



**INDIGENOUS**  
TOURISM ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

BUILDING BACK  
**BETTER**

# STRATEGIC RECOVERY OF INDIGENOUS TOURISM IN CANADA 2022-2025





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Message from ITAC's CEO.....	4
A Message from ITAC's Board Chair.....	6
About the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada .....	8
Alignment with the UNWTO's Sustainable Development Goals.....	11
Indigenous Tourism is Reconciliation in Action.....	12
New Industry Targets for 2022-2025.....	15
Recovery .....	17
Resiliency .....	21
Required Investment.....	26

In this document, ITAC is proud to feature images of its members from across the country. To learn more about ITAC's members, and to see more images, please visit **[DestinationIndigenous.ca](https://DestinationIndigenous.ca)**.

FRONT COVER: WAPUSK ADVENTURES • MB

BACK COVER: MOON GATE GUEST HOUSE • MB



# INVESTING FOR OUR FUTURE

## A Message from ITAC's CEO

Since 2014, the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) has strived to support and strengthen Indigenous tourism experiences throughout Canada. We have done this by delivering on our Indigenous-led, four-pillar approach: Leadership, Partnerships, Development and Marketing. Prior to COVID-19, Indigenous tourism in Canada saw unprecedented growth from 2014 to 2019:

- ◆ *Increasing Indigenous tourism jobs from 33,100 to 39,000*
- ◆ *Increased contributions to the GDP from \$1.4 B to \$1.86 B*
- ◆ *Increased the number of export-ready Indigenous-owned tourism businesses from 65 to 130*

The COVID-19 global pandemic had an immediate detrimental impact on the Indigenous tourism industry, with an estimated 70% reduction in contributions to the GDP and a loss of 21,000 jobs. During this time, ITAC immediately realigned resources, accessed \$16 M in federal grant support through the Government of Canada to support 680 operators with stimulus support and focused marketing activities to a domestic audience.

We know we are not alone; however, Indigenous tourism remains the most vulnerable sector of the industry, and we are calling on our partners to align with and support our strategy as we seek resources to efficiently build back our member businesses and make them more sustainable than ever before. ITAC is the right organization to lead this recovery, understanding the unique needs of our businesses and aligning with global demand for authentic experiences.



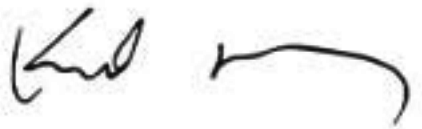
*A \$65 million federal investment over three years will **grow employment in Indigenous tourism by 21,000 jobs—to a total of over 40,000 workers.***

Today we present our amended strategic plan, “Building Back Better” an Indigenous-led strategy for 2022-2025, highlighting what is needed for Indigenous tourism to rebuild stronger than ever before. It was created based on industry leading research, engagement with our Indigenous tourism members, and consultation with private and public sector partners from across the tourism industry.

With a federal investment of \$65M for 2022-2025, ITAC will continue to support our members by leveraging funds with our partners. The targets set in this strategy are for the recovery of the industry to 2019 levels by 2025; however, we will only be successful if our plans are fully supported and Indigenous-led. ITAC will leverage strong domestic and global demand, continue our leadership in supporting the development of exceptional, export-ready Indigenous tourism experiences and invest in a strategy to recover Indigenous tourism jobs.

On behalf of our board, staff and 1,900+ Indigenous tourism businesses, thank you for your support of ITAC’s Building Back Better strategy. We look forward to working collaboratively now, to rebuild our industry by 2025.

Sincerely,



**KEITH HENRY**  
PRESIDENT & CEO  
INDIGENOUS TOURISM ASSOCIATION OF CANADA





# LEAD - INSPIRE - ENGAGE

## A Message from ITAC's Board Chair

Since we first began to understand the devastating impact of COVID-19 on our industry, we knew we had to fight for Indigenous-led solutions. One moment we were being recognized for building an Indigenous tourism industry that is admired globally for its economic impact and Indigenous prosperity, and the next we were facing devastating job and revenue losses across the country.

Through all of this, our industry has remained resilient. As a board, we have been incredibly proud to see our team pulling through the third and fourth waves of COVID-19. We're thankful to them for working tirelessly to create an industry-wide strategy, backed by research and collaboration with our members and partners, to inspire our entire industry to move forward quickly with a focus on building back better than ever.

