



May 27, 2026

The Honourable Rechie Valdez
Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism)
Government of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
Email: rechie.valdez@parl.gc.ca

Dear Minister Valdez,

On behalf of the Yukon First Nations Culture and Tourism Association (YFNCT), we are writing to express our strong support for continued and sustained federal investment in Indigenous tourism and the broader network of provincial and territorial Indigenous tourism organizations across the country.

The growth trend of Indigenous tourism in Canada is one of the fastest-growing tourism sectors in Canada. Since 2021, there has been between 40% and 45% in the number of Indigenous businesses in the tourism sector, which relates to 34,700 direct jobs, and an economic contribution to Canada's GDP of \$1.6 billion.

Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) provides its members with the tools and resources that results in Indigenous businesses starting, growing, and competing globally while maintaining cultural authenticity.

In the Yukon, Indigenous tourism creates meaningful opportunities for travellers to connect with the land, stories, traditions, and living cultures of Yukon First Nations while supporting Indigenous entrepreneurs, cultural revitalization, and community economic development. Organizations like YFNCT play an essential role in supporting Indigenous tourism operators through marketing, training, partnership development, and industry advocacy.

Without dedicated federal investment and strong national leadership through organizations like ITAC, Indigenous tourism risks being overlooked within the broader tourism industry. The momentum of product development will be stifled, creating a lasting negative impact on the tourism industry and visitor experiences. Indigenous-led experiences require culturally informed support and visibility to ensure they are not overshadowed by larger sectors that already receive significant exposure and resources.

Continued investment in Indigenous tourism is an investment in reconciliation, economic resilience, and the preservation and sharing of Indigenous cultures. Sustained support for ITAC and regional Indigenous tourism organizations is essential to ensuring Indigenous voices remain at the forefront of how these experiences are developed and shared across Canada.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'ABA', followed by a period.

Amber Berard-Althouse
Board President
On behalf of the Board of Directors
Yukon First Nations Culture and Tourism Association



May 29th, 2026

The Honourable Rechie Valdez
Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism)
Government of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6

Via email: rechie.valdez@parl.gc.ca

Dear Minister,

Subject: Funding for Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada

On behalf of WestJet, Canada's second largest airline and a longstanding supporter of the national tourism industry, we write to express our concern regarding the elimination of federal funding for the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC).

Indigenous tourism has become one of the fastest-growing and most distinctive segments of Canada's visitor economy. It offers authentic cultural experiences that resonate strongly with both domestic and international travelers who seek meaningful connections to place, people, and heritage. WestJet is proud to play a vital role in this ecosystem by delivering reliable air connectivity to Indigenous tourism destinations across the country, as our network enables travelers to reach remote and culturally rich communities that contribute significantly to local economies, job creation, reconciliation, and sustainable development.

ITAC is fundamental to nurturing this sector, providing national coordination, marketing support, and business development resources that many Indigenous tourism operators would otherwise be unable to access. However, recent funding cuts to ITAC threaten to jeopardize progress that has been made in advancing Indigenous-led travel experiences, particularly during this challenging time for the tourism industry due to higher fuel prices and continued economic uncertainty due to the ongoing conflict in the Middle-East.

WestJet remains firmly committed to Indigenous tourism and to the partnerships that make these experiences possible, and we believe that continued federal investment in ITAC represents a high-impact strategy that advances economic growth, reconciliation, and the long-term strength of Canada's visitor economy. We therefore respectfully urge the Government of Canada to restore stable, multi-year funding to ITAC so that Indigenous tourism can continue to thrive and contribute to a more inclusive and resilient tourism sector for all Canadians.



We welcome the opportunity to discuss this further and stand ready to support any efforts to strengthen Canada's Indigenous tourism economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "McGillivray". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping initial "J" or "M" on the left.

