



Aboriginal Cultural Tourism Business Planning Guide

Checklist for Success



Developed by



ABORIGINAL
TOURISM ASSOCIATION OF BC
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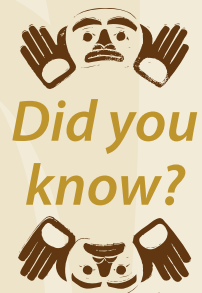
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The AtBC logo includes a pair of hands welcoming you to explore all that Aboriginal culture has to share. The hands in the above symbol are reversed, asking you to pause for important content throughout this handbook. You’ll learn facts and benefit from lessons learned by those who have incorporated Aboriginal Cultural Tourism into their businesses and communities.

Acknowledgements

This handbook has evolved from a number of learning resources that have been developed over the past decade. The core content was originally developed for the (then) Aboriginal Tourism Team Canada, in partnership with the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council (CTHRC), and with the support of the Federal Government. The writers of the original Aboriginal Tourism Business Planning Guide: Checklist for Success were the Aboriginal Tourism Association of BC (AtBC) and the (then) Pacific Rim Institute of Tourism. Appreciation to the developers of the Aboriginal Cultural Tourism: Checklist for Success (O'Neil Marketing and Consulting, editor), for additional useful content. A number of Aboriginal tourism operators and Elders contributed to the "Experience Taught Me" and "A lesson learned" sections and their words of wisdom (included in this new handbook) still hold true today.

The Aboriginal Tourism Business Planning Guide was updated in 2010 by the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council. Recently, the Aboriginal Tourism Association of BC (with Small Planet Consulting and North Shore Project Leadership) using excerpts from this updated version, created a resource for the

Belize Sustainable Tourism Program: Belize Cultural Tourism Development: a Handbook for Community Champions.

Demonstrating that industry information is always evolving, some of the new content for the Belize handbook has now also been utilized and adapted for the new Aboriginal Cultural Tourism Business Planning Guide: Checklist for Success—the handbook you are now reading.

Acknowledgements also are given to Sandra White, who served as project manager for this new resource, and to Cheryl Chapman (AtBC) and Terry Hood for writing and editing support. Thanks to Jason Brawn for the effective design. Thanks to Vince Acardi and the CTHRC for their support, and to the Canadian Tourism Commission, Destination BC, Sean Fenzl, and Doug Neasloss for use of photos.

Most of the resources mentioned in this handbook (and many others) can be found in the Aboriginal Tourism collection in the Tourism Online Resource Centre (www.bctorc.ca). We hope you find this handbook of ideas & checklists both useful and inspirational!



Did you know?



One in four visitors to British Columbia is interested in adding an Aboriginal cultural tourism experience to their trip.¹

1. Getting Started: Tourism & You

1.1 Make the Connection

If you're thinking about starting an Aboriginal cultural tourism business, perhaps the idea was planted in your mind by something you saw, read or heard.

You may have noticed that people from all over the world are interested in British Columbia's historical sites, cultural traditions, and natural beauty. Or maybe you know a successful tourism operator in your community or a neighbouring one. Perhaps you've attended and have been inspired at a workshop about business opportunities and want to create a satisfying job for yourself, in a way that promotes the unique cultures of our province.

Whatever your reasons for thinking about a cultural tourism business, it's important that you find out as much as you can before you go too far with your plans. The current 5 Year strategy (see p.6) of the Aboriginal Tourism Association of BC

(AtBC) encourages more people to consider working in this area and providing authentic experiences to visitors.



This guide provides key questions to get you thinking about Aboriginal cultural tourism as a sustainable business choice. The information, resources and checklists presented in this hand-

book will help you learn how to develop, market, run, and sustain your operation.

You may only use some of the information in this handbook. Choose the resources and checklists that best apply to you and your business.

As you work your way through this handbook, keep in mind the following advice:

"There is a lot to learn and do. Don't be overwhelmed. Be patient with yourself, but be ambitious. Be patient with others, but set high standards. When times are tough, smile and remember why you chose this path. And never forget the land, the water, the creatures, the people, and the culture that you rely on for your tourism business."

1.2 Prepare Mentally

To be self-employed you will have to work hard to establish your business. You must develop self-confidence and determination to succeed. You will need the full support of your family. You must set realistic goals and stick with them until they are achieved. If you encounter a setback (you can be sure of these!)—you'll need to turn it into an opportunity. Think positively and strive to succeed!

Sit down with your family and other important people in your life. Explain your plans and specific ways they can support you. Make sure they understand the commitment you're making; and ask them whether or not they are ready to stand by you.



A lesson learned...



“True satisfaction comes when visitors from all over the world share our culture.”

1.3 Develop Your Goals

You'll need to define your business goals early. When you get a moment, sit down in a quiet place and think about this: Why do you want to be self-employed? What is driving you to “be the boss”? Are you ready to make a total commitment to this business? Your goals should be “SMART” ones:

Sustainable

Is the goal compatible with cultural, environmental, social, and financial longevity?

Measurable

How will you know you've reached your goal?

Attainable

Is the goal actually within your reach?

Realistic

Can you achieve the results you want with the resources you have?

Time-Limited

Within what period of time will you achieve it?

As you build on your cultural tourism concept, it may help to think of your goals in these broad categories:

Personal Goals

Business is more than just making money. Personal goals may be making sure there is balance in your life like “spending time with my family” or “providing an opportunity to preserve our language, culture and traditions for my grandchildren.”