Over the last two years, we've seen a societal shift in travel, one that has moved consumers closer to the core values of our Indigenous peoples. We're seeing visitors more interested in exploring the lands they inhabit in addition to embracing a slower, more mindful pace of life, grounded in nature and spirituality. We know demand both domestically and globally is growing for authentic Indigenous experiences.

It is now time for Indigenous tourism to rebuild and flourish. With a 3-year commitment of \$65M, the rate of return will be substantial. This investment will allow ITAC to engage with Indigenous operators, leadership, and private sector partners. Investing in Indigenous tourism is an investment in our future. Beyond economics, investing in the Indigenous tourism industry is an investment for

*A \$65 million federal investment over three years will **drive over \$1.86 billion in GDP contributions year over year by 2025**—a more than 1500% return on investment.*

future generations, ensuring that Indigenous youth, languages and cultures continue to thrive. Indigenous tourism operators are integral to supporting Canadians in their own reconciliation journeys.

Our team is working to bring together all levels of government to create cohesive solutions for our industry and these efforts have contributed to ensuring more than 1,900 businesses have the resources to not only survive this disruption but to rebuild with hope for the future. This trust in our abilities to rebuild is seen in a 144% increase in members and a 91% increase in Marketing Upgrade members since 2019.

Thank you to everyone that has worked hard to support our members across the country. We have seen resiliency across our Indigenous tourism associations—from BC, Alberta, Manitoba, Yukon, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland & Labrador and PEI. I would also like to thank the ITAC team for their passion, optimism and commitment to ensuring Indigenous tourism comes out of this pandemic stronger than ever. It is an honour to work beside you.

Sincerely,



**BRENDA HOLDER**  
BOARD CHAIR  
INDIGENOUS TOURISM ASSOCIATION OF CANADA



# ABOUT THE INDIGENOUS TOURISM ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

Since 2014, the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) has strived to support and strengthen Indigenous tourism experiences throughout Canada. ITAC is now widely recognized as the global leader in Indigenous tourism development and marketing. ITAC's reputation is built upon its successes, but also by the strength of its partnerships—at the federal, provincial and territorial levels and also with the Indigenous communities across the country who have chosen to welcome visitors to their lands.

The success of past ITAC strategies has been a result of ITAC's efforts to support member businesses in becoming more market and export-ready and ITAC's building of a network of provincial and territorial partners across Canada. This coordinated approach to development and marketing activities is led by ITAC as the national voice for industry leadership and advocacy.

Over the past seven years, the sector has seen unprecedented growth in Indigenous tourism offerings, resulting in new job creation and an increased contribution to GDP—up from \$1.4 billion to nearly \$2 billion. Additionally, from 2016 to 2019, ITAC supported a 100% increase in the number of market-ready and export-ready Indigenous tourism businesses in Canada.

ITAC's strategic recovery plan supports the sustainable restoration of Indigenous tourism in Canada as the sector leader in annual growth in jobs, GDP contributions and the creation of new tourism businesses. This will be achieved through the continued delivery of our four-pillar approach to business:

**Leadership:** Increasing positive industry awareness, advocacy and accountability to gain market respect, establish funder confidence and build member support.

**Partnerships:** Uniting the Indigenous tourism industry in Canada, bringing together members and key industry organizations to collaborate and maximize results.

**Development:** Encouraging product development and investment in Indigenous tourism to ensure the industry remains competitive internationally.

**Marketing:** Promoting Indigenous tourism and its positive community and cultural impacts with high-value, targeted marketing as well as through research, media and sales efforts.



As the Indigenous tourism industry in Canada recovers from the shock of COVID-19, ITAC has set its sights on moving forward in the most adaptable and sustainable manner possible. ITAC understands that this undertaking will present challenges, both known and unknown, and is prepared to face them head-on. ITAC has forged national partnerships that include Destination Canada, Tourism HR Canada, WestJet, Parks Canada, and the Tourism Industry Association of Canada. The input of these partners is invaluable as ITAC works with them to rebuild the industry in Canada.

ITAC has achieved strong results throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This success would not have been possible without the ongoing support of our funding partners and the Government of Canada. To achieve our 2022-2025 targets for the Indigenous tourism industry in Canada, ITAC's recovery plan requires a \$65 million investment over three years.









