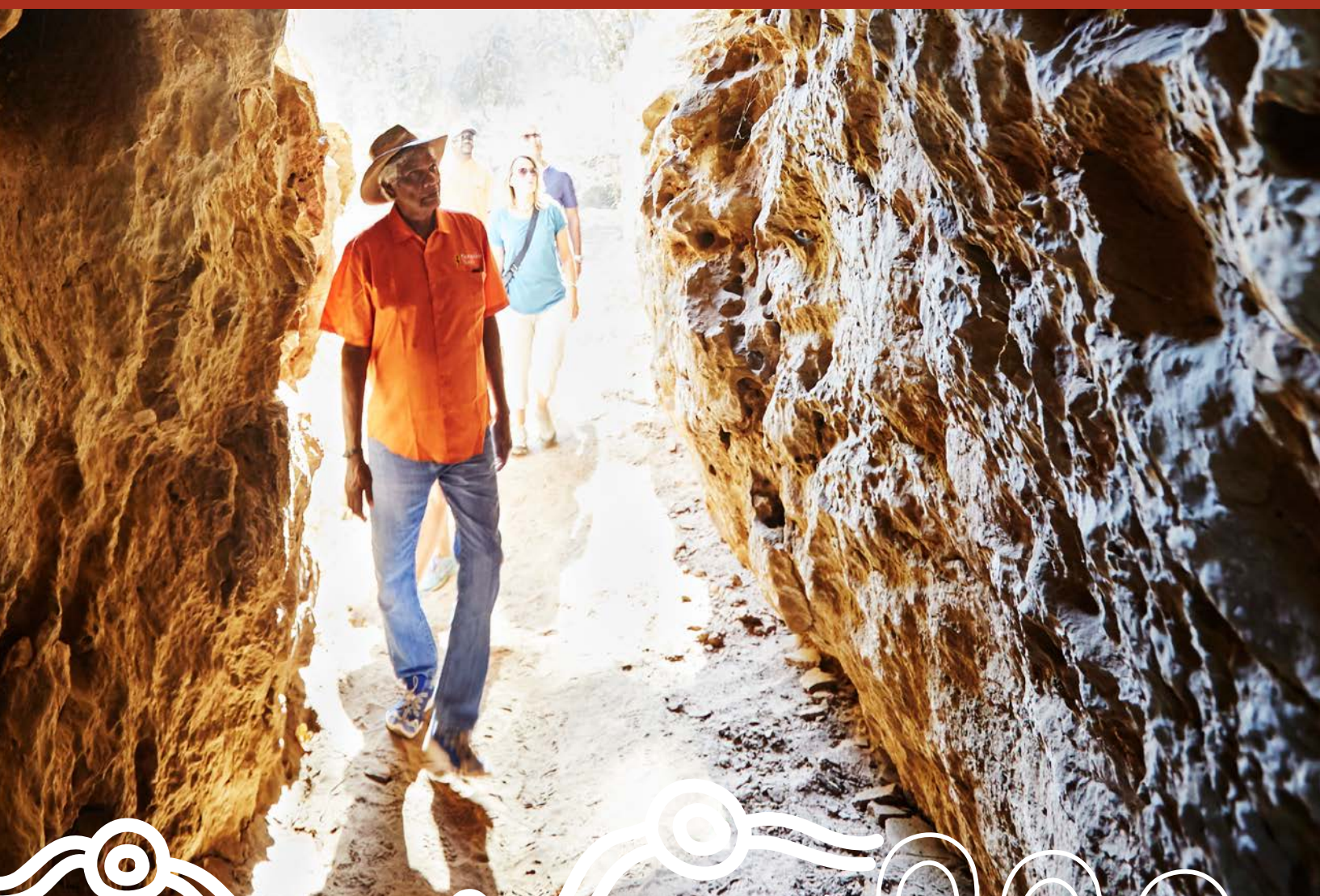


# Supporting Global Indigenous Tourism





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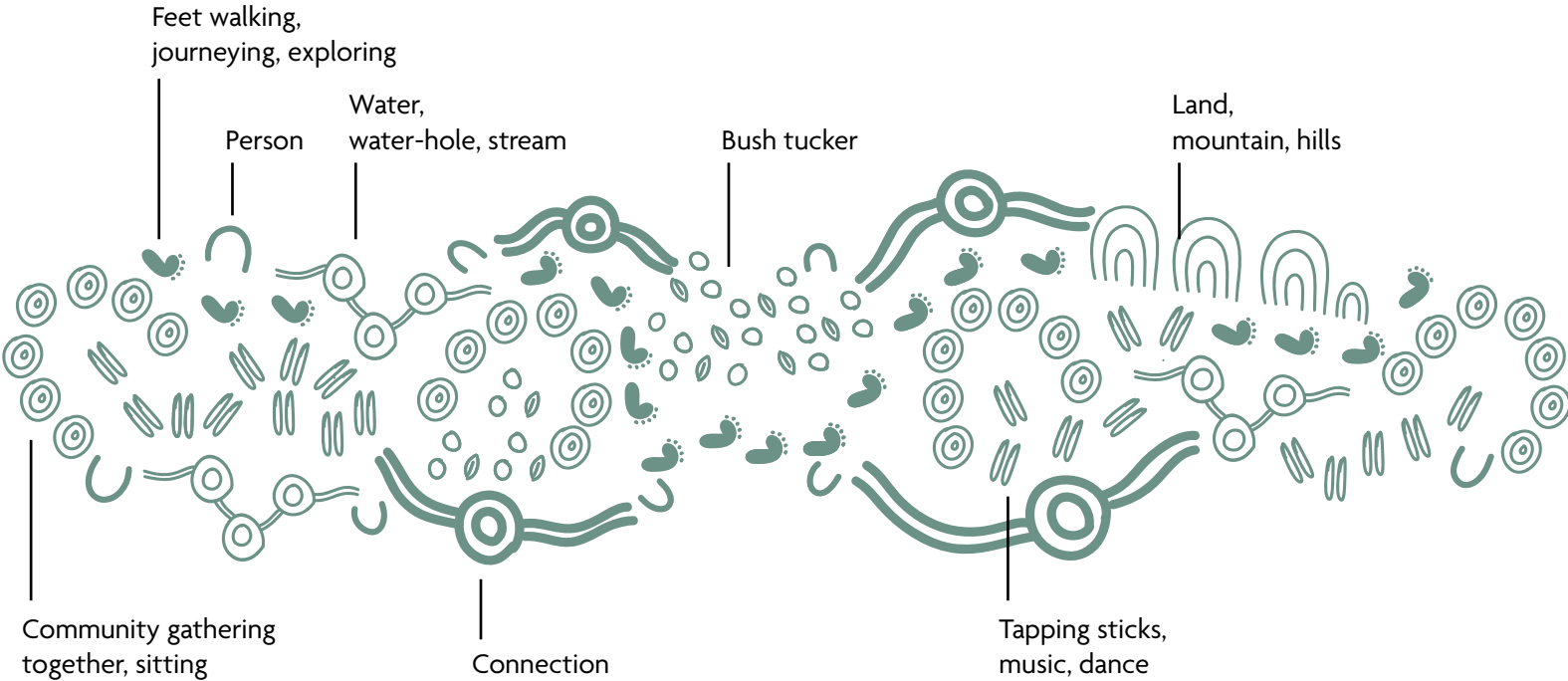


Colombia

WTTC is delighted to work with Nani Creative on the design of this report. As it was launched on 10 October 2024 in Perth | Boorloo at the 24th WTTC Global Summit, it was only right that we contracted an Aboriginal-led design agency, based in Western Australia. The report beautifully features artwork by Noongar-Yamatji artist Connie Clinch.