Financial Goals

Your business should provide financial return; it is a business after all! Here are some examples of financial goals:

Pay off my debt of \$___ by ___ (set date), pay myself \$___ a month, beginning ___ and set aside an extra \$___ a month to save for ___ (e.g.: expand the business or take a vacation).

Spiritual & Emotional Goals

There should be more to owning a business than personal and financial goals. You may want to leave the world a better place, or teach others about your culture. Others might want to have their business reflect strong moral and ethical values. What are your personal, financial and spiritual/emotional goals for starting this business? Write them down!



**Experience
taught me:**



“You will have challenges when the unexpected happens. Learn and adapt. Be ready to do what it takes to achieve your goals.”

Sustaining Your Motivation

Write down your goals in detail and keep a copy handy. Create a summary of each goal, and post these somewhere you can see them every day. This will help you:

- Stay motivated.
- Track how close you are to achieving each goal.
- Gain support for your business idea/ prepare your business plan.
- Develop a personal plan, and create a support network.

Now that you know more about preparing for your role in developing a cultural tourism business, let's define exactly what we mean by “tourism” and “cultural tourism”.

2. Developing Your Product

A successful cultural tourism business starts with a product or service that has four essential qualities:

- It is culturally authentic.
- There is a solid base of customers or visitors who want the experience
- It has a good chance of being successful and profitable.
- It can be provided at a cost the market is willing to pay.

If you keep these four points in mind when developing your cultural tourism product or service, you'll avoid offering something that few people want to buy. The information below will help you with this important decision.

2.1 Understand the Tourism Industry

Tourism is a huge business worldwide. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) forecasted that in 2012 there would be one billion global tourist arrivals, and many are looking for a cultural tourism experience.²

Many Different Parts

Tourism is an umbrella term for describing a variety of tourism businesses. The tourism economy includes everything from how a visitor travels, what meals they eat, where they sleep, and what activities they participate in during their trip. It also includes the businesses that promote a destination, and the technology (like the internet) that allows visitors to search on-line information about your business.

Six sectors of Aboriginal Tourism



With so many products and services catering to the needs of tourists, it's not surprising that tourism is now considered by many as the largest industry in the world. One commonly accepted definition of tourism is:

"The activities of persons travelling to and staying places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes." – *The United Nations World Tourism Organization*



AtBC's 5 year strategy is to build on the success of the "Aboriginal Cultural Tourism Blueprint Strategy" and take advantage of the current trend towards increased visitor demand for authentic Aboriginal Cultural Experiences. The focus of the strategy will be on:

- Push for Market-Readiness
- Build and Strengthen Partnerships
- Focus on Online Marketing
- Focus on Key and Emerging Markets
- Focus on Authenticity and Quality Assurance
- Use a Regional Approach

2.2 Define Your Product or Service

When you are trying to define what your business is all about, ask yourself the questions in the checklist below. Not all of the questions will apply to you or your idea. Nor will you necessarily be able to answer all of the questions that do. However, going through the exercise of asking yourself each question will help you think through your idea.

- What am I good at? (e.g. fishing, drumming, carving, cooking, sewing, computers, story-telling)
- What do I enjoy doing the most?
- What are my skills, passions and gifts?
- What have I done in the past that will help me with this project?
- What kind of support can I get from my family, friends, and leaders in the community? (e.g. money, equipment, experience, labour, or mentoring)
- What experiences would I want to offer visitors? (e.g. a chance to look back at the rich history of our culture and an opportunity to enjoy the living culture of today)
- Is there an industry standard for the type of product or service I am planning to offer (e.g. food safety, guide training etc.)?
- Are there organizations or programs in BC that can certify or approve my product or service?
- Do I need community or family permission for sharing stories or cultural practices?
- Do I need a Band Council Resolution (BCR) before going ahead with the project?
- Are there other rules and laws (municipal, provincial, or federal) that I need to know about and follow?
- Should I apply for a patent or copyright (which usually applies to clothing design and similar creative products) for my product or service?
- Can I talk to someone with experience running the same kind of business I am interested in?
- What makes my idea Aboriginal? What makes it unique? How can I enhance the cultural part of my product or service?

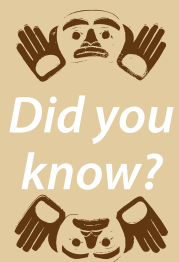
In what ways can I incorporate culture into my business to make it a more special and powerful place?

The Defiant One

Siwash (Slhxi'7elsh) Rock, near Vancouver, BC, is the subject of stories passed down through generations of Coast Salish families.



During the last decade, the tourism industry grew more rapidly than the BC economy as a whole and an estimated 3.7 million tourists experienced some form of Aboriginal cultural tourism in 2010, almost double the number from 2006.⁷



Did you know?



The Power of Place

When we think of a “place” we usually think of a physical location. But a **place** can have more meaning than that. **Place** can also be defined as a location of experiences.³ This is why places evoke in all of us feelings, memories, images. Think of your own favourite cultural tourism places: do they appear in your mind as simply a location or more powerfully, do they conjure up wonderful feelings and scenes of memorable experiences? The following checklist can help you create a unique “sense of place” for your business.

- Does your décor include art, logo and/or design elements from your culture?
- Do you teach guests anything about your culture or language?
- Does your business have an Aboriginal name?
- Do your uniforms reflect the designs of your culture?
- Do you serve Aboriginal cuisine?
- Are there any traditional stories about the territory that you can share with your guests?
- Do you have at least one word in your language that you say every day to your guests?