# ALIGNMENT WITH THE UNWTO'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

ITAC is proud to support the United Nations World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) mandate to promote responsible, sustainable, and universally accessible tourism that is geared towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. ITAC's national efforts and strategy align well with the United Nations call to action in contributing meaningfully towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

ITAC's commitment to improving the socio-economic standing of Indigenous Peoples, as well as its commitments to cultural revitalization and environmental stewardship are a priority and a guiding principle within ITAC's four strategic pillars. ITAC identified the following SDGs that actively and directly contribute towards meaningful change:

- ♦ ***SDG 1: Eliminate Poverty***
- ♦ ***SDG 3: Good Health & Well Being***
- ♦ ***SDG 4: Quality Education***
- ♦ ***SDG 5: Gender Equality***
- ♦ ***SDG 8: Decent Work & Economic Growth***
- ♦ ***SDG 9: Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure***
- ♦ ***SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities***
- ♦ ***SDG 11: Sustainable Cities & Communities***
- ♦ ***SDG 12: Responsible Consumption***
- ♦ ***SDG 14: Life Below Water***
- ♦ ***SDG 15: Life on Land***
- ♦ ***SDG 17: Partnerships for Goals***

# INDIGENOUS TOURISM IS RECONCILIATION IN ACTION

As the country continues to mourn the children lost to residential schools, and struggles to find ways to support reconciliation, Indigenous tourism plays a vital role in educating and sharing Indigenous culture. Experiencing Indigenous tourism firsthand is an important way for non-Indigenous Canadians to gain a new perspective. It helps them to connect to the lands, traditions and way of life of Indigenous Peoples and to better understand the history of Canada—while also having a positive impact on Indigenous economic growth.

Investing in Indigenous tourism demonstrates reconciliation in action by creating and expanding tourism economic development projects with Indigenous nations, while supporting self-determination for Indigenous businesses.

## Leading Industry Research

Prior to COVID-19, ITAC successfully implemented a growth strategy for the Indigenous tourism sector in Canada, improving Canada's competitive advantage by aligning with visitor demand for authentic experiences. This was demonstrated by the 23.5% increase in Indigenous tourism revenues in 2019—outpacing the rest of the sector which only increased by 14.5% that year. ITAC's strategy also supported economic prosperity in several Indigenous communities with limited economic opportunities, providing a successful Indigenous-led model where previous government programs had failed.

In 2019, Indigenous tourism employed 39,000 employees and brought in an estimated \$1.9 billion in direct GDP. Conference Board of Canada research conducted in partnership with ITAC, showed that in 2020, compared to 2019, Canada's Indigenous tourism sector has experienced a 65.9% decline in direct GDP (down to \$555 million) and a 59.4% decline in employment (down to 14,624 jobs) in 2020, due to COVID-19 and the global tourism industry grinding to a halt.

However, with targeted investments, Indigenous tourism is expected to recover more quickly than the rest of the tourism sector by 2025 due to shifting Canadian interest towards Indigenous tourism (based on Destination Canada modelling).



ITAC commissioned a study by Insignia Marketing Research which revealed that COVID-19 may in fact have been the catalyst of change responsible for the growing enthusiasm of Canadians for Indigenous domestic travel experiences. Study findings suggested that where Canadians had once been passively curious about Indigenous tourism and culture, the pandemic has amplified that curiosity, resulting in a more open and receptive attitude to exploring the Indigenous world in their own backyard.







**33%** of Indigenous tourism businesses are owned by women entrepreneurs—**more than double the percentage of non-Indigenous tourism businesses.**



# NEW INDUSTRY TARGETS FOR 2022-2025

As the Indigenous tourism industry in Canada recovers from COVID-19, ITAC has set targets to move forward while being adaptable and sustainable. Recognizing that this undertaking will present known and unknown challenges, ITAC is prepared to face them head on using proven strategies and funding resources.

## The Three Main Priorities of the Strategic Recovery Plan

**Inspiring** ITAC member businesses across the country to rebuild or refocus their business offering through targeted business support, education and training.

**Leveraging** partnership opportunities and investments with the Provincial and Territorial Indigenous Tourism Organizations to maintain their membership and infrastructure.