## ‘Journey together’

*The people journey through the land together, seeing the beauty.  
They discover on their way food, water, land, music, and dance.  
They sit together sharing their stories and they feel connected.*



## Foreword

On a dark morning in June 1886, many people, including the Māori artist Tene Waitere and his family, took shelter from Mount Tarawera during what was to become the deadliest volcanic eruption in New Zealand's history. The structure that saved them, *Hinemihi*, was a meeting house carved by Waitere and Wero Taroi just a few years earlier. Today the house stands ten thousand miles away in Clandon Park, near London in the United Kingdom. Waitere would live to become one of the most prolific and celebrated carvers of his age, making canoes, tobacco pipes and walking sticks for his community, as well as vast, experimental artworks that reached a global audience.

The story of Tene Waitere captures the themes of this report. It echoes the value Indigenous tourism can bring – both to Indigenous communities, and to their visitors. Though he played a big part in local Māori life, Waitere primarily earned a living from tourism. He worked for a local hotel – The Geyser, where he had a small workshop – as well as visiting European collectors, and occasionally the New Zealand department for tourism. He wasn't alone. It was common to see Māoris welcoming travellers arriving by schooner and whaleboat, drawn to the geothermal pools of the North Island's Lakes District. Travel created employment not only for artists and craftsmen, but for tour guides, interpreters and hospitality staff. It was the kernel of a sector that employs some 350 million people worldwide to this day.

That so many of Waitere's works are such a distance from where they were created – with pieces scattered around the UK, Germany, and the rest of Europe – is both a reflection of his international success, and a reminder that Indigenous voices and profits have frequently been appropriated. Despite being such a critical part of our sector, Indigenous tourism providers have many times been excluded from the opportunities that are readily available to others. This report seeks to highlight models for how Indigenous tourism can be better supported, with easier access to finance, better industry data as well as existing and emerging networks.

Above all, however, Waitere's story is one of hope. More than a century later, his carvings remain celebrated by casual visitors and critics alike. Indigenous tourism continues to play a crucial role around the world, sparking opportunities to share traditional knowledge, practices, and languages.

Our hope is that this report encourages you to continue to support this important segment of Travel & Tourism, and to celebrate its remarkable legacy.



**Julia Simpson**

President & CEO  
World Travel & Tourism Council







New Zealand

## Acknowledgement of context

This report on Indigenous tourism is WTTC's contribution to the ongoing work to better support Indigenous peoples' work around the subject. We are not the experts. We are lending our voice and support to conversations and work that Indigenous peoples and organisations representing their interests have already been doing long before our organisation existed.

We have chosen to be curators of this report, which includes some global examples of how Indigenous tourism can work to be more supportive of the people who make it possible. The writers and owners of these stories and methods are the leading Indigenous professionals who welcome travellers onto their lands and with whom they share their culture, heritage, history, food, time, and expertise.

The editors would also like to acknowledge that there are histories and contexts that we are not always able to articulate here. Indigenous peoples are not a monolith. Each person, each tribal group, each community, each nation, and each government operates in its own way. This report, in no way, suggests the contrary. For mainstream understanding, we have used the names for land and place as they are recognised by the UN and the country distribution of territory; we acknowledge that these names may not be the Indigenous names of those areas.

Our intention is to share what we have learnt, through experience, research, and interviews with experts, so that others may learn more about this important segment and some ways in which to better support the people who make it possible. We also hope that this report serves as a resource to Indigenous peoples and organisations representing their interests. We hope it serves as a collection of global examples that can be used to help with future planning and in advocacy work. We are in full support that Indigenous peoples should benefit from Travel & Tourism and self-determine how they interact with the sector.

It should also be noted that the editors have chosen to use the term "Indigenous". While terms such as "First Nations" and "Indigenous" are interchangeably used in the global discourse, and more specific names may be used in local contexts, this report will refer to Indigenous peoples as such unless quoting a particular source or contributor.

We are deeply grateful to the contributors of this report who shared so openly and honestly with us.

We acknowledge those who have gone before, and we recognise the strength of the nations who make Indigenous tourism opportunities possible and successful.

## Defining Indigenous tourism and its value

Definitions of Indigenous tourism may vary; what remains consistent is that it should be led by Indigenous peoples. The editors of this report are working with a definition that states it is Indigenous-led experiences created for the purpose of sharing traditions, culture, and languages while fostering connections. While some of these experiences can be tailored towards international travellers, they are not the only demographic that enjoy these experiences.

Indigenous tourism matters. It plays a crucial role in cultural preservation and revitalisation, providing opportunities for communities to share their traditional knowledge, practices, and languages. This helps keep cultures alive and vibrant, especially for younger generations – feedback that came up frequently across most interviews. Additionally, Indigenous tourism contributes to economic empowerment by creating jobs and income sources within Indigenous communities, sometimes in areas with more limited economic opportunities. This can help reduce poverty, improve living standards, and support economic independence.

Importantly, Indigenous tourism allows communities to control their own narratives and representation, countering historical misrepresentation and supporting self-determination. As Sebastien Desnoyers-Picard, Vice President of **Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC)** says, “Indigenous tourism is crucial for reclaiming our identities and strengthening the connections between different Indigenous nations. It helps build up infrastructure and supports the circular economy within our communities by providing jobs and career opportunities. We aim to show that Indigenous tourism is not just a job but a viable career path. It also allows us to control the development of our land, preventing non-Indigenous exploitation”.

Indigenous tourism has supported communities and met traveller demand in various ways around the world. Many initiatives have created employment opportunities for local Indigenous peoples, often in remote areas where other paid jobs can be scarce. These range from tour guides and cultural interpreters to hospitality staff and artisans. For instance, some resorts operated in partnership with Indigenous communities have created hundreds of jobs and provided valuable training programmes.