2.3 Define Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism, done well, strengthens and promotes the unique cultures of the destination, for the benefit of community members and visitors alike. It's one of the largest and fastest growing tourism markets worldwide. According to the UNWTO, cultural tourism accounts for 40% of international tourism and is growing.

Definition and Examples

There are many definitions of cultural tourism: one that works well is:

“Travel to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes historic, cultural and natural assets.”

– George Washington University, for the Belize Tourism Board.

What is a Cultural Tourism Business?

One definition of a cultural tourism business has been developed by AtBC:

A locally-owned business, product or service that authentically reflects a past or present Aboriginal Culture or aspects of the culture to include lifestyle, heritage, food, music, dance, art, craft, architecture, and spiritual beliefs and that form recognized and appreciated part of the tourism industry.

Another useful definition was developed by the Canadian Tourism Commission: (CTC)⁴:

Culture and heritage tourism occurs when participation in a cultural or heritage activity is a significant factor for traveling. Cultural tourism includes performing arts (theatre, dance, music), visual arts and crafts, festivals, museums and cultural centres, and historic sites and interpretive centres.

Cultural tourism experiences usually include a blend of attractions in these broad categories:

Cultural Attractions:



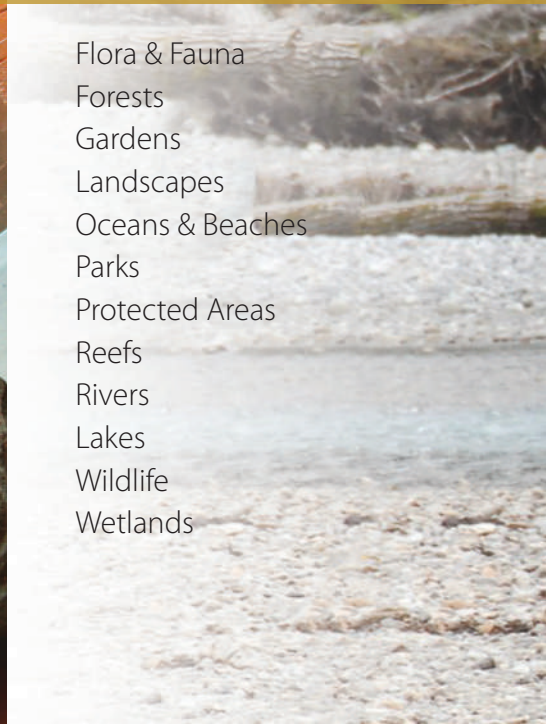
- Arts/Crafts
- Cuisine
- Dance/Performing Arts
- Design
- Fairs & Markets
- Fashion
- Festivals
- Peoples
- Literature
- Music
- Religion

Historical Attractions:



- Archaeology Sites
- Architecture
- Agricultural Buildings
- Battlefields
- Bridges
- Churches/Temples
- Factories/Industry
- Historic Homes
- Main Streets
- Museums
- Monuments

Natural Attractions:



- Flora & Fauna
- Forests
- Gardens
- Landscapes
- Oceans & Beaches
- Parks
- Protected Areas
- Reefs
- Rivers
- Lakes
- Wildlife
- Wetlands



Did you know?



The United Nations reported that in a single year, 940 million tourists travelled to a different country, coming into direct contact with tangible (art, monuments) and intangible (music, food, traditions) culture.

– United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2011

The following are examples of this concept – cultural elements that engage the senses and heighten the visitor’s experience and enjoyment:

- **Cultural demonstrations or events.** Performances or festivals that allow guests to see traditional dress or regalia, watch and participate in dance, hear traditional music and try drumming, meet local artists and performers, taste and smell local food, and learn about local history and culture. Includes seasonal or annual events.
- **Arts and crafts.** Experiences that feature authentic basket weaving, carving, paintings, and other visual art. Includes artist demonstrations, workshops on production techniques, and sales of arts and crafts.
- **Learning programs and opportunities.** Specialized educational programs where children or adults learn about Aboriginal history or culture.
- **Guided interpretation.** Tours delivered by trained, appropriate cultural representatives. Guides must be familiar with protocols for sharing cultural knowledge appropriately.
- **Passive interpretation.** Permanent or temporary displays or exhibits featuring cultural information, audio for self-guided tours, video’s showcasing culture, and interpretive sign programs.
- **Cultural apparel.** Use and adaptation for staff dress, either traditional or modern clothing with cultural designs.
- **Aboriginal cultural design and decor.** Incorporated into physical aspects of the business including: building design, furniture, landscaping, art displays, dinnerware, linens, and signs.
- **Cultural foods.** Traditional foods promoted in a restaurant, food stand, catering business, or for a snack to be included in a tour or packaged for sale.



You might be asking yourself, “How will we provide guests with a quality experience that helps them appreciate our unique culture(s)?” To help you answer that question, let’s look at your potential customers – the cultural tourist.

2.4 Learn About Cultural Tourists

Travelers are Changing

As communities consider diversifying their economies through cultural tourism, they need to be aware of the changing desires of many travelers. Today, an increasing number of consumers want:

- Safe destinations.
- Meaningful, authentic experiences.
- The ability to “participate” rather than “observe”.
- A chance to meet locals.
- Quality combined with good value.
- Comfort and softer adventure activities.
- Unique products and customized experiences.

- Last-minute getaway opportunities, with suggested itineraries.
- The opportunity to plan online.
- Ways to support good environmental and socially responsible practices⁵.

This means that more and more people are travelling to experience authentic attractions and services unique to each destination – a great opportunity for Aboriginal cultural tourism.

