

**To the Honorable Rechie Valdez, P.C., M.P.**

House of Commons

**Subject: Concerns Regarding the Decision Not to Fund the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada**

Dear Minister Valdez,

I write this letter with great disappointment regarding the decision not to provide funding for ITAC. As an indigenous tourism operator who knows the benefits of indigenous tourism and understands the value of how our industry adds to the economy, I believe indigenous tourism deserves meaningful support and a firm commitment from the federal government.

Indigenous tourism offers far more than economic benefits. It creates opportunities for indigenous communities and individual operators to share history, traditions and culture from our own perspective and terms. These experiences foster greater understanding between indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians while also attracting visitors seeking authentic cultural experience.

The indigenous tourism industry has demonstrated its ability to create jobs, support local businesses, and generate revenue in communities that may have limited economic opportunities. Investment in this sector can contribute to long-term economic self-determination and community well-being. Conversely, a lack of funding may hinder growth, limit employment opportunities, and undermine efforts to strengthen indigenous led cultural enterprises.

Canada has made commitments toward advancing reconciliation and supporting indigenous development. Many Canadians view indigenous tourism as a practical and effective way to advance those goals. For that reason, I respectfully urge you to reconsider this funding decision or explore alternative measures that would allow indigenous tourism operators and organizations to continue developing and expanding their offerings.

I would appreciate greater clarity regarding the rationale behind this decision. To build the narrative that our industry is best managed by a non-indigenous organization such as Destination Canada is putting us back into the dark ages, and it feels like that is the direction this government is heading towards. ITAC has worked hard to gain global recognition and the world is watching us and decisions being made by your government that ultimately do affect our industry. I believe that continued Dialogue and collaboration with indigenous operators and industry leaders are essential to ensuring that this important sector survives.

I sign off respectfully but with great disappointment in how this has been handled

Tim Mearns/Owner operator of Painted Warriors

Honourable Rechie Valdez,

I am writing this letter in support of ITAC as they have been instrumental in the growth and prosperity of our First Nation communities and businesses in Northwest Territories (NWT).

I have personally attended several of their presentations and conferences and their team has been in NWT over the years to help us better understand the tourism opportunities to attracting non resident visitors both domestically and internationally.

I am the owner/operator of the River's East Arm Tours, a proud member of ITAC, offering cultural tours in our Dene Nation I the NWT. ITAC has believed in my business and supported financially from time to time. These funds enhanced & improved my business; their programs guided my development and increased marketing in ways I simply do not have the capacity to do on my own.

The tourism industry in Canada has been strengthened by ITAC as their agenda is inclusive and their work ethic fair and respectful to all its members. I see the inclusion and recognition of Indigenous tourism much greater that we felt years ago

I fear if we do not have ITAC to lead us, Indigenous tourism will become invisible once again. I have witnessed their work for years, seen their team in NWT, and have felt the success directly in our meetings.

I urge the Government of Canada to invest in Indigenous tourism through ITAC. I cannot understand why Canada would not invest to ensure proper capacity and support to begin with.

Thank you

James Marlowe  
Owner Operator  
River's East Arm Tours

The Honourable Rechie Valdez  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

June 2, 2026

**RE: Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) Funding & Future**

Dear Minister Valdez,

On behalf of the **North Thompson Aboriginal Cultural Centre Society** in Clearwater, British Columbia, we are writing to express our deep concern regarding the current funding crisis facing the **Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC)** and the significant impact this will have on Indigenous communities, organizations, and tourism operators across Canada.

The loss of federal operational support for ITAC is a serious setback not only for Indigenous tourism, but also for rural and remote communities that rely on tourism as a key driver of economic development. Indigenous tourism has become an important contributor to local economies, creating employment opportunities, supporting Indigenous entrepreneurs, preserving cultural knowledge, and providing authentic cultural experiences for visitors from around the world.

Tourism remains one of Canada's strongest economic sectors, and Indigenous tourism has been one of its fastest-growing segments. At a time when governments are seeking opportunities to strengthen local economies and support reconciliation through economic participation, the withdrawal of operational funding from ITAC sends a concerning message to Indigenous tourism operators, communities, investors, and industry partners.

Organizations such as ITAC provide essential leadership, training, marketing support, business development resources, and national representation that many small Indigenous organizations and businesses cannot access on their own. The loss of this support infrastructure will disproportionately affect rural and remote Indigenous communities that already face significant economic and geographic challenges.

