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ITAC's Responds to the ITBC Misinformation Presented April 4 to First Nations Summit in BC

At the First Nations Summit meeting on April 4, Indigenous Tourism British Columbia (ITBC) presented misinformation about the new [Indigenous Tourism Destination Fund](#) (ITDF) as well as the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC), in which a resolution was passed for the development of a BC-based approach for a BC Indigenous Destination Tourism Fund. Given the seriousness of this situation, ITAC is providing a briefing for members and partners and reassurance that despite ITBC's actions, we will maintain the ITDF and support for all members and partners in Canada.

We encourage members and partners to watch the recording of the ITBC presentation at the First Nations Summit to appreciate the gravity of the undermining by ITBC towards ITAC:

[Video from BC First Nations Summit](#)

ITAC had representatives in person and online at this meeting and is disappointed that the ITDF was egregiously misrepresented, especially by one of ITAC's Indigenous provincial and territorial partners. The ITDF is a *voluntary opt-in program* where tourism businesses collect a small fee on behalf of their guests - independent research has found that intentional travellers are seeking ways to invest in reconciliation in Canada but do not have a clear understanding of how to do this; Indigenous tourism is seen as a catalyst for both Truth and Reconciliation.

Tourism in Canada is driven in large part by destination marketing fees, which Indigenous communities are not eligible to access. This is one of several systemic barriers to address within the tourism industry. The ITDF was created to attract investments through a similar design process, the first of its kind in the world. ITDF is not mandated, nor is it a tax, as was implied by ITBC representative Brenda Baptiste - however, it does align with industry norms to collect a fee while in destination, which supports the development of new experiences and marketing of destinations and provides resources for funding of the industry. ITAC has been fully transparent in the governance and allocation of funds collected. ITAC is proud to say that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners of the new ITDF are already participating in BC.

Another message from ITBC Chair Baptiste was insinuating that ITAC and Indigenous tourism in Canada should not collect an ITDF fee. That Indigenous tourism should only seek investment support from governments. Given this current Federal investment and economic climate, ITAC knows there will remain significant gaps in the ability to grow Indigenous tourism effectively in Canada and become the world leader by 2030 as aspired in our national vision. ITAC's vision is to create program self-sufficiency for our members and partners over time as we implement ITDF partners. By contrast, after making such statements to the First Nations Summit leaders, the ITBC Chair then requests support for ITDF for ITBC specifically. The contradiction in the ITBC rationale to undermine ITAC's new program while securing support for a similar fund is



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unfair and inaccurate. Moreover, why would ITBC need an ITDF, given the \$12 million in accumulated surplus provided by public funds?

[ITAC's 2024-25 Action Plan](#) provides a roadmap to invest over \$21 million to support leadership partnership, development, and marketing. The ITAC budget included revenues from the ITDF of approximately \$11 million to enhance several tactics. One of the key ITDF investments in 2024-2025 is \$2.2M to increase support for Indigenous tourism provincial and territorial tourism partners. Most disappointing is the potential negative impact this ITBC false representation may have on these Indigenous organizations and Indigenous staff. The fact is ITBC actions further risk the growth of a coordinated approach to Indigenous tourism nationally. By contrast, ITBC reported a \$12M surplus budget as of March 31st, 2023; however most Indigenous provincial and territorial partners do not have this financial stability yet, and they depend on ITAC's financial support through programs such as ITDF. ITBC's unprofessional and inaccurate narrative against ITDF harms the other Indigenous provincial and territorial partners. It risks their ability to raise money to develop and promote tourism experiences in their respective provinces and territories. For fiscal year 2024-25, ITAC had allocated \$236,000 for ITBC to be paid by the ITDF.

ITDF includes supporting First Nations, Inuit and Métis members of ITAC. The ITDF will support [ITAC's strategy to make Canada the world leader in Indigenous tourism by 2030](#) and focus on Indigenous-led marketing, development, partnerships and leadership support for entrepreneurs and community-owned tourism businesses. In ITBC's presentation to the First Nations Summit, it was inaccurate to only to make recommendations that focus exclusively on First Nations, which excludes the Metis and Inuit operators throughout BC and Canada. For the record, an estimated 25% of Indigenous tourism businesses operate on First Nations reserve lands. The remaining estimated 75% operate throughout Canada off-reserve by First Nations, Metis, and Inuit entrepreneurs.

ITAC has had a difficult relationship with ITBC for years. ITBC has made numerous efforts to interfere with ITAC's national partners, such as Destination Canada, Indigenous Services Canada Ottawa, Federal Minister of Tourism, etc. Despite these past ITBC actions, the ITAC board tried to repair the relationship in September 2023, when ITBC seemed to commit to working with issues between the boards. ITBC has never acted in good faith since September 2023. In February 2024 ITBC representatives tried to meet with other Indigenous Tourism Provincial/Territorial Associations to suggest the creation of a new national Indigenous tourism organization. Ironically ITBC Chair Baptiste is aware that this divisive approach has led to the failure and demise of past iterations of national Indigenous tourism bodies.

