboriginal Tourism Market Penetration.

3.1.1 Incidence Levels

The share of visitors actually participating in Aboriginal tourism activities during their trips is referred to as the 'incidence level'. Incidence levels are dependent on traveler awareness of and access to products, services and experiences suited to their interests. Since 2006, the collective marketing and product development activities of AtBC and its supporting businesses and destination marketing organization partners helped increase overall Aboriginal tourism incidence levels by almost 70%. While incidence levels vary by geographic market and destination region, on average about one in five overnight visitors (22%) reported their participation in various forms of Aboriginal tourism trips. Given the far-reaching exposure BC's Aboriginal culture received during the Olympics, as well as AtBC's increasingly sophisticated marketing efforts, it is reasonable to assume that future incidence levels will remain strong.

3.1.2 Aboriginal Tourist Traffic Estimates

BC's domestic and international tourists comprise the primary market source for Aboriginal tourism businesses. Between 2006 and 2011 the overall number of overnight trips that included Aboriginal tourism components increased by an estimated (+77%) to about 3.3 million overnight visits. Much of this increase can be attributed to the higher consumer awareness and interest in market-ready Aboriginal tourism products and services nurtured through AtBC's Blueprint Strategy initiatives (Table 2).

Table 3 - Estimated Aboriginal Tourist Overnight Visits 2006-2011 (000's)

Market	2006	2011	% Change 2006-2011
Domestic	962	1,981*	1,019
US	598	875	277
Other	315	464	149
Overall	1,875**	3,320**	77%

* No formal domestic estimates available. Domestic market in 2011 assumed to remain similar to 2010 estimates.

** Based on Aboriginal tourism incidence levels (TBC 2008), overnight visitor volumes (BC Stats, 2011-12 and 20089 Conference Board of Canada forecasts (2009).

3.1.3 Tourist Expenditure Estimates

Because of longer trip durations, Aboriginal tourism visitors spend more on their trips than do average travelers; however, their spending on Aboriginal tourism products and services is dampened by limited exposure to Aboriginal products and services while on route (AtBC Consumer Survey 2003.). With these behaviors in mind, it is an estimated \$40 million was spent on Aboriginal related trip purchases during 2010 (Table 4). While access to consumer traffic and expenditure information for 2011 and 2012 was unavailable prior to this report's preparation, preliminary indicators for 2011 and 2012 suggest that similar overall expenditures were probably attained if not surpassed in 2011. This represents more than a doubling of Aboriginal tourism spending over 2006 levels (Table 4).

Table 4 - Estimated Aboriginal Tourist Expenditures (\$ millions), 2006-2011

	2006	2010	2011	% Change 2006-2010
All BC Tourism	7,498	8,047	~8417	7%
Aboriginal Related BC Tourism *	20	40**	~42	100%

*Based on Conference Board of Canada (2009) forecasted visitor volumes to 2011.

* Based on estimated Aboriginal trip incidence levels (TBC, 2008), share of total BC trip days and share of trip purpose (AtBC 2003).

3.1.4 Tourism Tax Revenue Estimates

Tourist expenditures generate a variety of tax revenue streams for Canada's municipal, provincial and federal governments. In 2010, Aboriginal related tourists generated about \$11.3 million in direct tax revenues for various levels of government. About 51% of these revenues (\$5.5 million) were received by the federal government, while 40% and 9% respectively were for distribution to the provincial and local governments of BC (Table 5).

Table 5 - Estimated Aboriginal Tourism Tax Revenues Generated \$ Millions, 2009-2012

	2009	2010	2011
Federal	5.5	5.8	6.1
Provincial	4.3	4.5	4.7
Municipal	1.0	1.0	1.1

* Revenue to tax ratios based on MCTA Tourism Action Plan (2007) and COTA estimates (2009).

3.1.5 Tourism Business Estimates

Growing awareness and demand for Aboriginal tourism products and services, as well as increased planning and financial support for local entrepreneurs accelerated the establishment and / or expansion of Aboriginal tourism businesses between 2006 and 2009. Between 2006 and 2010, the total number of businesses increased to about 135. This represented an estimated increase of 123% over 2006 levels (Table 6). In addition, in 2008-09 about 44 additional businesses were reported to be in various stages of planning for development. This was an unprecedented level of Aboriginal engagement in tourism business development, and bodes for a continued expansion of Aboriginal entrepreneurs operating their own tourism ventures in the future.

Table 6 - Aboriginal Business Development 2006-2009

Businesses	2006*	2007/08**	2009	2010	% change 2006-2010
New	110*	116	131	135**	23%
Business planning ****			44		

* AtBC Business Survey, 2006.

** Aboriginal funding institutions - personal communications, 2009 and 2010.

**** AtBC field visit notes (2008-2009).

3.2 Tourism Employment

Accompanying the growth in businesses is an impressive expansion in the number of jobs created. Based on average Aboriginal business employment levels (AtBC 2006), and current business establishment growth levels for tourism businesses in BC, it is estimated that about 1,700 full-time and 310 part-time peak season Aboriginal tourism jobs existed in 2009. This represents a 16% increase over 2006 levels (Table 7). This expansion is complemented by a growth in Aboriginal tourism staff capacity building programs developed and delivered by AtBC.

Table 7 - Tourism Employment Creation 2006-2009

Jobs	2006*	2007	2008	2009**	2010**	%Change 2006-2010
Full-time	1,454	1,534	1,679	1,708	1,785	23%
Part time	264	278	305	310	345	23%

*AtBC Business Survey, 2006 (13.22 FT and 2.40 PT positions / business).

**Aboriginal new and expanding businesses estimates (Pers. Com, October 2009).

***Assumes growth of jobs based on number of new business, as per AtBC business survey 2011).