The Cultural Tourist

Many travellers to BC can be considered cultural tourists. Knowing more about this type of visitor will help you identify ways your community or destination can create experiences that will appeal to the wide interests of this group.



Recent research has allowed the tourism industry to better target these visitors, and understand their motivations. *The Cultural and Heritage Traveler*, from the US Office of Travel and Tourism Industries, provides this description of the ‘typical’ cultural/heritage tourist:

Well-Educated:

More likely to have college or university degrees than the general traveler, and willing to do homework about their trip, often arriving with detailed prior knowledge of the attraction(s).

Well-Heeled:

Enjoy significantly higher incomes than general travelers, thanks to an older demographic profile and the aforementioned higher education levels.

Well-Travelled:

Take more trips per year over general travelers.

What They Want

Let's consider this kind of visitor, and how you might be able to provide an experience that will meet (or exceed!) their expectations.

Canada's national tourism commission identifies the Cultural Explorer⁶ as one of nine categories of travelers. The Cultural Explorer seeks constant opportunities to embrace, discover and immerse themselves in the entire experience of the culture, people, and settings of the places they visit.

Cultural Explorers:

- Prefer spontaneous events and unique discoveries; they avoid mainstream, touristy locations.
- Are not concerned at all by unfamiliar locations or situations and are willing to endure uncomfortable transportation and facilities to "live" a different culture.
- Avoid skimming the surface of their destinations and are more interested in deep, meaningful experiences than seeing all of the "must-see" attractions.
- Feel some time pressure trying to meet all of their goals and responsibilities.
- Are willing to take risks to reach their goals and are confident in their ability to adapt to change.
- Seek fun and excitement, and are attracted to crowds and social events.
- Place little importance on brand names and status purchases when shopping, and are sceptical of advertising.
- Are ecologically and ethically aware, as reflected in their carefully-selected purchases.

The travel values of cultural/heritage tourists:

- Companion experiences - prefer traveling with like-minded people.
- Living history/culture - enjoy ancient history and modern culture.
- Learning travel - like to learn everything about a place, time or culture.

- Risk-taking – willing to try new things; be adventure-some
- Constant exploration - always planning for the next outing.

These considerations can help Canadian tourism businesses attract cultural tourists with the right mix of product, packaging, and promotions. Now let's consider an example from New Zealand (Aotearoa). It demonstrates how the rich Maori culture is promoted as part of the national identity:

You can learn a lot about this amazing culture by visiting many of our museums and art galleries, but you can also do so, simply by pulling up a chair and sharing a quiet moment with someone who will quite likely be able to trace their lineage (whakapapa) back to the very first canoes to ever land here. From the stirring emotion of the Haka to the thriving and often whacky, kitsch and eccentric art known as Kiwiana – Zealand's culture, arts, music and history are not simply locked away in museums – they're everywhere you look.

– www.newzealand.com/int/culture

This is just one example of ways other countries are developing experiences that meets the needs and interests of cultural tourists. There are many great examples here in BC as well. Make it a priority to learn more about what kind of visitors are currently coming to your community, and decide who you would like to attract. If you do your job right, you'll be bringing many benefits to you and to many others in your community.



Did you know?



Most cultural travelers want to enrich their lives with new travel experiences in which they can learn something new, thus the trips become more memorable and enjoyable to them. For them, a leisure or vacation trip is not complete without visiting a museum, historic site or landmark or attending a cultural event or arts performance.⁸

2.5 Consider the Benefits

A successful, well-planned cultural tourism business can:

- Help preserve local traditions, customs and culture.
- Enhance a sense of community image and pride.
- Teach young people about their history and heritage.
- Help employees develop front-line, management, and entrepreneurship skills.
- Help employees gain transferable skills for other job opportunities.
- Help decrease stereotypes of a cultural community.
- Allow new partnerships to develop with neighbours and other businesses.
- Share local cultural & heritage traditions with the rest of the world.
- Promote the history of the people.
- Generate positive economic impacts for the owners, the community and region.

These can be enjoyed with a well-planned, promoted and managed cultural tourism business, but without careful planning challenges can occur. It's important to carefully consider how your business might affect your community before deciding to proceed.



A lesson learned...

“Running a cultural tourism business is the same as running any business—you have to survive first.”



2.6 Consider the Challenges

It is not easy to start any business, let alone in the tourism sector. As one tour operator says, “I would caution against making the development of a cultural tourism business sound easy.” Review the list of potential challenges below—do any of these apply to you or your community?

Community-Related Issues

- Lack of community awareness and support for the idea.
- Community politics that may interfere with the cultural tourism business.
- Distance between your market (customers) and your location.
- Lack of transportation between your market and your location.
- Concern that too many visitors might result in an erosion of the culture.
- Lack of cultural knowledge and skills in the community.

Management-Related Challenges

- Lack of or difficulty in accessing funds to develop and operate the business.
- Lack of enough qualified people to manage or staff the business.
- Short seasons and weather changes.
- Access to land and land management agreement issues (public vs. private land etc.).
- Actions by other resource-based industries, such as fishing, mining and logging that conflict with tourism needs and values.
- Under-valuation of what you have to offer.

Despite the challenges, most cultural tourism operators share optimism and pride in their businesses. As the owner of an Aboriginal-owned and very successful travel agency says, “The reward comes from making it happen and showing people we can do it.”

This section has covered: what tourism is, your relationship to cultural tourism, the sector itself, cultural tourists, and the benefits and challenges of running a successful tourism operation. The path isn't easy, but we're here to lead the way. If you've decided cultural tourism is for you, or your community, read on!