Canada



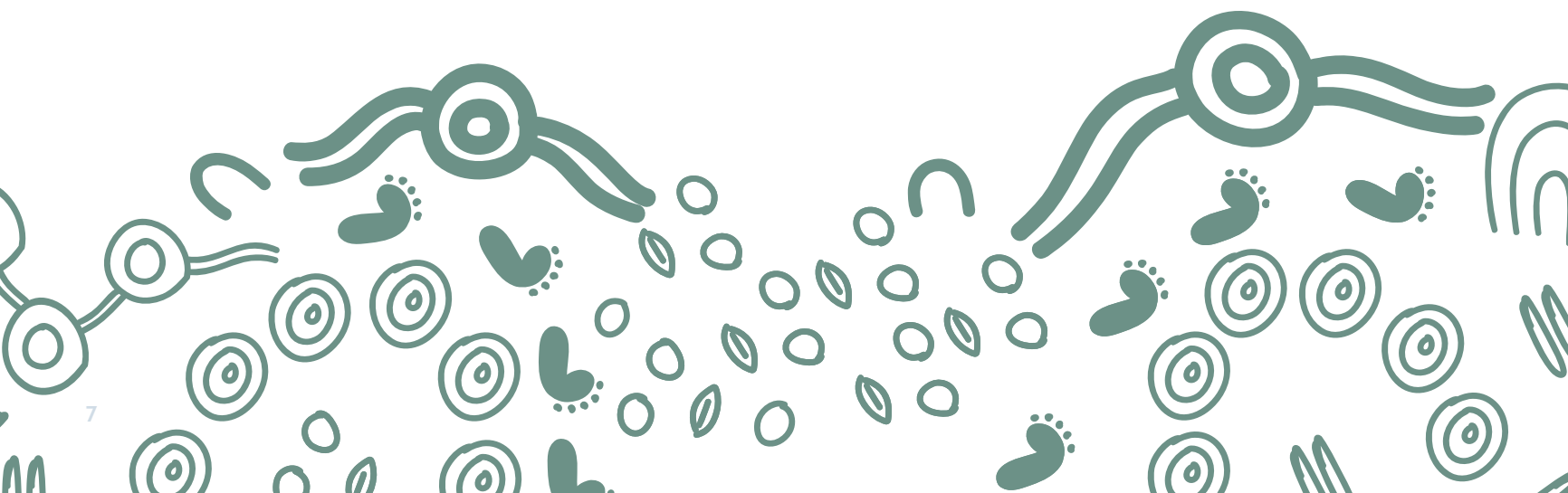
Some tourism projects have also helped revitalise traditional practices and arts. By creating a market for authentic cultural experiences and products, these initiatives encourage – and can incentivise – the continuation of traditional crafts, performances, and knowledge systems. This not only helps preserve culture but can also instil pride in younger generations.

“Indigenous tourism is crucial because it allows us to tell our authentic stories, a role that others have often taken from us in the past. Through cultural tourism, we can preserve and perpetuate our cultural identity, teaching the next generation the value of their heritage. It [also] protects our cultural identity while providing revenue and jobs for our communities, particularly to our cultural protectors and artists who rely on traditional art passed down through generations,” says Sherry Rupert, CEO of **American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA)**.

Moreover, Indigenous tourism often incorporates environmental conservation efforts. Many communities have developed ecotourism projects or monetised practices to help provide income while supporting the protection of natural resources. “This new wave of climate protection is not new to us – it has always been a core part of our culture. We have long understood that Mother Nature provides for us, and it is our responsibility to protect her. For instance, the Māori calendar is intricately connected to the environment through its recording of the lunar and solar cycles. These ancient learnings now guide our community in practising modern-day sustainable business practices. The values of environmental care and stewardship have been embedded in our way of life for centuries,” shares Steffan Panoho, General Manager at **Ngāti Kuri Tourism**.

By learning from and meeting communities whose very way of life is about protecting the planet, travellers’ growing demand for sustainable and culturally rich experiences can be met while still supporting Indigenous rights to land and resources. “Our tourism activities allow Indigenous people to stay on country, stay connected with their Elders, and ensure that traditional knowledge is passed on. This reduces the need to move to cities, providing individual benefits as well as benefits to the whole community and family,” says Phil Lockyer, Head of Indigenous Affairs at **Tourism Australia**.

Countless traveller surveys will highlight increasing demand for authentic and local experiences or opportunities to connect with local communities and cultures. However, global data on how much of this is specifically about Indigenous tourism is limited. Data commissioned by particular regions or territories has been undertaken. Canada, for example, has national research available as well as province-level research. ITAC-commissioned research, released in 2019, is one such example. This research found that almost 2,000 Indigenous businesses participate in Canada’s Indigenous tourism sector, with over 39,000 people working in the sector’s associated industries. It goes on to highlight that the combined direct economic footprint in 2017 is estimated to exceed CA\$ 1.7 billion in gross domestic product (GDP)<sup>1</sup>. AIANTA reports that American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-owned hospitality businesses contribute US\$ 15.7 billion in annual sales to the tourism and hospitality sector in the U.S.<sup>2</sup>. Tourism Australia reports on its Discover Aboriginal Experiences marketing collective and states that in 2019, 1.4 million international visitors (17%) participated in an Indigenous tourism experience while visiting Australia. The report goes on to share that this is a 6% year-on-year increase since 2010<sup>3</sup>.



One outlook supports continued growth in this segment. It projects that Indigenous tourism will achieve a CAGR of 4.10% between 2024 and 2034. It forecasts this important segment's market value will reach US\$ 67.05 billion in 2034; a significant increase from its current value of US\$ 44.86 billion in 2024<sup>4</sup>. While these statistics are available and helpful, there is need for consistent, regular statistics on Indigenous tourism to effectively show growth over time and endorse efforts to direct funding to Indigenous business and increase the marketing of these experiences. This data is needed at a global level but also at a territory level to better support those communities whose way of life contributes significantly to jobs and international arrivals.

Looking at the future of tourism, globally, it is imperative that as demand for Indigenous tourism grows, this growth benefits the Indigenous peoples that make it possible and does not exploit them or their culture. It is important to remember that “culture is not a product to be consumed, it is a living tradition,” as shared by Dawnielle Tehama, Klamath Tribal Member and Senior Associate Principal at **Coraggio Group**. Should elements of a culture be commercialised, this needs to be managed by the people who own it. Christina Hætta, Head of the Cultural Unit at the **Saami Council**, says the ideal future for Indigenous tourism is “for communities to benefit from the commercialisation of their culture. Our culture is our property – just as large companies have properties. If our property is to be used, it should be done sensitively, and we should benefit from it.”

As travellers seek more authentic and meaningful experiences, Indigenous tourism offers unique opportunities to engage with traditional cultures, learn about alternative world views, and contribute to sustainable economic growth and development in Indigenous communities.





## Effective practices from around the world



Indigenous peoples around the world have been welcoming visitors for thousands of years. In fact, Christina Hætta shares a story of an 18th century market where Sámi people sold handicrafts and other products to travellers. Other cultures have similar stories dating as far back as living and inherited memory allows. WTTC research estimates that Travel & Tourism's growth over the next ten years will outpace the growth of the wider economy. Between 2024 and 2034, Travel & Tourism is forecast to grow at a CAGR of 3.7% compared to 2.4% in the wider global economy. Our sector is set to be worth US\$ 16 trillion, representing 11.4% of global GDP. Furthermore, it will be responsible for over 12% of all jobs, employing almost 450 million people. That is over 100 million more jobs than currently estimated for 2024.

With tourism projected to grow faster than the wider economy, it is imperative that good practices in and for Indigenous tourism are employed and shared. This underscores the integral role of Indigenous forums and networks like [World Indigenous Tourism Alliance \(WINTA\)](#) and [International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs \(IWGIA\)](#) at a global level and [The Indigenous Tourism Collaborative of the Americas \(ITCA\)](#) at a regional one.

ITCA is steered by the George Washington University International Institute of Tourism Studies, alongside the Organization of American States and the [Office of Indian Economic Development \(OIED\)](#) at the U.S. Department of the Interior. Additionally, the Office of Indian Economic Development – within the U.S. Department of the Interior - Indian Affairs – has been supporting the development of regional tourism networks, like the South Dakota Native Tourism Alliance, with funding from the NATIVE Act.



