

A scenic sunset over a large body of water, likely a lake or bay. The sky is filled with dramatic, colorful clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and blue. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm glow across the scene. The water in the foreground is calm, reflecting the colors of the sky. In the distance, there are silhouettes of islands and a forested shoreline.

BUILDING THE ABORIGINAL TOURISM PRODUCT

**Development of a Northwest Territories
Aboriginal Tourism Sector**

October 2010



In most of our communities in the Northwest Territories, Aboriginal people comprise the majority of the population. These communities face a number of challenges, including erosion of culture, lack of economic opportunities, threats to places of spiritual, cultural and ecological significance, and breakdown of social bonds holding communities together.

While tourism development is not a panacea that will resolve all these problems, it offers an opportunity to address many of the current issues that Aboriginal communities face.

Tourism offers value in four key areas that can contribute benefits to Aboriginal communities: economic, cultural, social and environmental.

Economic Benefits

- Tourism brings new dollars into a region or community, and is therefore an export industry, equivalent to mining, oil or gas development.
- Tourism allows participation of small businesses in a variety of areas: accommodation (guest houses, B&B's), tour services, restaurants, gas stations, and local arts and crafts.

Cultural Benefits

- Tourism can support the continuation of local culture and language by creating demand for services and products built on authenticity.
- Tourism can encourage interest and pride in younger generations in their culture, history and heritage.

Social Benefits

- Tourism can increase understanding between people from different cultures.
- Tourism can create a bond between strangers, and bring family and friends closer.
- Tourism can bind communities.
- Tourism can be a tool for peace, education, and science.

Environmental Benefits

- Tourism can support the preservation of natural areas of significant ecological and cultural value by creating demand that is carefully managed, for services built around these areas.
- Demand for these services will, in turn, generate financial resources to manage these areas, and demonstrate to government and industry that natural areas have a value to society in their pristine state.

Industry, Tourism and Investment has recognized that there is demand for tourism products based in authentic Aboriginal culture. As there is very little such product in the NWT that is market ready, a real opportunity exists to develop Aboriginal tourism products. However, Aboriginal leaders, businesses and communities have yet to be engaged in formal discussions on how to take advantage of this opportunity.

How Aboriginal people participate in tourism must align with their aspirations, and it must align with the goals of Aboriginal governments, the people they represent, and the Aboriginal business community.

To this end, in 2009/2010, Industry, Tourism and Investment contracted a team to hold a series of consultation meetings in each regional centre of the NWT to discuss Aboriginal tourism. The results of this consultation are available in a report posted on the ITI website at: www.iti.gov.nt.ca/tourismparks/productdevelopment.shtml



One of the major findings of the consultations was that there is strong interest in developing an authentic Aboriginal tourism sector. However, the definition of authenticity should come from Aboriginal people themselves. This definition is necessary to guide development of product that meets market expectations.

The consulting team also made a number of recommendations to develop this sector. Industry, Tourism and Investment (ITI) has developed a response to the recommendations. This response defines how ITI will participate in moving the sector forward. The Department's response to each recommendation is presented in the rest of this document.

It is important to note that ITI is a partner in the process of development of Aboriginal tourism. Success will depend on the active participation of NWT Tourism and the tourism industry, Aboriginal leaders and communities, and Aboriginal people and businesses.



Highlights of the Role of Industry, Tourism and Investment

While the Department's responses to the consultant's recommendations are presented in the following pages, summarized below are important initiatives that ITI will pursue in the development of an Aboriginal tourism sector:

Establishment of an Aboriginal Champions Advisory Council

ITI will support the establishment of a council comprised of individual Aboriginal tourism champions as well as representatives from NWT Tourism and the Tourism Marketing Advisory Committee. The Council will advise ITI on strategic direction, including development of a definition of Aboriginal tourism and product standards. The tourism champions will be Aboriginal people with a passion for tourism, representing the diversity of Aboriginal cultures in the Northwest Territories.



Aboriginal Tourism Champions Forum

ITI intends to host an Aboriginal Tourism Champions Forum in the spring of 2011. The Forum will bring together the Aboriginal tourism champions, Aboriginal leaders, members of the tourism industry, and other key stakeholders to discuss Aboriginal tourism development in the Northwest Territories, and develop key actions. An expected outcome of this Forum will be a consensus on the definition of Aboriginal tourism.