“We understand the significance of having a sound vision supported by our experience, proven track record, and clear plan to meet the current market opportunities. What we also realize is that the tourism industry supports continued cultural revitalization and strong personal growth for so many of the Aboriginal youth in the Aboriginal communities.”

- AtBC



3. Ensuring Cultural Authenticity

3.1 Recognize what is Authentic

Authentic tourism products are often associated with historical images and, in some cases, stereotypes developed over many years. Today an authentic experience usually reflects a blend between cultural authenticity and what is needed to run a successful business. An authentic cultural tourism experience (as opposed to one created entirely for visitors) is one that:

- Ensures that individual(s), with direct roots to the culture, own and participate in the business.
- Uses traditional and current techniques or methods belonging to the culture (design, art, food).
- Accurately portrays the local customs and culture (needs to be “real” and not an artificial version created for tourists).
- Involves the local community and leaders for guidance and support.
- Respects the natural environment and treats its creatures with respect.
- Provides an opportunity for visitors to interact with the people during the cultural tourism experience.



AtBC has developed an “Aboriginal Cultural Tourism Authenticity” program to profile authentic experiences available in BC. Only businesses that have proven their products and services are genuine are eligible and afforded the use of the workmark. Check out our website for more information www.AboriginalBC.com

The goals of the program are to:

- heighten the awareness and understanding of respectful and appropriate Aboriginal cultural tourism experiences
- increase the number of true, respectful Aboriginal cultural tourism experiences in BC
- encourage understanding of industry standards and operating quality
- promote the “best of the best” for service, quality, and cultural experiences
- improve industry and visitors satisfaction with the BC Aboriginal cultural tourism experience



What Does Authentic Mean to You?

The way you do or make something can be culturally authentic because of who you are as a representative of your cultural group. You might want to think about whether your story or product you are sharing with guests is **historically authentic** (accurately showing the way people did or made things in the past), **traditionally authentic** (demonstrating the way a group of people have done or made things for generations and still do) or **traditionally modern** (as societies evolve, traditions have adapted within a modern context, e.g. modern variations of Aboriginal art or adventure tours). Either way, your story is an integral part of the visitor experience.



“We must never lose sight of what we are offering – authentic Aboriginal cultural products. We have to make sure that the experiences are representative of our culture. This is what people come from all over the world to see.”



A lesson learned...



Knowing What to Share

If cultural tourism business involves sharing historical or traditional practices or stories from your family or community, take the time to ensure family and community leaders are comfortable with this. It's usually necessary to hold a meeting to review your plans and to discuss what information is okay to share with visitors. This will give you confidence, and will provide ideas, buy-in, and support for your business.

You'll need to script the stories and make sure you are describing the historical or traditional information accurately. If you're employing others to help convey stories, have them

memorize the main points to deliver accurately as well. It's important for guests that you go through these steps. You might consider highlighting the permissions and contributions of others with them so they can feel at ease.

This raises the issue of contributions of Aboriginal people in your business – it's very important that your community be as involved in the process as possible. The following checklists will help you think about ways to involve others, and ways to ensure you provide an authentic experience.

3.2 Ensure Participation of Aboriginal People

- Will most front-line staff (e.g. guides, interpreters, entertainers, performers, servers) be culturally appropriate representatives?
- Will all or most management positions be held by people from the culture being shared?
- If not, is there a fair partnership arrangement with an existing cultural or tourism business, and a plan to build strengths in future management staff?
- Are traditional techniques and methods being demonstrated?
- Is the cultural product or service acceptable to members and leaders of the community?
- Are buildings, community design, infrastructure or other facilities based on traditional cultural designs?
- Are the arts and crafts offered for sale true representations of your culture?

“It was challenging at first, but at the end of the day, the Elders made the decision - some cultures and languages are at risk of disappearing; tourism gives young people a chance to learn about our culture and teach others.”



Did you know?



Recent research from AtBC tells us that tour operators are seeing growing consumer demand for authentic cultural experiences and would consider offering or expanding Aboriginal experiences as part of their packages.

3.3 Follow Traditional Customs, Culture and Interpretation

- Does the product or service accurately reflect the culture you are representing?
- Are you representing your own cultural dances, stories, products, etc.?
- If you are borrowing from another's cultural heritage, do you need to provide credit to that heritage?
- Is local language (and text) and music to be used whenever possible and appropriate?
- Do you offer accurate information about the local culture? How do you know it is accurate?
- Are culturally-appropriate design elements used whenever possible (brochures, signage, flags, banners, websites, menu boards, etc.)?
- Will local people be involved in the production of crafts and the preparation of traditional foods?
- Will historical events be portrayed from the local perspective?
- Will visitors be able to interact with local people? How?
- Will you have traditional foods available on site prepared using traditional methods?

This section presented you with checklists to guide you in developing an authentic and unique Aboriginal cultural tourism business. Once you have determined the business you are interested in starting, you are ready to take a look at how to minimize the impact your business can have on the community and environment.



“The parts of our culture that are suitable for sharing are often difficult to determine because many laws and regulations regarding sacred practices are unwritten—they are based on verbal and family histories. Take the time to learn what is appropriate to share with your guests.”



