

July 14th 2026

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

Dear Minister Valdez,

We write as the Board of Directors of Indigenous Tourism Alberta to request immediate action regarding the Government's approach to Indigenous tourism and Indigenous tourism organizations. We write in strong support of the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC), the national body that Indigenous tourism operators and the Indigenous Provincial and Territorial Tourism organizations depend on to sustain markets, coordination, training, promotion, and credibility in Canada's tourism economy.

At Rendezvous Canada, you addressed an international group of tourism buyers—approximately 1,500 international buyers—and communicated that tourism is important to Canada and that the Government supports the sector. However, the subsequent reality is that Government funding has been cut, including most significantly to Indigenous tourism. Your remarks gave the impression of meaningful support and continuity for tourism in Canada, while Indigenous tourism organizations are being forced to absorb the consequences of major funding reductions. That is unacceptable.

Minister Valdez, the harm is not theoretical. Indigenous tourism is estimated to generate approximately \$2.1 billion in economic activity. This sector supports Indigenous workers, entrepreneurs, communities, and families. When national support is weakened or removed, the devastation reaches well beyond a single organization—it reaches the entire Indigenous tourism ecosystem.

Without ITAC, Indigenous Provincial and Territorial Tourism organizations and Indigenous operators will be forced to fail

ITAC plays a national coordinating role that cannot be simply replaced by non-indigenous lead organizations like Destination Canada. Without ITAC support, Indigenous Provincial and Territorial Tourism organizations and Indigenous tourism operators face reduced capacity to:

- access national and international markets;
- participate in coordinated promotion and buyer-facing opportunities;
- receive support for readiness, marketing, and partnerships;
- remain competitive against better-resourced tourism businesses.
- participate in authenticating their experiences through the important Original Original Accreditation

This impact is particularly alarming to Indigenous Provincial and Territorial Tourism organizations, which rely on ITAC to function as a connected national network. If ITAC is not funded, those Provincial and Territorial organizations will be unable to sustain programming, staffing, and coordination—resulting in a broader collapse of Indigenous tourism capacity across regions. In other words, the harm will be national in scope, not limited to Ottawa or to any single program.

This is a Truth and Reconciliation obligation, not optional “priority” language.

This issue is also grounded in Truth and Reconciliation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action #92 calls on Canada to ensure Indigenous peoples’ histories, perspectives, and lived experiences are properly represented and advanced. Tourism is one of the most visible ways visitors engage with Canada’s story. Failure to properly support Indigenous tourism undermines reconciliation in practice and delays meaningful progress.

Indigenous Tourism Alberta is well supported by the Provincial Government under the leadership of Premier Danielle Smith, whom has shown true support of Indigenous Tourism and has been instrumental in ensuring Indigenous Tourism in this province has been given high priority by being a part of the Higher Ground strategy. This has been demonstrated not only by the financial contributions but her direct action in creating an Indigenous Pillar within the tourism strategy. However it is not the same across the rest of the country, and our federal government, while enjoying the image of being supportive of Indigenous initiatives, fall short of the support required. We are thankful to have such strong support in this province, but the Federal support needs to be reinstated! It is important to know the world is watching, as

evidenced by the letters you have received from the global community of tourism operators and organizations who have written their letters of support for ITAC

What we are demanding

Minister Valdez, we are issuing this correspondence as a formal demand for clarity and corrective action. Specifically, we request that you:

1. Publicly clarify what tourism support was miscommunicated to international buyers at Rendezvous Canada, and how that message aligns with the funding outcomes affecting Indigenous tourism.
2. Restore and protect funding for the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) so Indigenous operators—and the Indigenous Provincial and Territorial tourism organizations that depend on ITAC—are not pushed into service cuts, layoffs, cancelled initiatives, or closure.
3. Provide a clear plan and timeline for how the Government will support Indigenous tourism in alignment with Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action #92.

We expect a response from your office within 14 days, and we request a meeting at your earliest availability to discuss immediate next steps.

Sincerely,

Brenda Holder, John Ritchie, Jeanette Many Guns and Keith Diakiw
Board of Directors
Indigenous Tourism Alberta

June 26, 2026

The Honorable Rechie Valdez
Minister of Women and Gender Equality
Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism)
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Valdez,

On behalf of Travel Manitoba, I am writing to emphasize the need for continued federal investment in Indigenous tourism to foster destination development, create economic opportunities for Indigenous communities across Canada and support Indigenous tourism entrepreneurs. Ongoing support is essential to the growth, resilience and long-term sustainability of the Indigenous tourism sector.