Jacqui McGillivray
Executive Vice-President - Chief People Officer
WestJet



May 25, 2026

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

RE: ITAC Funding & Future

To Minister Valdez,

On behalf of Cariboo Chilcotin Coast Tourism, I am writing to express our concern regarding the current crisis facing the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) and rural Indigenous communities.

The loss of federal operational support for ITAC is a serious blow not only to Indigenous tourism, but to small businesses and rural economies across Canada that rely on a healthy and growing visitor economy. Tourism continues to be one of the country's strongest economic drivers, supporting employment, entrepreneurship, export revenue, community development, and regional economic diversification in every province and territory. Indigenous tourism has grown to become an essential part of that success story.

At a time when the federal government could be relying on tourism growth to support broader economic objectives, the complete withdrawal of operational funding from ITAC sends the wrong message to operators, investors, communities, and tourism partners nationwide.

Organizations like ITAC provide critical leadership, coordination, training, and market development that individual small businesses cannot carry on their own. The impacts of losing that infrastructure will be felt most heavily by entrepreneurs and communities already working within challenging economic conditions.

In the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast region, we have seen firsthand how Indigenous tourism strengthens local economies, supports cultural revitalization, and creates meaningful visitor experiences that benefit entire communities, the region and the nation.

We respectfully urge the Government of Canada to restore meaningful support for ITAC and recognize Indigenous tourism as an ongoing and vital component of Canada's economic future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amy Thacker".

Amy Thacker
Chief Executive Officer



ADVENTURE TRAVEL TRADE ASSOCIATION®

May 28, 2026

To: The Honourable Rechie Valdez
Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism)
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Dear Secretary of State Valdez,

On behalf of the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA), I am writing to advocate for the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) and to urgently champion the restoration of meaningful federal investment in this foundational partner of our global travel community. We have worked with ITAC through our Beyond Borders Tourism Coalition and many other initiatives over the past 15+ years.

As a network dedicated to the transformative power of travel, ATTA and our members recognize that the most profound journeys are rooted in authentic, sustainable, and culturally immersive experiences. Indigenous tourism in Canada represents the core of adventure, offering travelers a true path to cultural exchange, economic empowerment, and reconciliation through the shared discovery of heritage and land.

ITAC has been a lead explorer in strengthening Indigenous tourism, carving out pathways for operators to build resilient businesses and reach the global stage. Their work ensures that Indigenous voices guide the narrative of the Canadian indigenous travel community, preserving cultural heritage while competing in a high-impact, competitive global economy.

We are deeply concerned and saddened to learn that ITAC was forced to lay off its team due to the elimination of federal funding for fiscal year 2026. Excluding ITAC from the federal tourism strategy as a priority partner risks stalling years of momentum and undermining the vital partnerships that fuel the Indigenous tourism sector. As a global leader in adventure travel for the last 30 years, ATTA understands that sustained investment in organizations that foster deep cultural connections and support local communities is essential.

Thank you for considering this important issue and for your continued support of the tourism industry and Indigenous communities across Canada. If you or your team have questions or would like to chat, my contact information is: shannon@adventuretravel.biz 1-719-221-9970

Sincerely,

Shannon Stowell- CEO, Adventure Travel Trade Association www.adventuretravel.biz



Whitecap Dakota Nation

182 Chief Whitecap Trail, Whitecap SK S7T 1G1
Phone (306) 477-0908 • Fax (306) 374-5899
Website: www.whitecapdakota.com

May 15, 2026

Via Email: rechie.valdez@parl.gc.ca

The Honourable Rechie Valdez
Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism)
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Valdez,

Re: Urgent Federal Action Required to Support Indigenous Tourism and ITAC

On behalf of Whitecap Dakota Nation, I am writing to express our strong and urgent support for the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) and to call for the immediate reinstatement of core federal funding for Indigenous tourism.