Seleni Matus, Director of the International Institute of Tourism Studies and Adjunct Professor of Tourism at **George Washington University**, articulates that one role of Indigenous organisations is to “create networks which can evolve into destination organisations.” GWU is a partner of the OIED, helping the department develop Indigenous tourism networks that have evolved into destination organisations in North Dakota and South Dakota. The North Dakota Tourism Alliance has become an independent non-profit and serves as a destination organisation for all five federally recognised tribes in North Dakota. The South Dakota Tourism Alliance is still in the process of becoming an independent non-profit destination organisation.

Professor Matus highlights that OIED is funding both sub-national Indigenous tourism networks and supra-national networks, in particular the Indigenous Tourism Collaborative of the Americas (ITCA). The OIED's website outlines current Indigenous tourism projects funded by the NATIVE Act.

Indigenous organisations have also leveraged their networks such as the 2024 International Indigenous Tourism Conference (IITC) where a new alliance was announced. Destination Original Indigenous Tourism (DO-IT) is a collaboration between ITAC, AIANTA, and New Zealand Māori Tourism. It intends to ensure a larger presence and a unified voice in promoting the Indigenous tourism industry worldwide. This is an idea and initiative led by these three Indigenous organisations.

Indeed, support networks for Indigenous tourism exist. However, more needs to be done. The following effective practices highlight ways in which Indigenous tourism can be better supported, promoted, and enabled to grow. These practices are grouped by focus areas ranging from ensuring authenticity to Indigenous policy development. While most examples are from Indigenous organisations, there are a few examples from the private sector and organisations that have dedicated themselves to supporting Indigenous peoples and the preservation of culture through tourism. In addition to its economic and social benefits, tourism plays a crucial role in environmental and cultural preservation – another common theme that emerged in the research process. Says Ashish Sanghrajka, President of **Big Five Tours & Expeditions**: “Tourism should be used as a vehicle to protect culture and heritage.”

The editors attempted to gather examples from all continents, though obtaining the detail on each was not always possible. Indeed, there exist many more examples than those listed here.





## Advocacy & inclusion

### USA

Indigenous tourism is fundamentally about Indigenous people leading efforts to share their culture and stories. As Dawnielle Tehama, Klamath Tribal Member and Senior Associate Principal at **Coraggio Group**, says: "It can be traumatising for some communities when their stories are discussed by those who may not fully understand or respect them. There's a concern about erasure language and the lack of understanding about Indigenous presence and contributions. It's important to remember that Indigenous people are not extinct; we are very much present."

Echoing the need for Indigenous voices to tell Indigenous stories, Sherry Rupert, CEO of **Aianta**, says: "Indigenous tourism is a native-led effort from a native perspective. It's about sharing who we are as people—our culture, food, stories, and our deep connections to the land, water, and animals."

Indigenous organisations can support communities in advocacy while helping to develop tourism initiatives that preserve cultural identity and generate economic benefits. One such example is Aianta. The organisation has been instrumental in supporting Indigenous communities by connecting them with tour operators, advocating for inclusive marketing efforts that reflect Indigenous culture, and pushing for more inclusive language in the tourism sector. For example, Aianta expanded its focus to include Native Hawaiians, recognising the broader spectrum of Indigenous identities<sup>5</sup>.

### Canada

Canada, which is home to more than 700 unique Indigenous communities, is a global beacon when it comes to the prominence of Indigenous tourism as part of its overall tourism offering. Data show that this has had significant economic and social benefits for Indigenous communities. In 2019, Canada had 1,900 Indigenous-owned and operated tourism businesses providing 39,000 jobs<sup>6</sup>. "By the end of 2022, Airbnb hosts sharing their homes in Indigenous communities across Canada collectively earned nearly US\$ 4 million," says Janaye Ingram, Director of Community Partner Programs and Engagement at **Airbnb**. Demand for opportunities to connect with Indigenous Canadians continues to grow, says Ingram. From January to September 2023, the number of nights booked for Airbnb listings within Indigenous communities in Canada increased by more than 60% compared to the same period in 2019<sup>7</sup>.

One of the principal drivers of this inclusion and prominence is the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC), which was formed in 2015 to support the growth of Indigenous tourism after years of conversations among Indigenous tourism leaders. It represents its members of more than 1,000 Indigenous-owned businesses nationally and provides training, workshops, and advice on economic development.

### Cross-regional private sector support

The Travel & Tourism sector requires collaboration to function well. The public and private sectors must work together and with NGOs to ensure our sector is both inclusive and sustainable. Thus, private sector companies that take an active role in including Indigenous peoples and supporting their autonomy and businesses are an important part of effectively supporting Indigenous tourism.

Intrepid Travel is one such company. It is a certified B-Corp offering more than 1,150 trips in over 100 countries and on every continent. Its support for Indigenous people spans from inclusion in Intrepid itineraries (verified Indigenous-owned businesses are paid by Intrepid to provide these experiences) to actively engaging with Indigenous peoples and communities around key focus areas such as reconciliation<sup>8</sup>, training, and paid cultural education for Intrepid staff. "We only include First Nations experiences that are delivered by First Nations people. Any activities in National Parks or on land held under Native Title require approvals from local Traditional Owners. We are also financial supporters of First Nations organisations such as WAITOC and Indigenous Tourism Collaborative of the Americas," says Sara King, General Manager of Purpose at **Intrepid Travel**.



## Authenticity

### Canada

Canada's *Original Original* is a leading example of an accreditation that prioritises Indigenous people and supports traveller demand for authenticity. This programme, launched in 2022, is a partnership between ITAC and Tourism HR Canada that verifies and promotes Indigenous-owned businesses. In order to be verified as an Original Original, businesses will be evaluated by a certification programme and must meet key criteria including being at least 51% Indigenous-owned and offer a business-ready, visitor-ready, or export-ready experience. Not only does the programme allow travellers to identify Indigenous-owned experiences, it enables those travellers to directly support Indigenous individuals, families, and communities.

ITAC is also broadening its promotion of authentic Indigenous tourism products to the international market. At the 2024 Rendez-Vous Canada trade event, it hosted the 'Destination Indigenous' pavilion where 32 Indigenous operators had been mentored to be able to showcase their work for buyers, especially to European and Asian markets where there is higher demand. This helped ensure that potential customers had access to authentic Indigenous operators.

### Northern Europe

The Sámi people, indigenous to regions of Finland, Russia, Norway, and Sweden, have a rich tradition of crafts and arts known as 'duodji'. These handicrafts have long been popular souvenirs for travellers visiting Sápmi (Sámi territory). The products are often made from materials such as antlers or reindeer hide – materials that may not always be used otherwise. Using these materials reflects the Sámi way of thinking, explains Christina Hætta, Head of the Cultural Unit at the *Saami Council*. She expands that when a reindeer is slaughtered for food everything else must be used, and references an old story of an agreement the Sámi people made with a reindeer.