Aboriginal Tourism Product Development Staff

ITI will seek additional funding for a dedicated position to support the development of Aboriginal tourism in the Northwest Territories. This position will provide guidance to the industry in terms of market demand for Aboriginal tourism products. It will also support ITI regional staff, as well as Aboriginal businesses and organizations, in their tourism development efforts.

Business Development Services

ITI will continue to provide financial aid programs and business advice to the tourism industry and Aboriginal organizations for business development goals related to Aboriginal tourism.



The following pages detail the consultant's recommendations for building an Aboriginal tourism product, followed by Industry, Tourism and Investment's responses.



Recommendation 1:

Identify a Central Organization or Lead Organization or Agency

ITI will coordinate the formation of an NWT Aboriginal Tourism Champions Advisory Council. The Council will consist of individual Aboriginal tourism champions, NWT Tourism board members, and the Tourism Marketing Advisory Committee (TMAC), supported by ITI staff. The Aboriginal Tourism Champions Advisory Council members will provide advice and assistance to Aboriginal organizations, groups or individuals in developing Aboriginal tourism products and championing tourism development in their regions.

ITI will seek funding to create and staff an Aboriginal Tourism Product Development Officer position within ITI.

Rationale

ITI is responsible for product development in the NWT, and this includes Aboriginal tourism. The mandate for marketing the tourism industry is contracted annually to the tourism association, NWT Tourism. A separate Aboriginal Tourism agency would compete with NWT Tourism for scarce resources for marketing and administration.

The development of this sector should be driven by Aboriginal people that have a vested interest in its success.



Recommendation 2:

Develop a multi-year Aboriginal Tourism Strategy

ITI will host an Aboriginal Tourism Champions Forum in April or May 2011. The goal of the forum is to develop a multi-year strategic plan.

Rationale

A multi-year Aboriginal Tourism Strategy should be developed by a group of stakeholders that includes Aboriginal organizations, tourism operators, and others with a vested interest in developing the Aboriginal tourism industry.

Recommendation 3:

Establish a clear definition of Aboriginal Tourism

As an outcome of the Aboriginal Tourism Champions Forum, the stakeholders will be responsible for establishing the definition of Aboriginal tourism. ITI will assist by funding and coordinating the Forum.

Rationale

The development of this sector should be driven by Aboriginal people that have a vested interest in its success.



Recommendation 4:

Conduct an Analysis of the NWT Aboriginal Tourism Market

ITI will conduct an analysis of the NWT Aboriginal tourism market, based on existing studies and data, which will be presented at the Aboriginal Tourism Champions Forum.

Rationale

While there are various reports available, there is no single analysis that links all the data together for Aboriginal Tourism in the Northwest Territories.

Recommendation 5:

Develop and Deliver Aboriginal Tourism Orientation Workshops

Currently ITI staff delivers tourism business development workshops and gives tourism awareness presentations in the communities.

Rationale

The ITI regional staff delivers tourism business development workshops and tourism awareness presentations in communities as part of their regular job duties.



Recommendation 6:

Develop Industry Standards and Certification

ITI will consult with NWT Tourism on this recommendation.

Rationale

Industry Standards and Certification are typically done by an industry association.

Recommendation 7:

Define Partnerships and Supports in Aboriginal Tourism Development

ITI will encourage NWT Tourism to establish a subcommittee focussing on Aboriginal Tourism.

Rationale

NWT Tourism is the Destination Marketing Organization for the tourism industry in the NWT and is responsible for marketing all NWT tourism products, including Aboriginal tourism products.

Recommendation 8:

Establish an Aboriginal Tourism Subsidy Program

ITI will be seeking funding through Tourism 2015 to promote the development of Aboriginal tourism. However, general business and tourism specific loan and contribution programs currently exist, which can assist Aboriginal entrepreneurs to develop and grow tourism based enterprises.

Rationale

Currently there are several programs within ITI that offer support to northern businesses including the Tourism Product Diversification and Marketing Program (TPDMP), and the Support for Economic Development and Entrepreneurs (SEED) Policy.

The TPDMP offers funding support to the tourism industry and has identified Aboriginal tourism products as a priority. The program sunsets next year so a replacement funding program would be required.

Aboriginal tourism operators can also access funding through ITI's business funding programs.