Indigenous tourism is not a niche sector, it is central to economic reconciliation and to Canada's commitment to telling a complete and inclusive story. At Whitecap Dakota Nation, located minutes from Saskatoon, we have strategically positioned ourselves as a destination hub that welcomes visitors from across Canada and internationally. Through investments in Dakota Dunes Resort, hospitality services, and cultural tourism experiences, we are creating sustainable employment opportunities for our members while sharing Dakota language, history, and culture in an authentic and respectful way.

We are also actively advancing future tourism developments, including enhanced cultural programming and new visitor experiences that will further strengthen our role in Saskatchewan's tourism economy. These investments rely on a stable and coordinated national Indigenous tourism strategy, one that ITAC has led with proven success.

The complete elimination of ITAC's core federal funding places all this progress at risk. Without immediate federal action, Indigenous tourism operators across the country, including those in rural and remote communities, will face uncertainty, stalled growth, and, in some cases, closure. This is not only an economic setback, it is a direct contradiction to Canada's commitments to reconciliation, Indigenous entrepreneurship, and inclusive economic development.

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Whitecap Dakota Nation

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Minister Valdez

Page 2

May 15, 2026

ITAC has demonstrated national leadership by building capacity, connecting partners, and elevating Indigenous tourism on the global stage. The absence of stable funding undermines years of progress and weakens Canada's competitive position in a growing international market.

We believe this moment requires decisive leadership. Whitecap Dakota Nation stands alongside Indigenous tourism operators, partners, and communities across Canada in calling for:

- Immediate reinstatement of ITAC's core federal funding
- Long-term, sustainable investment in Indigenous tourism development
- Formal recognition of Indigenous tourism as a priority sector within Canada's tourism strategy

The current situation requires urgent attention. Continued inaction risks undoing years of collaborative work and limits the economic potential of Indigenous communities that are ready and willing to lead.

We respectfully urge your office to act without delay to ensure the stability, growth, and long-term success of Indigenous tourism in Canada.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We would welcome the opportunity to engage further.

Sincerely,

Chief Darcy Bear
Whitecap Dakota Nation



The Honourable Rechie Valdez
Secretary of State for Small Business and Tourism
Government of Canada

Dear Minister Valdez,

Re: Indigenous Tourism in Canada Must Be Protected, Prioritized, and Properly Supported

We write to you today as partners in Kitchiota Indigenous Destinations — “Travel the Path of our People” — a first-of-its-kind in Canada Indigenous Tourism Corridor experience comprised of Pêmisica Tourism, Dakota Dunes Resort, and Wanuskewin Heritage Park in Saskatchewan.

Together, our organizations represent a powerful Indigenous-led tourism collaboration rooted in culture, language, history, land, and reconciliation. Through Kitchiota, visitors are invited to experience the stories of our Nations across multiple territories and cultures — Cree, Dakota, and Plains Indigenous Peoples — through immersive, authentic experiences that cannot be replicated anywhere else in the world.

We are concerned about the significant financial challenges currently facing the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC), and we believe this presents an important opportunity for the Government of Canada to reaffirm the vital national role ITAC plays in strengthening and supporting Indigenous tourism operators and communities across Canada.

Without ITAC, many Indigenous tourism experiences simply would not exist.

Small and emerging Indigenous tourism operators do not have the luxury of large marketing budgets, national industry connections, export development expertise, or access to international travel trade networks. We rely on ITAC’s advocacy, mentorship, training, certification pathways, market readiness development, partnership facilitation, and global marketing reach to compete in a tourism industry that has historically excluded Indigenous Peoples from meaningful participation.

ITAC has helped Indigenous tourism become one of the most powerful economic reconciliation success stories in Canada.

At Pêmisica Tourism, ITAC helped support our journey from a concept into an award-winning, export-ready Indigenous tourism destination attracting national, and international media attention and international interest. Through Kitchiota Indigenous Destinations, we are now building a transformational, multi-day Indigenous tourism experience that connects visitors to the living cultures, histories, and lands of our Nations in meaningful and unforgettable ways.