Experience taught me



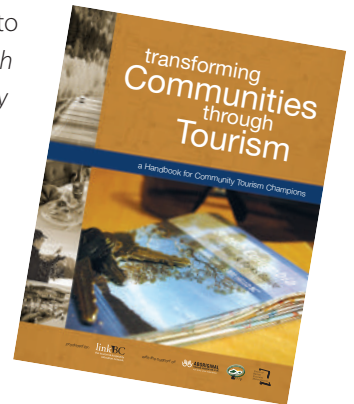
4. Involving Your Community

Community support for your tourism project is essential. As one Elder explains, you cannot develop or run a cultural tourism business without involving your community: “Your business will be showcasing your culture, heritage, and inheritance. Because these belong to the entire community, the community should have some input.” Here are three questions to help you start thinking about community involvement.

Community Involvement

- Do people in the community understand and support the proposed project?
- When new products are being developed, how do you involve the *keepers of the culture* in the development of the idea?
- Does the proposed project or business reflect the values of the community?

You may also want to refer to *Transforming Communities through Tourism: a handbook for community champions*. This is a handbook that provides practical information and guidance on community-based tourism planning and development. Download at no cost from www.bctorc.ca



Did you know?



Aboriginal cultural tourism in BC is growing. Entrepreneurs and communities are proposing well over 70 new tourism businesses with many existing businesses planning to expand by adding more cultural experiences.⁹



4.1 Talk to Your Cultural Leaders

Before moving forward with your idea, it's especially important to pay attention to your community's *keepers of the culture* (leaders, Elders, etc.) because they:

- Are guardians of the culture.
- Represent the continuity of traditions.
- Are sources of spiritual strength.
- Can often identify what is and is not appropriate for business use and development.
- Provide support and guidance for your idea.

Involving *keepers of the culture* in your early planning will help ensure that:

- Your proposed product or service will have cultural authenticity and integrity.
- Your use of land and resources will satisfy community standards and be conducted in a culturally sensitive way.
- The development of your business will fit in with long-term community planning.
- Your wider community will be more likely to support your business and welcome your visitors.

4.2 Work to Build Community Support

When you are working to build community support, ask yourself the following questions:

- Are there community guidelines or principles for tourism business development that I need to know about and follow?
- Do I need a written agreement that sets out what the community and I expect from each other?
- Have I helped community members understand what an Aboriginal tourism business is all about?
- Have I raised community awareness about my project?
- Who are the people in the community I want to influence? Have I talked to them about my project?
- Have I talked to Elders about my project?
- Have I talked to community leaders and the heads of family clans?
- Have I invited the Band Chief and Council and the Hereditary Chiefs to comment on my project, either formally or informally?
- Have I listened to everyone's suggestions and added them to my plan whenever possible?
- Have I made sure that the community is willing to share the elements of the culture that I plan to share with visitors?
- Have I made plans to give something back to the community (e.g. employment, road access, building improvements) in return for its involvement and support?
- Is there a place in my project for children and young people from the community?
- Is there a place in my project for Elders from the community?

4.3 Encourage Community Tourism Planning

Your proposed cultural tourism business won't exist in a vacuum. It's important to understand, encourage, and support your community's overall tourism development success. Consider taking the following actions as you develop your cultural tourism business idea:

- Support a community tourism planning process to pull together local residents
- Seek input from a broad range of stakeholders—everyone impacted by increased numbers of visitors.
- Clarify roles and possible ways to cooperate sooner rather than later.
- Help prepare children and youth with skills for tourism and community development.
- Join with other businesses to create a unified local voice for external relations and communications.
- Maintain the ability of community members to keep living and working in the area.
- Protect the wilderness and waters as primary resources for all local economies.
- Commit to ensuring the safety of visitors and locals.
- Work with others to establish, and communicate, clear messages about your community to visitors.
- Consider the first impressions visitors will have. What can be done to make these as positive as possible?
- Encourage friendly and respectful relations between residents and visitors.
- Prepare your visitors for local realities before they arrive.
- Manage for gradual growth that matches local capacity.
- Commit to preserving the features that attract locals and visitors alike.



A lesson learned...



“When you have more than one member from the same community involved, you are likely to have enlisted the support from two or more families.”

“We found that first the kids came to check things out. Then the adults began to show interest. The power and influence of kids can never be underestimated.”

“Everyone in the community can be an ambassador for our cultural tourism businesses.”



Experience taught me:



“I should have looked for community involvement at the very beginning.”

“You can’t run a cultural tourism business without community support. You may end up with feelings of jealousy and resentment that eventually lead to problems.”

4.4 Prepare Your Guests Before they Visit Your Community

When a guest arrives to stay with you, it may be the first time they are introduced to your culture, your area, and your language. As local residents and hosts, it’s your duty to help them feel comfortable, and to share ways to be respectful of your culture and environment. You can start this process long before the guest arrives at your business. Some of the things you can do are listed below. Not all of these practices will apply to all cultural tourism businesses – in reviewing these try to think of additional ideas that might apply specifically to your business idea.

Provide Pre-Trip Information to Reduce Cultural Impacts

- Are guests provided with an outline of what to expect from their cultural experience? Does this include an outline of acceptable behaviour and etiquette while at the site?
- If you have a hotel and travel trade partners (tour operators and wholesalers) do they know what cultural information can be shared and are they encouraged to communicate these limitations accurately to their visitors before they visit?

Protect Sensitive Cultural Activities and Places

- Have you taken the appropriate steps to ensure that culturally sensitive activities and places are protected from visitors and others? And if appropriate, interpreted?
- Can your management and staff demonstrate they have a clear understanding of why the activities and places are sensitive? Do they also have cultural knowledge to be able to describe the significance of the sites that are sensitive?
- Has your business undertaken measures to protect, preserve and respect the sensitive cultural activities and places in and around the site? What are they?
- Have your guides and front-line staff been trained to minimize impacts in culturally sensitive areas?