Here in the North Thompson Valley, we have seen firsthand how Indigenous tourism contributes to economic growth, cultural revitalization, education, and community pride. Through cultural programming, community events, traditional knowledge sharing, and visitor engagement, Indigenous tourism creates meaningful opportunities that benefit Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities alike.

The North Thompson Aboriginal Cultural Centre Society respectfully urges the Government of Canada to restore meaningful operational funding for ITAC and to recognize Indigenous tourism as an essential and ongoing contributor to Canada's economic future, reconciliation efforts, and cultural heritage.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Yours in Community Spirit

Cindy Wilgosh

Executive Director/Chair  
**North Thompson Aboriginal Cultural Centre Society**  
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To the Honorable Reichi Valdez, federal secretary of state for tourism and small business

I am writing this letter in response to the decision to cut all funding for Indigenous Tourism and economic development.

I would like to stress the adverse impact this has on not only our industry, but the organization that gave us a voice, ITAC. We have been a tight community of tour operators for many years now and question the lack of financial support offered to this vital sector, especially given that Financial benefits trickle down to all areas of our economy and create employment for other indigenous and non indigenous citizens.

Our industry is a major economic driver contributing 3.7 billion to the economy and creating over 30,000 jobs across the nation. Indigenous tourism in Canada is a leader in the global market with unique cultural experiences that are sought after by 1 in 3 visitors. The Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada created this momentum and has been a powerful voice for us operators, to not continue to fund this organization is to take away our voice.

To cripple our industry makes no sense to the indigenous operators given that it is a sustainable and viable industry, especially since federal support of indigenous tourism was listed as a priority. Before ITAC, Indigenous tour operators faced many barriers and challenges, without ITAC, you leave our sector vulnerable and unprotected.

I strongly urge you to reconsider your priorities for funding and recognize that indigenous tourism is an industry worth saving

With Respect  
Tracey Klett

June 05, 2026

The Honourable Rechie Valdez, Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism)  
House of Commons, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6  
[rechie.valdez@parl.gc.ca](mailto:rechie.valdez@parl.gc.ca)

Dear Honourable Minister,

I commend the Government of Canada for its continued efforts to build a stronger and more prosperous country through investments in infrastructure, economic development, and Indigenous equity and participation. Support for Indigenous tourism is an important part of this work; advancing reconciliation while enabling Indigenous entrepreneurs to start, grow, and sustain tourism businesses across Canada.

I am writing on behalf of iTOTEM to encourage the Department to continue its support of the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC).

iTOTEM is a Canadian data science and investment intelligence company that helps organizations measure, verify, and communicate the local economic and social impacts of investments. We transform complex information into clear, evidence-based reporting that supports decision-making and demonstrates outcomes for governments, communities, industries, and associations.

Over the years, iTOTEM has supported ITAC's funding and reporting initiatives through data collection, grant administration support, and impact measurement. Through this work, we've seen firsthand the scope and value of ITAC's role in strengthening the Indigenous tourism sector nationally.

ITAC works simultaneously with operators, regional partners, and governments to ensure programs are practical, coordinated, and effective. Through its governance structure and teams, ITAC delivers direct support to Indigenous tourism operators while coordinating across jurisdictions with provincial and territorial tourism organizations and other partners. ITAC consistently gathers input from operators, industry partners, and regional organizations to shape programs, market development initiatives, and sector priorities—ensuring national efforts are based in the realities, needs, and aspirations of Indigenous tourism businesses across the country.

Equally important is ITAC's practical, day-to-day support for operators, particularly small businesses with limited capacity as they focus on serving guests and growing their operations. ITAC helps remove barriers that can prevent businesses from accessing programs, funding, and

markets. From helping businesses identify funding opportunities and complete applications, to supporting certification and export readiness, to navigating reporting requirements and compliance obligations, ITAC provides the guidance and support needed for operators to participate and succeed.

This hands-on support is not always visible, but it helps ensure that more Indigenous tourism businesses can access opportunities and meet program requirements.

ITAC serves as a trusted bridge between government, provincial and territorial tourism organizations, industry partners, and Indigenous businesses. We respectfully encourage the Department to continue its support for ITAC so this important work can continue. Predictable, sustained funding will help maintain momentum, strengthen coordination, and deliver measurable outcomes for Indigenous tourism operators and their communities.

Sincerely,

*Colleen Sweet*

President and CEO  
iTOTEM