In the past, the term 'Sámi duodji' has been misused for the sale of products inspired by Sámi culture but not actually crafted by Sámi people. Customers have not had enough knowledge to distinguish products made by the Sámi from those that appropriate Sámi culture to produce copies. To mitigate this and strengthen the industry of Sámi handicrafts and other products, two certification trademarks have been developed by the Saami Council<sup>9</sup>. Products bearing the stamp 'Sámi Duodji' are genuine products made by Sámi people in the traditional way. The 'Sámi Made' stamp identifies products made by Sámi people such as jewellery, clothes, cosmetics, and books but not necessarily in the traditional way. These trademarks are an assurance that the products and crafts are genuinely Sámi produced and that the money actually goes back to the Sámi community.

It should be noted that there is a clear difference between traditional duodji and other handicraft (sometimes made specifically to sell to travellers). Traditional duodji take more time to create and the selling price is therefore higher. Products made for tourists can be made from leftover materials from traditional duodji and used to create more commercial products that are more time-efficient to produce and sell. This is also why there are two different trademarks, explains Hætta, "one for traditional Sámi duodji/handicraft (The Sámi duodji trademark) and one for other Sámi made products which can be products, clothes, designs etc for tourists (The Sámi Made trademark)."

The Saami Council, which owns the trademarks, is a voluntary, non-governmental organisation whose main aim, along with its nine member organisations, is to promote Sámi rights and interests. While the Council owns the trademarks, the work is done in collaboration with the different duodji organisations in Sápmi who also function as the licence offices for the trademarks. The Council facilitates conversations within the duodji field organisations so they can meet collectively across the borders in Sápmi and discuss issues such as what makes handicrafts traditional and whether all materials must be natural or not. Hætta says: "We need to ensure that it is the Sámi ourselves who decide how our culture is commercialised. It is crucial that groups actually then use the trademarks and promote them so tourists are aware"



Graphics published with the permission of the Saami Council



## Collaboration on strategic goals

### Australia

#### Positioning Indigenous tourism

Australia's Indigenous peoples are diverse. Some estimations state that there were at least 250 distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages spoken across the continent at the time of colonisation<sup>10</sup> with others stating there were more than 300<sup>11</sup>. These language groups emphasise the diversity of Indigenous Australians. In Western Australia, the government launched its Jina: Western Australian Aboriginal Tourism Action Plan 2021-2025<sup>12</sup> to better support Indigenous tourism in the state. The plan, supported by the AUS\$ 20 million Aboriginal Tourism Fund, supports a range of initiatives<sup>13</sup> including the development of new Indigenous tourism experiences in WA and administration and booking systems to support Indigenous businesses.

The plan represents a concerted effort to position Indigenous tourism at the forefront of the state's tourism offerings. It focuses on creating sustainable tourism opportunities that celebrate and preserve Indigenous heritage. It emphasises the importance of authentic cultural experiences, offering visitors the chance to engage with and learn from Indigenous cultures in meaningful ways. This includes guided tours, cultural workshops, and other immersive Indigenous-led experiences, ensuring that the portrayal of Indigenous cultures is accurate and respectful.

The Jina Plan was developed with significant input from the Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council (WAITOC), an organisation that plays a pivotal role in supporting and promoting Indigenous tourism businesses across the state of Western Australia<sup>14</sup>. WAITOC's involvement ensures that the Jina Plan is deeply grounded in the values, traditions, and aspirations of Indigenous communities. As Rob Taylor, CEO of **WAITOC**, says: "It's important we embrace the culture in the right way – lots of other states don't embrace Aboriginal culture the way WA does".

WAITOC, established to advocate for Indigenous tourism operators, has been instrumental in the development and implementation of the Jina Plan. The organisation provides a platform for Indigenous tourism businesses, helping them to thrive in the competitive tourism market while maintaining cultural integrity. WAITOC's role in the Jina Plan involves not only representing the voices of Indigenous operators but also ensuring that the initiatives and opportunities created by the plan align with the needs and goals of Indigenous communities.

This collaboration has tangible economic and other benefits for Indigenous Australian operators while also enriching the broader tourism landscape with unique and culturally significant experiences.

### Colombia

#### Providing training and certification for Indigenous businesses

Around 115 diverse Indigenous peoples – spread throughout the areas including the Amazon, the Andes, and the Caribbean and Pacific coasts – call the territory of Colombia home. The 2018 national census reported the country's Indigenous population stood at 1.9 million people<sup>15</sup>. To provide intercultural training on Indigenous tourism for 30 Indigenous leaders, the Vice Ministry of Tourism organised a conference in the Purace Indigenous Reservation in 2021. This led to the formation of the National Association of Indigenous Tourism of Colombia (ASONTIC) in 2022. With a membership formed of entrepreneurs from different towns and reservations nationwide who work in Indigenous tourism, ASONTIC's<sup>16</sup> role includes consulting with Indigenous authorities and helping to develop tourist routes in collaboration with local communities; advising on regulation to make appropriate use of the territory; and essentially promoting the socio-economic development of Indigenous peoples. The association also provides a training and certification programme for all Indigenous tourism companies and introduces Indigenous businesses to international operators such as Big Five Tours and Expeditions and Intrepid Travel that have featured Indigenous experiences.



## Panama

### Policy development in support of Indigenous Peoples

Another positive policy development is occurring in the autonomous region of Guna Yala in Northeast Panama where tourism is already the main economic activity. With support from the Inter-American Development Bank, the authorities launched the 2024-2035 Roadmap for Indigenous Tourism for the Gunayala Region<sup>17</sup> in January 2024 – the first of its kind in Panama. The strategy, which aims to lead Guna Yala to greater sustainability and competitiveness through tourism, was created after input from multiple key stakeholders such as 61 Guna tourism operators from Panama and Guna who market products and services from the region. The strategy identifies five priority tourist areas within the region and proposes 31 actions around infrastructure, human capital, entrepreneurship, tourism planning, sustainability, management, and governance. A training plan has also been rolled out to almost 100 Guna tourism agents focusing on customer service, tourism marketing and commercialisation, assessment, and natural and cultural interpretation techniques.

## Peru

### Using technology to support cultural preservation

Kipi is a robot<sup>18</sup> that was created by Peruvian educator Walter Velásquez to help students access formal education during the pandemic. Kipi, which means ‘to carry’ in Quechua, quite literally carries the formal education curriculum to children in remote communities in the mountains of Peru. Velásquez says Kipi is intentionally female to support the view that all children, not just boys, should have access to education.

While she was created to support the formal education of children in Peru, Kipi is now supporting language preservation. As she frequents remote areas with languages spoken in those select areas, Mr Velasquez has coded her to learn these languages. In a [video available online](#)<sup>19</sup>, Big Five Tours & Expeditions documents one of these journeys where Velasquez personally takes Kipi to learn Kukama – a language spoken by the Kukama people in the Peruvian Amazon. It is said that only around 2,000 people speak Kukama, many of whom are septuagenarians or above. “We are proud to partner with Walter. This project started in remote parts of Peru to help with education. Phase two was about learning languages. Phase three is teachers and students learning to programme,” says Ashish Sanghrajka, President of **Big Five Tours & Expeditions**.

The Quechua-speaking robot is made from recycled materials and uses solar energy. She can project videos through her eyes, interact through questions and answers, and will soon be able to use artificial intelligence and teach in over 40 local dialects. Kipi’s name speaks to the important role she will play in the preservation of the Quechua language (and many others). Quechua is spoken by the Quechua people who are Indigenous peoples of South America. Most Quechua speakers are native to Peru but there are some significant populations in Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, and Argentina.