Dakota Dunes Resort represents a powerful example of Indigenous economic success and self-determination in action. As a premier Indigenous-owned resort destination on Whitecap Dakota First Nation, Dakota Dunes has demonstrated how Indigenous tourism can compete at the highest levels of the hospitality industry while remaining deeply connected to culture, language, community, and Dakota identity. The resort welcomes visitors from across Canada and internationally, creating meaningful economic opportunities for Indigenous Peoples while showcasing Indigenous excellence in tourism, hospitality, and destination development.

Wanuskewin Heritage Park stands as one of the most significant Indigenous cultural and archaeological destinations in North America. For thousands of years, the lands at Wanuskewin have served as a gathering place for the Peoples of the Northern Plains, and today the park continues to educate, inspire, and reconnect visitors with the histories, cultures, and living traditions of Indigenous Peoples. Through its national and international reputation, educational programming, cultural revitalization efforts, and global recognition efforts including its pursuit of UNESCO World Heritage designation, Wanuskewin demonstrates the profound cultural, educational, and reconciliation value Indigenous tourism brings to Canada and the world.

This work matters.

It matters economically — creating jobs, supporting entrepreneurs, generating own-source revenue, and driving rural and Indigenous economic development.

It matters culturally — revitalizing language, storytelling, ceremony, traditional knowledge, and intergenerational learning.

And it matters nationally — because Indigenous tourism is *reconciliation in action*.

Canada promotes Indigenous tourism internationally as part of its national identity and visitor experience. Yet the very organization responsible for building and sustaining that success is now facing uncertainty and instability. That contradiction is difficult to understand and deeply concerning to Indigenous tourism operators across this country.

Kitchiota Indigenous Destinations represents what the future of tourism in Canada can look like:

- Indigenous-led
- Collaborative
- Sustainable
- Culturally grounded
- Economically transformative
- Internationally marketable

But these successes do not happen in isolation. They happen because organizations like ITAC exist to support, mentor, advocate for, and elevate Indigenous tourism businesses large and small.

We respectfully call on the Government of Canada to:

- Provide stable, long-term operational funding for ITAC;
- Recognize ITAC as a permanent national partner in Canada's tourism economy;
- Invest meaningfully in Indigenous tourism growth and export development;
- Ensure Indigenous tourism operators continue to have access to national support systems, training, and market opportunities; and
- Treat Indigenous tourism not as a seasonal initiative, but as a vital component of Canada's economic and reconciliation framework.

The success of Indigenous tourism in Canada is not accidental. It is the result of years of relationship-building, community investment, cultural revitalization, and tireless advocacy led by Indigenous tourism operators and ITAC alike.

Now is not the time to weaken that work. Now is the time to strengthen it.

Respectfully, for Kitchiota Indigenous Destinations



Joy Caron
Resort Director



Andrew McDonald
Co-Executive Director



Kevin Seesequasis
Director Tourism Development



Honourable Rechie Valdez,

I am writing this letter in support of ITAC as they have been instrumental in the growth and prosperity of our business located in Robinson's, Newfoundland. Our business is a medium sized Adventure Tourism operation attracting non resident clientele both domestically and internationally. My name is Ruth and with my partner Paul we have been pioneering the ATV Tourism Industry for the past 20 years. Our vision 20 years ago of developing a unique ATV Touring Product was not supported by Government as it was a New product and they could not see the possible benefits of this product. But hard work, commitment, resilience and many sleepless nights and long days we succeeded and now ATV Tourism is one of the top 3 sought after Tourism products on the west coast of the island.

