12.1: Indigenous People in Canada

In previous chapters, you’ve learned that Indigenous tourism is an increasingly central part of BC’s tourism economy. In Canada, tourism operations that are majority owned and operated by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people comprise this segment of the industry (Butler and Hinch, 2007; ITAC, 2020). This chapter explores the global context for Indigenous tourism development, the history of the sector, and important facts about Indigenous tourism in BC, Canada and Internationally.

Figure 12.1 A Haida sculpture welcomes people arriving at Vancouver International Airport.

Today’s travellers are attracted to many global destinations because of the opportunity to interact with, and learn from, other cultures. Visitors to Australia can meet an Aboriginal guide who will help them feel a spiritual connection through a memorable outback experience. In New Zealand (Aotearoa in the Maori language), tourists are often welcomed into a ceremonial community marae, a communal or sacred centre that serves a religious and social purpose in Polynesian societies (New Zealand Maori Tourism Society, 2012).
In the mountainous region of northern Vietnam, traditionally dressed ethnic minority villagers are now opening their homes to international trekkers, thus generating new income for the community. In the United States, visitors to the ancient desert wonders of Monument Valley can enhance their experience in a Navaho-run hotel, enjoying Indigenous cuisine while learning about the cultures of the Native American groups that have lived there for centuries.

**Spotlight On: International guidelines**

In 2016, global tour operator G Adventures, Planeterra Foundation, and the International Institute of Tourism Studies at the George Washington University collaborated to develop a set of practical, international guidelines, “that can be used by any travel company wishing to offer experiences with Indigenous communities.” Read more about [responsible travel with Indigenous people on the G Adventures website](https://www.gadventures.com/about/guiding-principles/responsible-travel-indigenous/).

Explore these guidelines as part of reflecting on your own travel experiences and choices, and better integrating this into tourism product development and delivery: *Indigenous People and the Travel Industry: Global Good Practice Guidelines* [PDF].

Those readers familiar with the first edition of this textbook may have realized the chapter title change from “Aboriginal Tourism” to “Indigenous Tourism.” This adjustment mirrors the official change in Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s newly elected Liberal Government — a decision that reverses the change made by the Conservative Government in 2011 which at the time abolished the use of Indigenous to Aboriginal (from the former Liberal Government). The more recent 2015 change was reported as being sanctioned by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), as well as Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Chair Justice Murray Sinclair (Lum, 2015). The shift in terminology from “Aboriginal Tourism” to “Indigenous Tourism” has also recently occurred in many leading tourism organizations and education institutions within Canada.

For the purposes of this revision there are times when the terms “Aboriginal” and “Indigenous” are used interchangeably, particularity when referring to valuable industry resources created prior to the more recent practice. The changes to the terminology used to identify and refer to Indigenous peoples globally, and in Canada is fraught with challenges, and many of these difficulties are embedded in the oppressive structures or systems associated with colonialism, past and present.

Within the international context, it is worth noting that “Aboriginal” is still commonly used to refer to the Indigenous people of mainland Australia — though its use there is also critiqued for the way it simplifies Australian Indigenous history (Common Ground, 2020). Similar to Indian and Eskimo, the tangled use of Aboriginal is embedded in the power relationships with colonial governments and history. These perspectives point to the geographic and culturally based discrepancies, which affirm the exceptional diversity within and between Indigenous groups.

**Take a Closer Look: Understanding the use of “Indigenous” in Canada**

For additional background and a national media perspective on the use of “Indigenous” in Canada, view this short video: [From “redskin” to Indigenous: Unreserved takes a look at what Indigenous Peoples have been called and what they call themselves](https://www.cbc.ca/11249911508607) (CBC, 2016).

According to the United Nations (UN), there are 370 million Indigenous people globally, representing 5 per cent of the world’s population, and living across 90 countries. The UN defines Indigenous peoples as “inheritors and practitioners of...
unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment”, who have “retained social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live” (npn). Notwithstanding the uniqueness of Indigenous peoples around the globe, they are considered to be among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in the world, and therefore share common challenges related to the protection of their rights as distinct peoples (UN, 2020). The nature of oppression experienced by Indigenous peoples around the globe has been documented, notably by the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and their commissioned research and awareness-building campaign, the State of the World’s Indigenous people (SOWIP) (SOWIP, 2010, 2019).

In 2016 there were 1,673,785 Indigenous people in Canada, this number accounts for 4.9% of the total population, which is up from 3.8% in 2006, and 2.8% in 1996 (Statistics Canada, 2016). Indigenous peoples have lived across present-day Canada for thousands of years and have numerous languages, cultures, and spiritual beliefs. In 2020, there are more than 630 First Nation communities in Canada, which represent more than 50 Nations and 50 Indigenous languages (Statistics Canada, 2016).

What’s in a Name?

There are three groups of Indigenous peoples recognized in the Canadian Constitution Act: Inuit, Métis, and First Nations. Indian (or Native Indian) is still an important legal term in Canada given the on-going, if highly contested and emotionally charged, relevance of the 1876 Indian Act (Gray, 2011).

Recognized as an assimilation tool used by the Dominion of Canada under the British North America Act, the Indian Act gave the federal government jurisdiction over Indigenous lands and was entwined with significant negative impacts on Indigenous cultural and spiritual expression tied to that land that persist to present day (Joseph, 2018).

The Indian Act also held important identity granting consequences, both legally and culturally. As a result many Indigenous people associate “Indian” with government regulation and colonialism, and its use has gone out of favour; this practice is unlike usage in the United States where North American Indian (or Native American) is still common (Wilson & Henderson, 2014).