What started as a tool to support formal education is now acting as an important part of language preservation and skills development for Indigenous communities.





## Holding Travellers Accountable

### New Zealand

Land, water, and animals are precious parts of many Indigenous cultures and the stories about them are equally important. “The stories of Indigenous peoples are intertwined with our connection to the land. Central to the bond between a tribe and a specific piece of land are these narratives —knowledge of our ancestors’ journeys and their achievements. These stories are expressed through various forms, including art, song, *haka*, *Tā Moko* (Indigenous tattooing), and importantly, the recital of genealogy,” shares Steffan Panoho, of **Ngati Kurī Tourism**. He describes perpetuating these stories as a commitment Indigenous people have to creating an enduring legacy for future generations.

Now, through New Zealand’s Tiaki Promise, the people of New Zealand are inviting visitors to share in this traditional concept. This world-leading example asks travellers to commit to the principles of this promise while visiting. Tiaki means to care for people, place, and culture. The promise reminds visitors that everyone who steps foot on New Zealand has a responsibility to care for it – it is a commitment everyone makes for now and for future generations. It requires that visitors promise to be respectful, tread lightly, and open their hearts and minds to what they may experience and discover. It asks each visitor “to act as a guardian, protecting and preserving our home”. Visitors commit to care for land, water, and nature, “treading lightly and leaving no trace”. This challenge, though seemingly simple, has a profound impact on traveller psyche and makes official what many already know but may have forgotten.

Panoho explains that for those planning to create similar initiatives in their territories, it is important that legislation and the whole system lives up to that promise.



New Zealand

## Access to funding

### Canada

One of ITAC's key roles is to advocate for more financial support for Indigenous tourism businesses. It points out inequities such as the fact that Indigenous communities receive no direct financial benefits from international visitors to Canada even when airports, border crossings, and cruise terminals are in Indigenous areas. The **Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC)** also looks into whether businesses in certain Indigenous communities find it harder than the general population to get financial support. TIAC's President & CEO, Beth Potter says: "They can have more difficulty receiving funding for programmes than others. Those on reservations may be exempt from taxation rules so may not be able to get a business number to set up officially. We would like to see a working group formed to improve the opportunities for Indigenous peoples to start and grow businesses".

Knowing that government is more likely to respond favourably to calls for financial and policy support if it can see the benefits of Indigenous tourism, ITAC collects research and data to showcase the positive impact of Indigenous tourism on national GDP, job creation, and reconciliation among Indigenous peoples, as well as to underline the importance of making Indigenous peoples the owners and operators of tourism businesses. For example, in the seven years to 2023, the Indigenous tourism sector has seen its contribution to GDP soar from CA\$ 1.4 billion to nearly CA\$ 2 billion and an unprecedented growth in new jobs<sup>20</sup>. ITAC highlights that Indigenous peoples provide a high return on investment; they contribute nearly CA\$ 2 million to GDP but don't benefit from the taxation they pay. Thus, ITAC has forged important partnerships at the federal level with Destination Canada, Tourism HR Canada, as well as with TIAC (where it has a place on the Board) to get the message across most effectively.

As more funding is needed, and to address this, ITAC has launched the Indigenous Tourism Destination Fund (ITDF) to attract investments in infrastructure, human resources, transportation, business development and marketing, and to create a thriving Indigenous tourism economy. The aim is to raise CA\$ 2.6 billion, by partner tourism companies passing on a fee of 25 cents per transaction to customers. ITAC's vision is that with these funds, by 2030, there should be 800 new businesses and over 21,000 new tourism jobs for Indigenous communities throughout Canada that will contribute CA\$ 6 billion to Canada's GDP, up from CA\$ 1.9 billion in 2019.

Sebastien Desnoyers-Picard, Vice President of **ITAC**, is hopeful for the future: "We do need more funding support. But we envision a future where Indigenous tourism is a thriving, self-sustaining industry that provides meaningful economic and social benefits to our communities while educating and enriching the experiences of visitors". He adds: "We aim to keep our culture, languages, and art alive while creating social and economic impacts".

### Global private sector

Funding is also required for the achievement of strategic goals such as land preservation. Through its Community Fund, created in 2020, Airbnb will distribute US\$ 100 million by the end of 2030 to help strengthen communities around the world. This includes organisations whose focus is advancing environmental sustainability. Past grant recipients focussed on sustainable land use at the community level, sometimes within or around Indigenous communities. These include the National Indian Carbon Coalition in the US; World Wildlife Fund in Mexico, Peru, and Colombia; and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation in Australia.







## Community-first approach

### Oman

Oman's approach to Indigenous tourism, particularly in Al Jabal Al Akhdar, serves as an example of balancing cultural preservation with economic development. Their model aims to empower local communities. "By prioritising authenticity and community ownership, we aim to create a tourism experience that benefits both visitors and locals," says Badriya Al Siyabi, Director of Sustainability and Local Content at **OMRAN Group**<sup>21</sup>. She explains that community needs assessments are conducted before any operations begin. In Al Jabal Al Akhdar, OMRAN's initiatives focus on supporting local entrepreneurship and promoting traditional crafts. By hiring locals, using local ingredients, and offering unique experiences, the destination aims to develop an authentic and sustainable tourism sector. "Our projects are designed to respect local culture and ensure that the community benefits directly. By acting as an accelerator and incubator, we empower local communities to take ownership of their tourism initiatives, ensuring long-term sustainability and well-being," she says.

## Inclusive marketing

### Australia

In recent years, Tourism Australia and various state-level tourism bodies have increasingly prioritised the inclusion and promotion of Indigenous experiences within their broader tourism strategies. Through its "Discover Aboriginal Experiences" programme, the national destination marketing organisation highlights Indigenous experiences. This, in turn, makes these experiences more accessible for travellers while helping to increase the visibility of Indigenous businesses<sup>22</sup>.

Recognising the rich cultural heritage of Indigenous Australians, these efforts aim to authentically represent and celebrate Indigenous cultures. The organisation works with state-level Indigenous organisations to identify Indigenous-led experiences. This shift marks a significant movement toward more inclusive tourism practices that acknowledge the importance of Indigenous history, knowledge, and connection to the land. As Phil Lockyer, Head of Indigenous Affairs at **Tourism Australia** says: "Tourism plays a role in preserving and sharing culture; there is a cultural benefit to the soul of Indigenous peoples when culture can be shared and the community can benefit. It's crucial that the community determines which places should be shown and what stories should be shared. For example: in some parts of Australia, a permit is required to visit certain areas. Traditional custodians have a say in what they want to share with the rest of the world".

## Colombia

ProColombia, the country's national destination marketing organisation, developed a six-region strategy to better promote experiences across the country. It reorganised the country's strategic regions to ensure "each region has an international connectivity hub that then helps disperse tourism into remote areas and regions," says Maria Jose Abuabara, USA Executive Director of Tourism at **ProColombia**. She highlights that under this reorganisation, the Amazon and Orinoco regions – which make up 40% of the country – are now merged. This strategy also enables better promotion of Indigenous experiences such as tours of remote Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities that are guided by locals.

Abuabara also emphasises the role of appropriate signage and cultural education for travellers – a view supported by a number of interviewees. "We have many national parks and Indigenous communities live in some, so there should be signage in their territories and information for tourists on how to approach them," she says.