During the early years of our dream, ITAC believed in us and supported us financially and these funds enhanced & improved our products, which in turn, created more employment opportunities for community members and allowed partnerships with other businesses, ensuring sustainable and building strong, healthy communities. ITAC's support to 100's of businesses has been the backbone to their growth and prosperity. The financial support, mentoring practices, skills development and the advertising capabilities of ITAC have ensured business success. 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. ITAC created a comradery among its members, a pride where we felt unified and strong, creating healthy & safe Communities. Businesses supporting each other, strong partnerships, collaboration and a common goal to Grow Indigenous Tourism for all the World to experience. If we are to keep this momentum we need ITAC to lead us as they are genuinely the force behind so many of our successes. Indigenous Tourism is about sharing our story, staying authentic and creating an experience to our guests that resonates with them long after they leave us.

I fear if we do not have ITAC to lead us, Indigenous Tourism will deflate and we will experience division and failure quickly and communities and people will suffer.

Respectfully, Paul & Ruth Gale

Dear Right Honourable Prime Minister and Ministers of the Government of Canada,

The RT. Hon. Mark Carney,
Hon. Melanie Joly,
Hon. Rechie Valdez,
Hon. François-Philippe Champagne,
Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty,
Ho. Marc Miller.

On behalf of the Canadian Association of Tour Operators (CATO), I am writing to express our strong support for the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) and to underscore the importance of sustained and stable funding for the organization and its initiatives.

Over the years, ITAC has played a critical role in advancing Indigenous tourism across Canada, fostering meaningful economic opportunities for Indigenous communities while enriching the Canadian tourism experience through authentic cultural engagement and reconciliation in action.

Many of our CATO member tour operators have worked closely with ITAC for several years to help develop and promote tourism experiences and tour packages in partnership with Indigenous communities across the country and abroad. These collaborations have not only created unique and high-quality travel products for domestic and international visitors but have also contributed directly to local employment, entrepreneurship, cultural preservation, and regional economic development.

The progress achieved in Indigenous tourism over the past decade has required significant trust-building, partnership development, training, product development, and international market positioning. Interruptions or uncertainty in funding risk undermine these important gains at a time when Indigenous tourism continues to demonstrate strong growth potential and growing demand from travellers seeking authentic and responsible travel experiences.

As Canada positions itself as a world leader in sustainable and inclusive tourism, ITAC is a key national partner in achieving these goals. Continued federal support for ITAC is therefore not only an investment in tourism, but also in economic reconciliation, cultural preservation, and community development.

We respectfully ask your office and the Government of Canada to work toward a sustainable solution that will allow ITAC to continue its important mandate and maintain momentum for Indigenous tourism development across the country.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We'd welcome the opportunity to discuss further the positive impact ITAC has had on the Canadian tour operating sector and on tourism partnerships with Indigenous communities.

Sincerely,

Jean Hébert, Executive Director

613-884-5147



Hello Honourable Rechie Valdez,

My name is Wyatt Gilmore, founder and CEO of Laguna Creek, a 100% Native-owned software as a service (SaaS) company dedicated to boosting the Indigenous tourism economy. While based in the United States, we work with multiple Canadian tour operators as clients, and we understand firsthand how difficult it is for Indigenous tour owners to find the time and resources to advertise and reach new customers.

The Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada has been indispensable in that regard through helping Indigenous tourism businesses not only survive during difficult economic times, but grow. ITAC has also served as a critical source of education on the cultures, traditions, and heritage of First Nations. Above all, it has been the only organization fully dedicated to promoting Indigenous tourism across every province and territory in Canada — which I believe represents the greatest opportunity for economic prosperity among Indigenous peoples across the Americas.

I know this firsthand. I never would have traveled to Canada had it not been for ITAC's invitation to attend their annual conference. I went with a business partner in 2024, and because we enjoyed it so much, I sponsored the event and brought a group of staff with me this year.

Losing ITAC would be devastating to Indigenous tours and hotels across Canada — especially now, as international tourism has slowed considerably. They are a strong foundation for generating new business in tourism both domestically and internationally, and there is no comparable organization positioned to fill that role.

I respectfully ask for your support in restoring funding for this essential organization.

Thank you sincerely for your time and consideration.



Wyatt Gilmore

CEO

Laguna Creek