Recommendation 9:

Develop Occupational Standards

ITI will work with the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council (CTHRC) on the occupational standards that already exist for tourism and see if it is possible to adapt them for use in the NWT.

Rationale

Skills training, upgrading and certification are core components of CTHRC's mission. They are addressed through their *emerit* tourism training brand, with more than 50 National Occupational Standards, occupation-specific training in paper-based and on-line versions, human resources tools for employers, and professional certification. *emerit* is the most comprehensive industry-developed training available anywhere in the world.

Recommendation 10:

Establish a Hosting Skills Program

ITI will continue to deliver hospitality training workshops in the communities through the NorthernMost Host and Japanese Service Expectations Programs.

Rationale

ITI staff delivers the hospitality training workshops as part of their regular job duties.

Recommendation 11:

Aboriginal/General Tourism Skills Program

ITI will continue to deliver training workshops in the communities. The workshops include a variety of subjects to enhance the technical skills of operators and employees. This training is available to Aboriginal organizations also. ITI will also work with the Department of Education, Culture and Employment in delivering labour force related skills training.

Rationale

ITI is responsible for tourism training and capacity building in the NWT.

Recommendation 12:

Develop a Business Skills Program

ITI and the Business Development & Investment Corporation (BDIC) currently offer various training workshops and seminars on business development to the tourism industry. These are made available to Aboriginal organizations and businesses.

Rationale

ITI funds business skills training as part of its core mandate.





Recommendation 13:

Provide On-site Business Development Assistance

Economic Development Officers (EDOs) will continue to provide business development assistance to all clients, including Aboriginal tourism businesses.

Rationale

EDOs provide on-site business development assistance to all clients, including Aboriginal businesses.

Recommendation 14:

Develop Product Standards

The Aboriginal Tourism Champions will be tasked with developing product standards.

Rationale

The development of this sector should be driven by Aboriginal people that have a vested interest in its success

Recommendation 15:

Promote Awareness of Aboriginal Tourism Product/Business Opportunities

ITI currently delivers tourism awareness programs in the communities, including to Aboriginal organizations. ITI will work with the Aboriginal tourism businesses and organizations on promoting awareness of this sector and advising them of any business opportunities that may arise.

Rationale

ITI has the mandate to promote awareness of tourism product and business opportunities through its headquarters and regional tourism staff.

Recommendation 16:

Classify Existing Tourism “Products” by stage of development

ITI business assistance programs currently recognize lifecycle stages of business development.

Rationale

ITI programs currently classify businesses and products by their stage of development and level of assistance required.





Recommendation 17:

Streamline and Centralize all Tourism Licensing Requirements

ITI is constantly working on streamlining the licensing process.

Rationale

ITI must respect the legal requirements of other agencies and governments. In particular, obligations under land claims must be respected in licensing activities that may impact communities and Aboriginal rights.

Recommendation 18:

Provide Individual Product Development Assistance

ITI regional tourism staff will continue to provide individual product development assistance. Funding is available through the Tourism Diversification and Marketing Program and other programs applicable to all sectors.

Rationale

ITI has programs in place to deliver product development assistance to the tourism industry, in addition to programs of general application.

Recommendation 19:

NWT Tourism to Promote Awareness of Aboriginal Tourism, in Addition to Market Ready Aboriginal Tourism Products

ITI will consult with NWT Tourism on this recommendation.

Rationale

NWT Tourism is the Destination Marketing Organization for the tourism industry in the NWT and is responsible for marketing all NWT tourism products, including Aboriginal tourism products.

NWT Tourism is currently working on an Aboriginal Tourism Guide to the NWT, which will include listings and information on museums, art galleries, tourism operators and festivals/events that offer Aboriginal products or promote Aboriginal cultures.

Recommendation 20:

Develop a Marketing Plan as Part of the Aboriginal Tourism Strategy

ITI will consult with NWT Tourism on this recommendation.

Rationale

NWT Tourism is the Destination Marketing Organization for the tourism industry in the NWT and is responsible for marketing all NWT tourism products, including Aboriginal tourism products.

Recommendation 21:

Develop Marketing Skills Development Programs

ITI will consult with NWT Tourism on this recommendation.

Rationale

NWT Tourism developed “Market Ready – The NWT Tourism Handbook” and offers marketing skills training through its annual tourism conference.