## USA

Visit Native California is an initiative created by the state to encourage visitors to explore Indigenous experiences. It includes a video series that spotlights Indigenous operators – in their own words – across the state. It also includes educational links to teach visitors about the Indigenous people of California<sup>23</sup>.

## Global private sector

Inclusive marketing is equally incumbent on private sector organisations that offer experiences in particular countries and territories. Not only do they need to ensure ethical policies, they need to provide opportunities for people to call them out when they get it wrong. Accountability is key. Intrepid's Ethical Marketing Policy and Guidelines outline how it works with Indigenous creators and voices – including writers, photographers and videographers – to ensure greater diversity in marketing and communications. This is tracked annually and reported in its Integrated Annual Report<sup>24</sup>.

"Intrepid has an ethical marketing policy, which was developed in partnership with six consultants, including First Nations representation from Australia, who helped us with five commitments and 23 measurable actions to ensure we progressed our work to be more inclusive in our words, visuals, and narratives. This ensures we centre First Nations (and other diverse) voices and perspectives in our marketing and communications," says Sara King, General Manager of Purpose at **Intrepid Travel**.

The organisation's policy includes cultural guidelines that govern content creation and packaging, consultation with experts such as Trish Adjei – a world-leading expert on Indigenous IP, the inclusion of a Welcome to Country performed by Traditional Owners for significant events hosted in Australia, and seeking permission from Traditional Owners to use Indigenous words in naming. The organisation also lists an email address at which people can share feedback on its activities.





## Development of Indigenous tourism policy

### Colombia

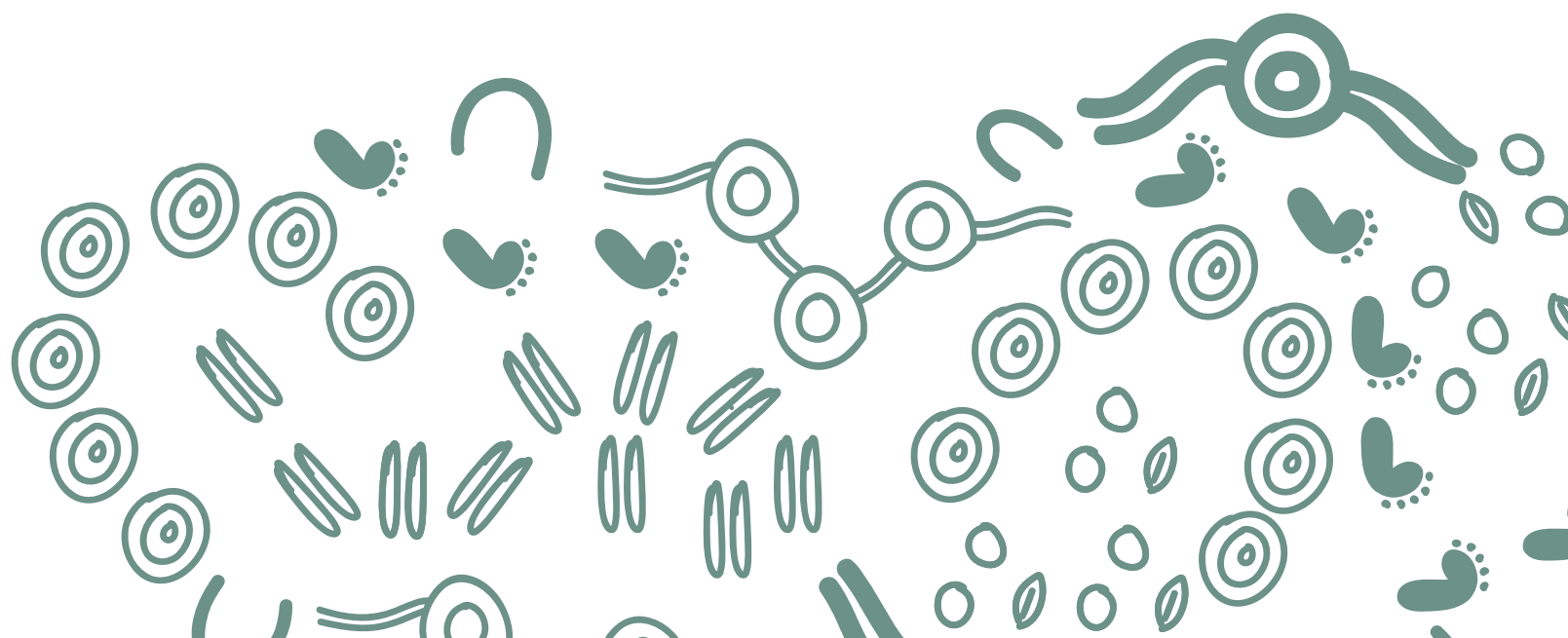
In recent years, Colombia's reputation for natural beauty, biodiversity, and positive sustainability initiatives has attracted increasing numbers of international visitors focused on nature tourism, hiking, adventure tourism, and guided tours. More than 50% of these trips are carried out within Indigenous territories<sup>25</sup>, and yet a lack of signage can mean travellers are not even aware of this. Furthermore, Indigenous communities have needed a greater say in how tourism could and should affect them.

The Colombian government's Sectoral Tourism Plan 2022-26 aims to foster economic development, social inclusion, environmental protection, and peacebuilding through tourism. As part of its strategy, the government began working with Indigenous representatives to develop the first Indigenous Tourism Policy in Colombia<sup>26</sup> with an aim to improve the social and economic development of Indigenous communities, while enhancing the protection of their heritage, culture, and traditions.

The Ministry is currently looking at introducing an Indigenous Tourism law based around sustainability.

### Panama

Panama's seven Indigenous peoples are an important part of the nation's culture, accounting for around 12% of the population<sup>27</sup>. The national government also recognised that more needed to be done to include them in tourism policy decisions. As part of the Master Plan for Sustainable Tourism 2020-2025<sup>28</sup>, the Ministry of Tourism in 2021 launched a long-term, community-based tourism initiative: the Panamanian Alliance for Community Tourism (PACTO). This partnership was set up to build strong and resilient communities in Panama through regenerative tourism. By 2022, PACTO was working with 11 communities in Indigenous territories and areas of high biological diversity and cultural heritage. The Panamanian Foundation for Sustainable Tourism (APTOS) – a member of the partnership – gave support around leadership training, impact management and developing digital platforms to connect local products with national and international markets.



## Policy considerations

Supportive governmental policies are foundational to the long-term sustainable and inclusive growth of the Indigenous tourism segment. These policies need to be relevant to the individual context of local Indigenous communities while also respecting Indigenous governments and other leadership structures. They need to be globally competitive and locally sensitive.

While Indigenous peoples should not need international laws to protect their basic human rights in their traditional and ancestral homes, history has dictated that these laws be enforced. In each jurisdiction, collaboration and mutual respect will be central to enacting laws that benefit both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

The hope is that these policy considerations enable governments to further support the sustainable and inclusive growth of Indigenous tourism. As highlighted by Britt Kramvig, Professor at the School of Business and Economics in the Faculty of Biosciences, Fisheries and Economics (BFE) at **UiT The Arctic University of Norway/ Norgga árktaš universitehta**: “We need the political tools to help us make Indigenous tourism more sustainable and inclusive.”

