



# Working with Indigenous Communities:

**A guide for developing tourism and media relationships in Indigenous communities**

The First Peoples of British Columbia have lived here for thousands of years and they are still here today – not in museums but alive and well and celebrating the renaissance of their culture. They are welcoming travellers from around the world and sharing their culture, their values and their relationship with the land, waters and all living things. Authentic Indigenous cultural experiences not only create memories for BC visitors – for most travellers, they are transformative; they restore the feeling of connection with all things and they become a travel highlight – the focus of stories, of bragging rights, of desires to return.

No other place on the planet offers such a density and diversity of Indigenous experiences – British Columbia is home to more than 200 First Nations, each with its own unique language, dialect and traditions.



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**INDIGENOUS  
TOURISM BC**

# Indigenous Peoples of BC

British Columbia is home to the largest diverse assembly of Indigenous peoples in the world, this provides the very unique opportunity for a huge number of unique experiences and stories. Many First Nations belong to the same language families developed over thousands of years for trade and social functions, but all have distinct cultures born from the territories they inhabit. When travelling into any of the distinct regions of BC, you will find new ways of understanding the world and new ways to experience it. The relationship to the traditional and ancestral territories of the many nations of BC have been developed over centuries and can bring guests closer to the very

## Peoples of the Coast

**Coast Salish, Nuuchahnulth, Kwakwaka'wakw, Haisla, Heiltsuk, Wuikinuxv, Nuxalk, Tsimshian, Nisga'a, Gitksan, Haida, Tlingit**

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

## Peoples of the Plateau

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

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

## Peoples of the Sub-Arctic

**Tsay Key Dene, Kaska Dene, Dunne-za, Tahltan, Dakelh-ne, Wetsuwet'en, Ts'ilh'aot'in, Inland Tlingit**

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






# Indigenous Rights, Title, and Treaties

Indigenous people have been present on the lands of BC for more than 14,000 years. This is more than 10,000 years previous to the construction of the Pyramids of Giza which date back just over 4,000 years. In the 269 years since British, Spanish, Russian, and American sailors began visiting the area and British Columbia was established, there have been few treaties signed by the many nations across the province. Certain legal rights are guaranteed to the Indigenous peoples in BC as well as a formal requirement for consultation by Industry and the Government of BC. With the passing of Bill 41, a commitment to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples across all legislation in BC, the need to respect traditional territories and rights is further strengthened.

## Indigenous Rights



In November 2019, the Government of BC passed the BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which looks to align all legislation with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as well as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action. Federally, many Indigenous rights stem from the Indian Act, which outlines services as well as rights to "Status Indians" on reserve and when doing traditional practices such as hunting and fishing. An important sub category of Indigenous rights is Indigenous title. Indigenous title is a unique interest in the land that encompasses a right to exclusive use and occupation of the land. There are currently multiple Indigenous title cases before the BC Courts to reaffirm ownership over traditional territories.

## Treaty Rights

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

Visit the BC Treaty Commission website  
for information on treaties in British Columbia  
<http://www.bctreaty.ca/>



# Benefits to Working with Indigenous Communities

## Travel Trade & Tour Operators

1. Strengthens Experiences for Guests with Indigenous Cultures
2. Provides Better Access to Cultures, Oral Histories, and Traditional Knowledge Keepers
3. Creates Potential Access to Community Ceremonies and Celebrations
4. Establishes Better Support in the Community for Initiatives and Tours
5. Gives Access to Potential Employees with Cultural Knowledge and Experiences

## Media & Influencers:

1. Provides Better Access to Sources and Interview Subjects
2. Creates Greater Trust within the Community
3. Establishes Contacts to Share Future Stories
4. Gives Better Access to Traditional Knowledge and Events
5. Creates a Higher Chance of Inclusion on Familiarization Tours



# Ways to Strengthen Your Relationship

## Travel Trade & Tour Operators

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

## Media & Influencers:

1. Include positive/feel good coverage about Indigenous communities rather than focusing mainly on issues.
2. Work with organizations, governments or knowledge keepers to factcheck all stories which include content on them and their territory.
3. Employ an in community correspondent or have an Indigenous liason to maintain relationships with communities you have previously connected with.



# 10 Considerations when Working with Indigenous Communities



For tour operators the guest experience is the most important aspect of any tour; For media, getting the story in and on time, is crucial for your job. Indigenous peoples are active participants in modern business and will understand these and other business realities. However, there also exists ancient protocols and customs that will often be given a priority in Indigenous communities. Knowing how to navigate some of these protocols based on respect will ensure better relationships and the best experience for all involved. This concept of relationship building for trade and business has been present in BC for centuries, and still continues today. Here are some tips on how you can be successfully integrated into this tradition.

## 1. Respect the People and Culture

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

## 2. Recognize Traditional Territory

Recognizing Indigenous territories is a great first step in recognizing traditional territory in BC, but is important to remember it is only the first step. To take this a step further recognize that you are a guest on the territory and thank the nation(s) who steward(s) it as your hosts for welcoming you into their territory. Additionally, do the work to understand the history of the place, and whether, like the Nisga'a among others, it is a territory owned under a treaty and requires special permissions to access.