**Strengthening** ITAC as the national leader and advocate for Indigenous tourism operators and stabilizing funding through the federal government, partners and members.

## 2022-2025 Targets

COVID-19 has paused the Indigenous tourism industry's flourishing growth. With new and emerging realities, ITAC's revised targets for 2025 are to return to pre-COVID levels:

- ◆ *\$1.9 billion in direct GDP contributions*
- ◆ *1,900 Indigenous tourism businesses*
- ◆ *40,000 Indigenous tourism employees*







# RECOVERY

As ITAC continues to manage the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is shifting its focus to restarting the Indigenous tourism industry and the promotion of Indigenous destinations that are open and ready to welcome visitors. ITAC will ensure that its members have the training and resources they need to meet regional health and safety requirements and will continue to work with Destination Canada and provincial and territorial partners on the launch of domestic marketing campaigns. Collectively, this work supports the sustainable recovery of the sector and will prepare ITAC's members for renewed promotion to international markets.

**Objective:** To safely restart the Indigenous tourism industry with a focus on domestic travel while continuing to build capacity amongst ITAC's membership, and providing targeted business support where required.

## Leadership Initiatives

- ◆ *Access to stimulus resources to support members during the Recovery and Resiliency phases*
- ◆ *Advocating for the industry at the federal level to ensure equitable access to federal support for Indigenous tourism businesses*
- ◆ *Delivering an Indigenous tourism conference in Calgary in 2022*

## Partnership Activities

- ◆ *Leveraging relationships with Provincial and Territorial Indigenous Tourism Organizations to grow ITAC's membership base to ensure the representation of as many Indigenous tourism businesses as possible*
- ◆ *Strengthening and expanding federal, provincial, territorial and sector partnerships to support the recovery of Indigenous tourism*

## Development Activities

- ◆ *Implementing Project RISE, ITAC's accreditation program for Indigenous tourism businesses, and aligning business support to improve products and services*
- ◆ *Implementing and sharing provincial and territorial reopening and response plans*
- ◆ *Creating a strategy to recover jobs and to increase Indigenous engagement in the tourism sector*

- ◆ *Building provincial, territorial, and community readiness toolkits to support destination development*
- ◆ *Advancing businesses from doors-open to market-ready and export-ready status by utilizing marketing initiatives*
- ◆ *Creating a directory of online training resources for members*
- ◆ *Developing the Indigenous Culinary Ambassador network*

## Marketing Activities

- ◆ *Instituting the Provincial and Territorial Indigenous Tourism Organizations' Marketing Circular Investment Program to leverage resources*
- ◆ *Delivering familiarisation tours and press trips for travel trade and media*
- ◆ *Publishing Nations magazine*
- ◆ *Collaborating with the travel trade to promote Indigenous tourism packages in key markets*
- ◆ *Collaborating with Destination Canada and provincial and territorial marketing partners on the launch of a domestic marketing campaign targeting travel within Canada*
- ◆ *Investing in market research and publishing Indigenous national reports and insights*
- ◆ *Organizing and managing sales missions and roadshows for key markets*
- ◆ *Creating niche content to promote various sectors of the industry*
- ◆ *Increasing the visibility of the Indigenous pavilion at Rendez-vous Canada and other trade and media events to increase partnerships and international impact*
- ◆ *Implementing domestic and targeted international marketing campaigns through The Original Original branding*
- ◆ *Building on the brand awareness of The Original Original through Indigenous channels, partners and membership*
- ◆ *Creating nationwide campaigns on key platforms such as Expedia and Airbnb*
- ◆ *Increasing investments in partnerships with TripAdvisor and online travel agencies to improve the digitization of Indigenous operators*
- ◆ *Development of a Corporate Federal Government awareness and reconciliation travel/ learning program in alignment with federal procurement strategy*
- ◆ *Optimizing the user experience of Destination Indigenous platforms*
- ◆ *Creating media content together with industry partners to support media, trade and marketing campaigns*











# RESILIENCY

When life begins to return to normal, and international travel restrictions are lifted, ITAC will lead the Indigenous tourism industry into the resiliency phase. ITAC's marketing team will expand its efforts to include the promotion of members in key international markets. This work will be done in partnership with Destination Canada and will build upon the ongoing domestic marketing campaigns, conducted in collaboration with provincial and territorial partners. ITAC will continue to support members by solidifying business offerings and aligning with Project Rise accreditation requirements. ITAC will focus on meeting the 2025 targets to rebuild a stronger, more sustainable Indigenous tourism industry in Canada.