### CONSIDERATION 1: The right to self-determine

As cited in article 3 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples<sup>29</sup>, “by virtue of that right [Indigenous peoples] freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.” Enabling Indigenous peoples to fairly participate in and benefit from Travel & Tourism supports their abilities to freely pursue economic, social, and cultural development in a sector that is currently estimated to contribute over US\$ 11 trillion to global GDP and employ 348 million people in 2024<sup>30</sup>.

As highlighted in the definition of Indigenous tourism used for this report – Indigenous tourism must be Indigenous-led. As such, the parameters of it can only be determined by the Indigenous people who make it possible.





## CONSIDERATION 2: Enjoyment of basic human rights

Indigenous peoples, like all peoples, should be able to freely enjoy basic human rights. This includes being free from discrimination and forced assimilation and supports the ability to maintain traditions and customs. By doing so, Indigenous peoples' way of life can also help them derive an income from tourism, based on growing traveller demand for authentic experiences and the opportunities to meet people from other cultures<sup>31</sup>. It is crucial to develop guidelines and regulations to safeguard sacred sites, traditional knowledge, and cultural practices from inappropriate commercialisation or exploitation.

In 2024 and beyond, the enjoyment of fundamental rights may also mean access to technologies such as reliable internet. In effect, it is the right or freedom to connect. This will look different for different people and communities – and access points will need to be determined by the individuals themselves and the providers. This access can open opportunities to leverage or create new technologies enhancing Travel & Tourism and, more specifically, Indigenous tourism.



## CONSIDERATION 3: Collaboration and mutual respect

Perhaps, one of the most common similarities in many global cultures is around treating each other with respect. Mutual respect is fundamental to effective collaboration and consultation. When determining and enacting policies that will affect groups of people and their way of life, collaboration and consultation with those groups is key. This remains true when engaging with Indigenous communities. In fact, the significance of respect is highlighted by the articles of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention of 1989<sup>32</sup>. Each part of the convention, and numerous articles, refer to engagements based out of a respect for Indigenous peoples, their customs, and their basic human rights.

Structures in Indigenous communities can enable the necessary collaborations, and respect will facilitate them. To engage with communities, it will be key that stakeholders commit to long-term relationship building. Ongoing collaboration and truly inclusive policies and practices require consistent, open-hearted, respectful engagement. It is also important to remember that some communities are self-governing and so, to collaborate, the basic principles of intergovernmental negotiation and co-operation will apply. It is also helpful for non-Indigenous people to learn more about these communities and respect their governmental structures before beginning consultation processes.

For all stakeholders, collaboration is fundamental to determining, refining, and benefiting from Travel & Tourism. Even in 2024, the world – and the sector – continues to recover from the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its management measures which, in some cases, have hit Indigenous-owned businesses the hardest. Destinations will need to redefine what they have to offer and how they create engaging experiences for travellers who are in search of connection, authenticity, culture, and sustainability. Indigenous tourism already provides these opportunities and it can continue to do so on a wider scale, and more inclusively, with the right support.

## CONSIDERATION 4: Intentional inclusion

Inclusion must be intentional if it is to be successful. This ranges from inclusion in decision-making processes, as mentioned above, to inclusion in funding opportunities and marketing campaigns. For destinations that offer authentic Indigenous tourism experiences, appropriate marketing and funding may be required to ensure travellers know how to find those activities and the businesses creating them have access to much-needed capital. Even in cases where relationships have historically been acrimonious or have broken down, intentional decisions from all parties to rebuild these connections or forge new ones are fundamental to long-term success.

Travel & Tourism, a sector that is all about people, is inherently inclusive. It enables connections between people and helps create jobs for people in even the most remote communities. In 2022<sup>33</sup>, 39% of the total jobs in Travel & Tourism were held by women and the sector directly employed more young people (15%) than the wider economy (13%). For more detailed data on Travel & Tourism's diverse workforce, read [WTTC's 2023 report "Creating Belonging"](#).

Essentially, our sector can create opportunities for all members of a community. In the case of Indigenous tourism, opportunities range from experiences centred around exploration of and education about traditional and ancestral lands to experiencing customs and traditions. Indeed, this requires that travellers are prepared to do so respectfully and that Indigenous peoples would like to share those parts of themselves and their lives with travellers.

Destination marketing campaigns and organisations have an important role to play in actively including those experiences and businesses in marketing material to help generate interest in this segment or meet the growing demand. The inclusion of Indigenous-led tourism governance structures to oversee tourism development in their territories can support long-term growth of tourism in those areas. At a policy level, policymakers can support this by being intentional in their inclusion of Indigenous voices and priorities as new policies are written and existing ones are refined. Policies can provide necessary incentives for inclusion and, where possible, this tool should be used for the upliftment of people.

## CONSIDERATION 5: Specific and targeted financial support

Most businesses require funding of some sort in their life cycles. This may be in the form of investors, loans, or government support. We acknowledge that the kind of financial support governments provide businesses is determined by a range of factors. Our recommendation is that within those parameters and the resources that make that financial support available, specific and targeted support be made available for Indigenous-owned and Indigenous-led businesses. As outlined in Consideration 4, the inclusion of Indigenous businesses in financial support measures needs to be intentional. Indeed, some governments provided critical support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

All governments should consider ways in which long-term support can be made available for Indigenous tourism businesses and operators. The specific support needed can and should be determined by the businesses operating in that territory or region as well as the governments entrusted with the governance and stewardship of those areas. Provisions should be made if Indigenous businesses are to survive in the long-term and build resilience to future shocks. Along with this, additional support in completing any and all required paperwork may need to be made available and should be advertised clearly to all prospective applicants. The support should be made available in whatever ways and amounts are feasible for those providing it while still being meaningful and positively impacting recipients. Support should be fair, visible, and accessible.



Oman





Canada

## Conclusion

It is clear that Indigenous tourism provides mutually beneficial opportunities for Indigenous peoples and communities, the private sector, destinations, and travellers. These Indigenous-led experiences speak to a strong human need to connect and reconnect with each other and with nature. The benefits of these interactions, for all parties, can go beyond the economic as they can support cultural and language preservation and the imparting and inheritance of history, expertise, and pride.

Regular and reliable data is needed to further support advocacy efforts for Indigenous-led activities, while targeted funding needs to be made available to those who need it. Effective examples exist across the world and can provide some lessons for others. Collaboration locally, regionally, and globally will be key to long-term success and respect is foundational to building the structures to facilitate this collaboration.

It is imperative that work and engagements with Indigenous communities are ongoing. To truly effect change and build or maintain the structures needed for future growth in Indigenous tourism, all stakeholders should commit to building strong, inclusive, and resilient long-term relationships.

Effective policies can create pathways for Indigenous communities to benefit directly from tourism activities and contribute to the management and preservation of their traditional and ancestral homes. Integrating traditional ecological knowledge and sustainable practices, investing in targeted education and training programmes and fostering partnerships can lead to more robust and sustainable tourism initiatives and stronger and more resilient tourism growth that protects both people and planet.

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We wish to thank the following contributors for their time and crucial expertise. Thank you for sharing your stories with us and for helping us gather this research.

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back cover: Local girl - traditional attire. OMRAN Group



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Oman

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