## 3. Take Time to Understand and Respect Colonial History.

The wounds made to Indigenous societies through colonization were calculated and deep, and the repercussions will take many generations to heal from, trying to identify the cause of mistrust, non-cooperation, or caution would not likely lead to an easy answer. One example of these repercussions surrounds alcohol and drug use, and while many Indigenous communities are dry now the stereotypes remain, respect this and the harm perpetuating stories about issue like this can do to communities. In the instances where you are confronted with the repercussions of the recent past, try to understand and respect the healing process and consider whether you are unnecessarily reinforcing stereotypes.



#### 4. Build Relationships for better Engagements

The mark of a successful partnership with Indigenous communities is one which places the value of the relationship in line with that of the outcome. Indigenous people have been building relationships for trade and politics through marriages, potlatches, powwows, and other formal gatherings for over 10,000 years, and it continues to be practiced. It is important for anyone seeking positive business relationships in Indigenous communities to not focus solely on the business transaction but at the relationship as a whole.

#### 5. Identify the Governance and Authority Structure.

Band Councils are the elected governments of most Territories, and can be a great resource within Indigenous communities to connect you with community members. For some Indigenous Communities however, there are tribal governments which act alongside or replace the Band council. Finally, there are Hereditary Chiefs, who hold titles and authorities which have been passed down for thousands of years, their roles are as influential figures in the community who focus on the health and well-being of their people and their territories. This is a key instance where a local guide would help navigate the governance systems for permissions and participation.

#### 6. Find a Guide for Protocol

Protocols are the complex social orders and procedures that must be adhered to during interactions, they include manners, ceremonial procedures, familial hierarchy, host-guest responsibilities, and a long list of other such functions. To go into an Indigenous community and apply knowledge from prior experiences will likely help, but to navigate the many facets of an Indigenous community like an expert, get the help of an expert. Find a guide to ask questions during your visit about protocols and how to be included in the community for whatever your purposes are, be it tourism experiences, interviews, or knowledge.

#### 7. Ensure Reciprocity

Within Indigenous cultures reciprocity or giving and receiving is integral to our interactions with one another as well as with the natural world. It is often appropriate to give a gift as a show of gratitude and respect for a person's time or knowledge as it is akin to a trade, it respects what was shared with you and gives you the opportunity to acknowledge the worth of what was received. In cases where you would normally give honorariums it is appropriate to offer this to community members as well, in the cases where it is turned down, having a gift on hand might be a better option. It doesn't need to be of high monetary value, often times swag or merchandise from the organization you work for might work well.

## 8. Attending Ceremonies and Celebrations

For Indigenous communities, ceremony and celebrations maintain and strengthen community, some are private but you are welcome to politely ask if your attendance would be appropriate. Some ceremonies are available for others to attend but do not allow photography, video, or recordings, it is extremely important that this is respected when asked of those gathered. If you are uncomfortable with participating in any portion of ceremony, politely excuse yourself from participation.

## 9. Allow for Time

Indigenous communities can sometimes have a more relaxed attitude for time management during events, not out of disrespect for time, but out of the deep-rooted respect for protocols to be followed. It does not allow for important processes to be rushed, to rush an Elder in their blessing, a chief in his speech, a youth in their learning, or guests who are being fed would be deeply disrespectful to the culture. In business and media, tight deadlines are often necessary and this perspective on time may not fit with yours, but it is important to allow for time to adapt as need.

## 10. Being Pushy will get you Pushed Out.

Indigenous peoples recognize the value of knowledge and the need to safeguard it against distortion or improper use and are often restricted by protocol or cautious due to past experiences. You cannot take it personally if you are told no, when asking about interviews, attending events, being included in ceremony, or when asking for comment or knowledge. If are an aggressor you will never be trusted with knowledge or access, respect that a 'no' will not likely change to a 'yes' and depending on the reason/person it is not

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

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# Media Conduct and Content Agreement

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

- Share content which I have screened for offensive, off brand, damaging, or any other material which could be construed as perpetuating harmful stereotypes against Indigenous peoples.
- Factcheck any information I share by Indigenous Tourism BC or a senior member of the community I am interacting with, to safeguard against false information or private information which should not be publicly shared.
- Seek the council of Indigenous Tourism BC or Indigenous community members belonging to the same community I am interacting with, to ensure respectful and positive collaboration.
- Ensure proper permissions are granted before interacting and capturing content, in the instances where I am unsure of the proper authority entitled to grant such permissions, I will consult with Indigenous Tourism BC, or a senior member of the community I am interacting with to guide me through protocols and permissions.
- Ensure any and all images, videos, recordings, interviews, quotes, and any other such content gathered and shared will have the full and ongoing consent of those involved in conjunction with the protocols of the ceremony, celebration, event, or tour I am capturing as set by the hosts.

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sign

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date





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