**Objective:** To reach ITAC's 2025 targets while ensuring the long-term sustainability of the industry and strengthening its ability to handle future pandemics or other disasters.

## Leadership Activities

- ◆ *Safely hosting an in-person International Indigenous Tourism Conference*
- ◆ *Advocating for the industry at all levels of government to ensure that the Indigenous tourism industry is well supported during the Resiliency phase*
- ◆ *Expanding participation and representation in national level industry organizations*

## Development Activities

- ◆ *Delivering business support to help businesses meet market-ready and export-ready standards in alignment with accreditation programs while addressing business gaps*
- ◆ *Implementing ITAC's job recovery strategy*
- ◆ *Maintaining Project RISE as an effective national accreditation program through online assessment and targeted alignment of business support*
- ◆ *Continuing to support provincial and territorial health and safety plans in the "new normal" with a focus on future-proofing the industry*
- ◆ *Collaborating with educational institutions to deliver Indigenous tourism and culinary programs*

## Partnership Activities

- ♦ *Growing ITAC's membership base across Canada*
- ♦ *Strengthening and expanding federal, provincial, territorial and sector partnerships to support the resiliency of the Indigenous tourism industry*


## Marketing Activities

- ♦ *Organizing and managing sales missions and roadshows in key markets*
- ♦ *Increasing the visibility of the Indigenous pavilion at Rendez-Vous Canada and other trade and media events to increase partnerships and maximise international impact*
- ♦ *Implementing domestic and international co-op marketing programs*
- ♦ *Delivering fam trips for international media and travel trade*
- ♦ *Delivering international Influencer and storytelling campaigns*
- ♦ *Creating rich, turnkey media content through media and industry partnerships*
- ♦ *Creating collections of digital assets to support marketing campaigns*
- ♦ *Optimizing the user experience of Destination Indigenous to showcase and promote ITAC's membership*







A photograph of a snowy winter scene. In the background, a light-colored building with a dark chimney is visible. In the foreground, there is a large, rectangular block of ice or snow. A dog's tail, with brown and black fur, is visible on the right side of the frame. The overall atmosphere is cold and serene.

***An investment in Indigenous tourism will employ more Indigenous workers than an investment in any other sector.***

*ITAC's research shows that **57%** of the workers in the Indigenous tourism industry are Indigenous—that rate is **4x higher** than any other sector.*





# REQUIRED INVESTMENT

The results that ITAC has achieved through previous federal investments demonstrate that an Indigenous-led approach to the development and marketing of Indigenous tourism will garner the greatest success. A fully supported Building Back Better plan will enable the Indigenous tourism sector in Canada to make a full economic recovery by 2025.

ITAC Pillar	Budget Amount	Alignment with ITAC's three main priorities		
		Inspiring Members	Leveraging Partnerships	Strengthening ITAC
Leadership	7,651,000	✓	✓	✓
Partnership	7,651,000	✓	✓	✓
Development	19,475,161	✓	✓	
Marketing	30,336,215	✓	✓	✓
<b>Total</b>	<b>65,113,376</b>			

## Deliverables

**Leadership:** Increasing positive industry awareness, advocacy and accountability in order to establish funder confidence and build support for ITAC and its members and ITAC's provincial and territorial Indigenous partners.

**Partnerships:** Uniting the Indigenous tourism industry in Canada by bringing together members and aligning and leveraging relationships with provinces and territories. Creating national partnerships to support Indigenous tourism.

**Development:** Working in partnership with provincial and territorial Indigenous tourism associations to encourage member development and to grow investment in Indigenous tourism. Further development of provincial and territorial Indigenous tourism networks.

**Marketing:** Promoting Indigenous tourism businesses and the positive community and cultural impacts their operations have. Conducting high-value, targeted marketing as well as research, media and sales efforts. Leveraging marketing resources with provincial and territorial organizations to maximize investment and to raise awareness of ITAC as a national and international brand.









**INDIGENOUS**  
TOURISM ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

[IndigenousTourism.ca](http://IndigenousTourism.ca)    [DestinationIndigenous.ca](http://DestinationIndigenous.ca)

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