Contribute to Education and Awareness within the Tourism Industry

- Are your tourism partners provided with information on the cultural differences of local people and sensitivities in dealing with and working with local culture, community, and businesses?
- Is your business actively involved in the broader tourism industry in your region? And, where appropriate, do you help share the local tourism perspective with others?

“Our vibrant Aboriginal cultures are anchored in the past and constantly evolving.”

Refer to the checklists in the next section for more good ideas about ensuring your business, and your community, prosper culturally, socially, environmentally, and economically as tourism is developed. With this firm foundation and partnerships in place, you can move forward with your specific cultural tourism business idea.

5. Thinking About Sustainable Tourism

Across the globe, tourism professionals are considering the impact of our activities on the environment, and tourism’s contribution to climate change. Much work has been done to create more “responsible” or “sustainable” industry practices. As a cultural tourism provider, you’ll want to develop and run a successful business that will benefit future generations, and not leave a negative impact.

Sustainable practices have long been a part of Aboriginal culture and lifestyles, but in recent times, the goal of reaching sustainability has grown in importance and complexity. This requires achieving a balance of the “four pillars” listed below, which may result in compromises and sacrifices:

- Cultural Sustainability
- Social Sustainability
- Environmental Sustainability
- Economic Sustainability

Sections 3 and 4 reviewed the concepts of cultural and social sustainability. This section discusses environmental and economic sustainability.

5.1 Practice Environmental Sustainability

Uncontrolled tourism can result in negative environmental impacts. Pollution, energy waste, disturbance of wildlife habitat, garbage, site overuse or viewscape destruction are just some impacts that must be managed. To be an environmentally sustainable business, you must undertake and commit to activities that minimize impact, and help return the environment back to its natural state.

To be responsible, a cultural tourism operation (small or large) should address and minimize the environmental impacts throughout the development of the business—from idea to design, planning, construction, and implementation. The checklists on the next page should be useful to you:

The Natural Environment & its Creatures

- Could this project continue for years or generations without damaging the environment?
- Could the environment sustain more than one operation of this kind?
- Does the proposed project give something back to the environment?
- Do we have sustainable tourism practices built in to the operation?
- Minimize environmental impacts during developmental phases.





Findings from the Canadian Tourism Commission’s (CTC) recent Global Tourism Watch Survey revealed a growing number of the nation’s core markets are interested in sustainable tourism and are willing to pay a premium for sustainable travel markets.

- Is the development of all structures and facilities in compliance with the appropriate environmental standards?
- Did you obtain all the appropriate licenses, permits and approvals (regulatory and legal) for the development of the business?
- Were the buildings and other facilities situated and designed to minimize site impacts and respect the natural environment?
- Did the layout and design of the site involve visual analysis to identify important views?
- During site development was there a program in place to preserve and protect the sensitive features of the natural environment including vegetation, views and wildlife habitats?
- During the building stage, does your business have at least three of the following measures?
 - Energy sourced from renewable energy power.
 - Site erosion kept to a minimum.
 - Minimized excavation/digging.
 - Locally-sourced and recycled building materials.
 - Local construction techniques applied.
 - Construction staff briefed on the cultural background and protected cultural sites.

Reduce and Avoid Environmental Impacts During Operations

Do you practise green activities such as the ones listed below?

- Recycled paper products used.
- Natural materials used.
- Environmentally-harmful products avoided (e.g. cleaning supplies).
- Non-recyclable containers (canned drinks and foods, non-recyclable containers) avoided.

- Paper, cardboard and glass recycled.
- Organic waste composted.
- Food and materials purchased in bulk or refillable packaging
- Food is sourced locally.

Do More for the Environment

- Do you use alternative energy sources such as solar power, or wind power?
- Do you follow POWERSMART ideas?
- Was landscaping of the site constructed with locally occurring (indigenous) plant and shrub species?
- Do you demonstrate concern for water preservation through the following?
 - Low-flush toilets used.
 - Rain water collected for non-potable uses.
 - Sewage effluent/liquids repurposed for other use.
 - Grey water (waters previously used) repurposed for other uses.
- Do you ensure measures are taken to minimize sound pollution?
 - Vehicles not left idling unnecessarily.
 - Service and maintenance facilities situated away from public areas.
 - Noisy activities minimized to the extent possible.
- Does the business have a policy to minimize air pollution (e.g. banning the burning of garbage, eliminating the use of aerosols, reducing vehicle emissions)?
- If a municipal system water or sewage is not used, is there a wastewater treatment program used?

These are just some of the numerous ways your business can leave a smaller footprint.



**Experience
taught me:**

“Our First Nation wanted to jump into the cultural tourism canoe, but like climbing into a real canoe, we realized we had to do it slowly and carefully.”

Manage the Environmental Impact

It's important that your staff monitor environmental impacts and take action when necessary. Make sure you include responsible business operations in your business plan.

- Have you reviewed “Green your Business: Toolkit for Tourism Operators” produced by the Tourism Industry Association of Canada? www.tourismvi.ca/pdf/best-practices/green_your_business_en.pdf
- Do you review your impact on the environment each year, and ensure efforts are made to reduce impacts?

Minimize Environmental Impacts from Guest Activities

- Are staff and guides trained to help guests understand how to minimize their environmental impacts?
- Is accurate information given to guests so they can appreciate local flora and fauna?
- Do you know the physical capacity of your site in terms of people, waste, power?
- Is there ongoing monitoring for overuse of the site?