Today, ITAC is one of the funding partners for ITBC and has established communication protocols for contributing funds to ITBC's operating budget on an annual basis. ITAC has ongoing conversations with the ITBC's staff and their board about the ITDF. Ultimately, ITAC is shocked and surprised that ITBC did not follow through on communication protocols to



discuss this latest issue and subsequent effort to politicize the Indigenous tourism industry as they have with the First Nations Summit leadership.

ITBC Chair Baptiste and staff member Henry Tso have been provided direct ITDF information numerous times since May 2023. ITAC has offered throughout all meetings an ITAC invitation to meet and discuss how provincial and territorial Indigenous tourism organizations, such as ITBC, can become more involved.

Timeline of Meetings & Communications:

1. May 2023—Keith Henry, ITAC President and CEO, informed ITBC of the ITDF at Rendezvous Canada through an informal conversation (with witnesses) with ITBC staff member Henry Tso on the concept of the fund in hopes of receiving support from ITBC.
2. September 8th, 2023 —Official Launch of the ITDF email sent directly to ITBC Chair Brenda Baptiste and ITBC Staff Henry Tso. Over 100 key partners were sent this information.
3. September 20th, 2023—ITAC Meeting in Halifax. ITBC staff member Henry Tso attended. ITAC provided a thorough overview of the new ITDF program.
4. October 2023—ITAC asked to attend the ITBC AGM to present a national update. ITAC was invited but limited to two guests only with no speaking opportunity offered. This would have been an incredible opportunity to bring ITBC and ITAC closer, enabling ITAC to share information like the ITDF.
5. December 14th, 2023—ITAC 8th AGM was held in Saskatchewan. ITAC presented an update about the ITDF. ITBC Co-Chair Sharon Bond attended online, and ITBC was invited. Sharon Bond was elected by members to ITAC Board of Directors as the endorsed representative.
6. January 4th, 2024—ITAC provincial and territorial Indigenous tourism partners, including ITBC staff Henry Tso, were emailed about ITAC priorities.
7. January 18th, 2024—ITAC provincial and territorial Indigenous tourism partners meeting. ITAC staff member Henry Tso attended. ITDF was on the agenda.
8. February 12th, 2024—Provincial and territorial Indigenous tourism partners virtual meeting check-in, which ITBC staff member Henry Tso attended.



9. February 25th, 2024 - ITAC's 2024-25 Action Plan was unanimously approved by the ITAC Board of Directors, including Sharon Bond, representing British Columbia, in which ITDF is a large component of the overall success of the delivery of the action plan.

10. March 2024 —TIABC CEO asked if Keith Henry would not present the new Indigenous Tourism Destination Fund at the BC Tourism Industry Conference. It was explained to Keith that ITBC Chair Brenda Baptiste was upset at him for providing ITAC and, specifically, Keith, being included on the agenda at the conference. ITAC was a contributing partner to the event and co-sponsored the Indigenous Tourism Award with ITBC.

Given the actions by ITBC, ITAC leadership ensures that our members in BC and across Canada are fully aware of this situation and understand the importance of this issue. ITAC will address this matter aggressively and will continue to advance the ITDF. The ITDF was established to enable the tourism industry and individual customers to contribute a voluntary option to showcase reconciliation through their support for the growth of the Indigenous tourism industry throughout Canada, not just BC. The ITDF will support our industry from coast to coast to coast and ensure Indigenous tourism is self-sufficient.

ITAC thanks all members and partners in BC and across Canada for your ongoing support and ITDF participation. ITBC messaging suggested by stopping ITAC's ITDF programming that, they are looking out for their members. We strongly disagree with ITBC's ongoing division and laterally violent actions; they hurt Indigenous tourism opportunities across Canada. ITAC has proudly supported several existing programs for BC members, and we assure them that regardless of ITBC politics, ITAC will maintain our commitment to delivering development and marketing programs.

In closing, ITAC leadership is meeting next week to examine options and will respond accordingly through appropriate channels.

This is not the preferred ITAC action, but given the ITBC tactics, there is no alternative.

Please reach out to Sheldon McRae ITAC Corporate Communications Specialist at Sheldon@IndigenousTourism.ca if you have any questions or concerns.

Additional Resources

[Indigenous Tourism Destination Fund](#)

[Video - Indigenous Tourism Destination Fund](#)

[2024-25 Action Plan](#)