Inuit have lived in the Arctic region of Canada for countless years. Many Inuit continue to rely on the resources of the land, ice, and sea to maintain traditional connections to the land. The old ways of life were seriously compromised, however, when Inuit began to participate with European settlers in the fur trade. The Government of Canada accelerated this change by requiring many Inuit communities to move away from their traditional hunting and gathering ways of life on the land and into permanent, centralized settlements (Wilson & Henderson, 2014). Today, in spite of social and economic hardships created by this change, many Inuit communities focus on protecting their traditional way of life and language.

Not so long ago, it was common for non-Inuit people in Canada to use the term Eskimo (“eaters of raw meat”) to refer to Inuit people; however, the use of “Eskimo” within the Canadian context is now widely considered insulting and should be avoided (Wilson & Henderson, 2014). That said, this is not the case in Alaska, where the use of “Eskimo” is still common practice (University of Alaska at Fairbanks [UAF], 2020).

Spotlight On: Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami

https://workforce.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Hospitality/Book%3A_Introduction_to_Tourism_and_Hospitality_in_BC_(Westcott… Updated: Fri, 02 Oct 2020 14:05:16 GMT Powered by
Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) is the national Inuit organization in Canada. It represents four regions: Nunatsiavut (Labrador), Nunavik (northern Quebec), Nunavut, and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the Northwest Territories. It is an advocacy organization that represents the interests of Inuit in environmental, social, political, and economic affairs, including economic and tourism development. For more information, visit the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami website.

Métis comes from the words to mix. In the 1600s and 1700s, many French and Scottish men migrated to Canada for the fur trade. Some of them had children with First Nations women and formed new communities, and their descendants became the first to be called Métis. The distinct Métis culture is known for its fine bead-work, fiddling, and jigging. Canadian and international tourists can learn from and enjoy participating in a large number of Métis festivals in most provinces across the country. Today, the infinity symbol on the Métis flag symbolizes the joining of two cultures that will live forever.

**Spotlight On: Louis Riel Institute**

The Louis Riel Institute in Winnipeg is dedicated to the preservation and celebration of Métis culture and supporting Métis in achieving their educational, career, and life goals. Its website features photographs and descriptions of Métis art and handicrafts as well as information about community programs. For more information, visit the Louis Riel Institute website.

**Take a Closer Look: Métis Nation Gateway**

This portal site features information about the Métis Nation, including healing, economic development, environment, electoral reform, veterans’ issues, and more. The portal on economic development leads to information on community development, including a Métis Tourism Policy Paper [PDF]. To explore these resources, visit Métis Nation Gateway website.

First Nations people are Indigenous peoples who do not identify as Inuit or Métis. They have lived across present-day Canada for thousands of years and have numerous languages, cultures, and spiritual beliefs. For centuries, they managed their lands and resources with their own governments, laws, and traditions, but with the formation of the country of Canada, their way of life was changed forever. The government forced a system of governance on First Nations so that they could no longer use their system of government.
Colonial settlement has left a legacy of land displacement, economic deprivation, and negative health consequences that First Nations communities within Canada are actively striving to overcome (Wilson & Henderson, 2014). However, many First Nations communities are working hard to reclaim their traditions, and in many places there is an increasing pride in the resurgence of Indigenous culture.

The entanglement of self-identification preferences used by Indigenous people to name themselves points to an increasingly politically fuelled and culturally empowered Indigenous identity landscape. There is a parallel tension and range of terminology used when referring to people who are not Indigenous to a place. In Canada, these terms include “non-Indigenous” and “Settlers” (Battell Lowman & Barker, 2015). Language and terminology are particularly interesting and important to be aware of and reflect on in the context of tourism studies and activities. There is significant diversity in terms are used across Canada, including within regions and communities.

There is an increasing appreciation that intercultural exchanges can help strengthen cultures at risk and biological diversity, if managed thoughtfully. For example, the growing niche of Arctic cruise tourism has brought both opportunities and challenges to the isolated small communities of Canada’s rugged Arctic coast. In recognition, the World Wildlife Fund produced a Code of Conduct for Tour Operators in the Arctic, and for Arctic Tourists. In part, it reads:

Respect Local Cultures:

- Learn about the culture and customs of the areas you will visit before you go.
- Respect the rights of Arctic residents. You are most likely to be accepted and welcomed if you travel with an open mind, learn about local culture and traditions, and respect local customs and etiquette.
- If you are not travelling with a tour, let the community you will visit know that you are coming.
- Supplies are sometimes scarce in the Arctic, so be prepared to bring your own.
- Ask permission before you photograph people or enter their property or living spaces.

(WWF International Arctic Programme, n.d., p. 2)

Wilson & Henderson’s (2014) *First Peoples: A Guide for Newcomers* [PDF] serves as an excellent introductory resource for tourism professionals who want to know more about the complex socio-political issues surrounding Indigenous peoples in Canadian history and present in society today.

**Take a Closer Look: Foundations Guide**

This *Pulling Together: Foundations Guide* is also an excellent resource for understanding more of the background and context about Indigenous people within Canada, and changes underway. This was created as “part of an open professional learning series developed for staff across post-secondary institutions in British Columbia to support Indigenization of institutions and professional practice...[and is intended as] a beginning step for those looking to broaden their knowledge about Indigenous peoples across Canada and British Columbia” (Wilson, 2018).

To review this guide for yourself, access *Pulling Together: Foundations Guide*.

Tourism can promote community and economic development; while preserving Indigenous culture and protecting
ecological integrity. However, it is vital for tourism practitioners, scholars, students and policy makers to carefully consider how tourism is involved in the complexities related to colonialism, Indigenous human rights and reconciliation within Canada.