Indigenous tourism has become a critical area of Manitoba's visitor economy, with the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) playing a foundational role in that development and the creation of Indigenous Tourism Manitoba (ITM). In 2017, Travel Manitoba and ITAC entered a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to advance Indigenous tourism development in the province. That agreement set in motion a series of transformative outcomes, including the creation of Manitoba's first Indigenous Tourism Strategy in 2019.

Building on this momentum, the MOU was renewed and expanded in 2021 to support the establishment of ITM. Today, with the support of the Manitoba government, Travel Manitoba invests directly in Indigenous Tourism Manitoba reflecting a shared recognition that Indigenous tourism is a key economic driver for the province and an essential part of Manitoba's tourism identity.

The results of this collaboration have been significant. In 2019, there were 81 Indigenous-owned tourism businesses in Manitoba; by 2023, that number had grown to approximately 170. This growth reflects not only increased economic opportunity, but also the strength of Indigenous entrepreneurship and cultural leadership in the tourism sector.

Beyond its economic impact, Indigenous tourism plays a vital role in shaping how visitors understand Manitoba and Canada. It creates opportunities to share Indigenous cultures, languages and traditions in authentic and meaningful ways while also contributing to cultural preservation and revitalization. Importantly, it supports improved socio-economic outcomes for Indigenous communities and represents a meaningful and practical pathway toward economic reconciliation.

Within this ecosystem, ITAC's *The Original Original* accreditation program is critical. The accreditation provides an essential framework for supporting Indigenous-owned and Indigenous-led tourism experiences while ensuring businesses and experiences are authentic, credible and culturally grounded. The loss of this foundational program would be a detriment to the entire sector.

Reductions in federal funding for Indigenous tourism are disrupting progress and limiting growth opportunities across the sector. In Manitoba, the loss of ITAC funding has resulted in ITM having to reduce staffing capacity, with Indigenous women bearing the direct impact of these workforce reductions. Planned expansion of operating hours at the Explore Indigenous visitor information centre has been cancelled and the second phase of ITM's Indigenous guide training program, which is building sector capacity and creating meaningful employment pathways for Indigenous people, has been put on hold. Budget reductions have also affected business development supports, marketing initiatives, travel and sponsorship activities.

The withdrawal of federal support is undermining the growth of Manitoba's Indigenous tourism sector by reducing access to business supports, workforce development opportunities and market readiness initiatives, ultimately limiting economic opportunities for Indigenous entrepreneurs, workers and communities across the province at a time when demand for Indigenous tourism continues to grow.

While significant progress has been made in recent years, those gains remain vulnerable without sustained investment. Continued federal partnership and support are essential to maintain momentum and ensure Indigenous tourism can continue to grow, create jobs and contribute to economic growth.

Sincerely,



Angela Cassie
Interim President and Chief Executive Officer

c. The Honourable Rebecca Chartrand, Minister responsible for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency

The Honourable Mandy Gull-Masty, Minister of Indigenous Services

Ginette Lavack, Member of Parliament, St. Boniface – St. Vital, member, Parliamentary Tourism Caucus

Honourable Nellie Kennedy, Minister of Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism

Keith Henry, President and CEO Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada

Holly Spence, CEO Indigenous Tourism Manitoba

Dear Honourable Minister Valdez,

As a Metis entrepreneur who has collaborated with tourism operators and leaders across the country for over 20 years, I urge you and the Government of Canada to fund ITAC (Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada)

I have been involved since the beginning of the CTC and Destination Canada and have seen the collaboration between Canada's crown corporation and ITAC since its inception.

Please provide ITAC with the annual operating capital, either directly or via funding provided to Marsha and the team at DC.

ITAC built most of the provincial Indigenous associations from inception to their current operational status. Allow ITAC to continue its economic development work in collaboration with our national agencies.

While I am building Explore Canada, our nation's first travel brand for my 20+ year Rendezvous Canada buyers, I am hoping that ITAC will be there to assist me as we seek Indigenous product and experiences to showcase to the world. Once the program launches in 2027, we will market it to Canadians for domestic travel as well.

Rechie, as an owner of several tourism businesses built from hard work and vision, I hope we can provide ITAC with annual funding for Indigenous Tourism as we build this important sector of our industry.

Most Sincerely,

Randy Vannatter
Owner/Operator

Randy Vannatter
Managing Partner
Visitors' Choice Magazine - visitorschoice.com
Explore Canada - explorecanada.travel
City Passports - www.citypassports.com
Tel 604-694-2489 | randy@visitorschoice.com

The Right Honourable Rechie Valdez
Minister for Women and Gender Equality
and Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism)
House of Commons
Ottawa, ONt., K1A 0A6
June 23, 2026

Dear Minister Valdez,

Over the past 13 years our firm has worked on 70 tourism projects with over 40 Indigenous groups, in Canada, from coast to coast to coast. During that time we have engaged ITAC to supply a number of important services for our clients as they developed a tourism enterprise. In particular, the Original Original program, ensuring experience authenticity, and cooperative marketing opportunities including representation at Rendezvous Canada have been extremely useful services provided by ITAC.

Tourism has unlocked significant benefits to all the communities we have worked for including own source revenue, the development of local entrepreneurs, revitalization of culture and real progress towards reconciliation. It is our belief, that in order for Canada's Indigenous tourism industry to realize its potential and contribute significantly to Canada's GDP, that ITAC is mission critical to this end. As such, we would urge the Government of Canada to reconsider its financial support for ITAC.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue.

Respectfully,



Rod Taylor, CEO,
Legacy Tourism Group

Dear Minister Valdez,

My name is Sarah, Director of Product at Excursionist, a luxury Destination Management Company. We curate custom, multi-destination itineraries for ultra-high-net-worth clients traveling to Canada and the USA.

Aside from Canada's stunning natural beauty and vibrant cultural offering, what attracts our travelers most to Canada is its heritage and sense of self. These are visitors who have traveled extensively and experience their bucket lists many times over; what impacts them the most are consistently the human connections that they form during their travels.

ITAC and its members have been the integral link between our travelers and the communities that call Canada home. The work they do is integral to elevating the voices of communities who have long been marginalized and forgotten. By empowering these operators to share their perspectives, ITAC is not only educating travelers on the mere existence of these populations. They are reaffirming time and time again that indigenous history is Canadian history, indigenous culture is Canadian culture, and the Canadian story cannot be told without its indigenous communities.

We are disheartened to learn of the budget cuts to ITAC and respectfully ask that its budget be reinstated so that ITAC can continue its mission successfully.

With respect,

Sarah Paster

Director of Product and Client Experience

[American Excursionist](#) | [Canadian Excursionist](#) | [Hawaiian Excursionist](#)

Official DMC / Onsite for American Express, Virtuoso, Serandipians, Ensemble and Internova

Email: sarah@excursionist.com

Office: [+1 646.429.0899](tel:+16464290899) | Mobile: [+1 786.815.3092](tel:+17868153092) | Website: www.excursionist.com

NEW! USA HQ Office: 5582 NE 4th Court, Suite 10, Miami FL, 33137

Canadian Office: 4262 Rue Sainte-Catherine Est, Bureau 200, Montréal (Québec) H1V 1X6

Hawai'i Office: 444 Hobron Ln, Penthouse 1, Honolulu, HI 96815



**UNIQUE
ADVENTURES
EXCURSIONS
BY DOGSLED**

6-24-26

Dear Honorable Rechie Valdez

I am writing to express my concern regarding the lack of funding support being directed toward the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada and the impacts this has on Indigenous tourism operators like myself.

I own and operate Unique Adventures, a small Indigenous tourism business that provides dog sled excursions and experiences rooted in culture, connection to the land, and education. My business is more than simply offering an activity to visitors; it is an opportunity to share Indigenous culture, create meaningful experiences, and contribute to local economic growth while supporting reconciliation through tourism.

For small businesses like mine, organizations such as the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada provide critical support through advocacy, marketing, training opportunities, industry development, networking, and resources that many small operators cannot access on their own. When funding is reduced or eliminated, the effects reach far beyond one organization — it directly affects entrepreneurs and families working hard to build sustainable businesses.

Running a small tourism business already comes with significant challenges and rising costs. In my case, operating dog sled excursions includes animal care, equipment, insurance, transportation, maintenance, staffing, marketing, and ensuring guests have meaningful and safe experiences. Like many Indigenous entrepreneurs, I continue to

invest in growing and improving my business while trying to create opportunities not only for myself, but for my community and future generations.

Without proper investment in Indigenous tourism support systems, many small operators may struggle to grow, innovate, or even sustain their businesses. This not only impacts individual entrepreneurs, but risks slowing the momentum that Indigenous tourism has built across Canada.

On a strictly personal note, my business is very new. I have been spending, investing and pushing to reach the criteria for the “Original Original” accreditation. Spending countless hours, and funds to build for my future as well as the tourism industry in St.Malo Mb where I grew up. I am still so very new. I need the support. I want nothing more than to learn and grow in my culture through tourism. The few events I have attended in relation have helped me gain knowledge, confidence, and friends that are dealing or have dealt with similar issues as myself. This is invaluable to me. I need tourism family.. I need these “funded” events. I need the contacts.

I appreciate your time and consideration and hope that Indigenous tourism organizations and operators will continue to receive the support needed to grow and succeed.

Sincerely,

Shanna Bastiaanssen of

Unique Adventures- excursions by dogsled