Contribute to an Environmentally Responsible Planet

- Do you contribute (either financially or in-kind) to broader regional conservation and preservation efforts?
- Is a portion of your guests' fees dedicated to broader conservation and/or preservation efforts?
- Is there research on the environmental impacts from your operation?
- Do you re-vegetate or regenerate disturbed areas?
- Is there a fire management program?
- Are guests encouraged to participate in conservation initiatives?
- Are you involved in partnerships with local/regional conservation groups?

“

After the collapse of fishing, people sold their boats and there was not the same involvement or connection to the land as there used to be.

We need to get back to that and tourism is one way to do it.”

”

5.2 Ensure Economic Sustainability

All of these practices are meaningless if you lose money and are forced to close your business. You must be economically viable to provide benefits to your community, other businesses and individuals outside the tourism industry. The idea is to produce as much economic benefit as possible to the community and region without negatively impacting the culture, community or environment.

Support the Community— Employ Local People

- How many of your employees are local?
- Do local Aboriginal people represent at least one-half of employees, or do you use this number as a target?
- Do you provide training or information on training programs to locals?

Keep in mind that employment targets may be difficult to achieve in areas where there is a small population, and that qualified professional staff is essential to maintaining a successful operation.

Support the Community – Buy Local

- Were numerous goods and services from local suppliers used during construction?
- Are locally-produced goods the primary content of products used in consumables such as arts and crafts?
- When you contract goods and services do you actively seek and source these services from local businesses?

- Do you encourage your contractors to hire local people or businesses?
- Do you encourage your staff to volunteer and participate in local initiatives?

The last few sections touched on developing your business idea within the framework of culture, community, environment and economic sustainability. Once you understand where your potential business fits in, you're ready to begin the next step of planning.



“We don't just inherit the land from our ancestors—we borrow it from our children.”

– Native American Proverb



A lesson learned...



“People come to see our village and participate in our programs because they are unique, so we have to make sure that we remain unique and true to our culture.”

“Your dreams might be grand, but make sure you start small.
I had to put my personal resources into the business
when I expanded too soon after starting up.”

6. Establishing Your Business: First Steps

Once you've defined what cultural tourism experiences you will offer, and have an understanding of the market and your place in the community, you can take begin creating your business. This section walks you through the initial steps, including: business planning, seeking assistance, and securing funding.

6.1 Prepare a Business Plan

A business plan helps you determine how you'll accomplish the goals you established in Section 1 – it's a road map for you and your Aboriginal cultural tourism business.

Why Create a Business Plan?

A business plan will:

- Test the feasibility of your business idea. (Is your idea a viable (workable) opportunity? Does it provide a culturally authentic experience?).
- Help clarify your goals and objectives.
- Force you to be realistic and thorough.
- Start/get your business on the right track by researching and paying attention to details.
- Secure funding from banks, government funding sources, partners, and others.

What Goes Into a Business Plan?

Your business plan should include the following main sections:

- **Executive summary:** a 1-2 page overview of your entire business plan.
- **Market research information:** what you have learned about your potential customers and any competitors.
- **Product or service development plan:** how you will produce the product or service you will provide. What makes it an authentic Aboriginal cultural tourism business?
- **Marketing plan:** how you'll let people know about your cultural tourism product or service (including your online presence).

- **Operating plan:** how you'll keep your business running over time.
- **Human Resources plan:** who you'll hire and train to work in your business.
- **Financial plan:** how you will earn profits and spend your money (include costing and an operating budget).
- **Contingency plan:** what you'll do if something unexpected happens (bad weather, delayed ferries or flights, broken vehicles, etc.)

Review Your Business Plan

Some plans will have more information in one section than in another. It's often a bigger job than some would think, but it's time very well spent. This is one key step where you may choose to attain some assistance. When you are reviewing your business plan, ask yourself the following questions:

- Have I described my ideas clearly and precisely?
- Have I backed up all my claims with facts?
- Have I summarized what I learned about the tourism industry in my area?
- Have I described my market and how I plan to reach it?
- Have I described my product or service in enough detail?
- Have I included information about my competition?
- Have I included a contingency plan?
- Are my financial projections realistic?
- If I have a partner(s), am I certain there is a good fit between us?

6.2 Identify Sources of Funding and Support

With a business plan in place, it's time to seek the means to make it happen. The most common lenders of funds for businesses are banks and trust companies, development corporations, and family members or friends. There are also public sources of start-up financing for businesses. Before you approach a funding institution or agency (or even your family/friends), ask yourself the following questions:

- Does my business plan contain clear and convincing financial projections?
- Have I looked at the "best case" and the "worst case" scenarios of the project?

- Do I have a strong team to carry through with the plan?
- Do I have some of my own money invested in the project to show my commitment and confidence in the project?

This section has introduced you to the business planning process. If you've taken this step seriously, you're ready to bring your idea to life. Next, let's take a look at the importance of meeting guest expectations in your new business.



***Experience
taught me:***



"I would have put more detail in my business plan if I'd known how many questions the bank manager was going to ask!"

"Any kind of tourism business is not usually a "get rich quick" opportunity. It is often a lifestyle choice that takes hard work and sometimes it may have to be supplemented by doing other work in the off-season."



7. Meeting Visitor Expectations

Studies reveal that customer service is the number one reason people choose, return and tell others of a business. Aboriginal people are known for providing warm hospitality to guests – and visitors will arrive expecting the same from your business. The following introduces you to the *host-guest relationship*, and will help you develop strengths in this area.

7.1 Understand the Host-Guest Relationship, and Ways to Share Cultural Knowledge

The *host-guest relationship* is the meeting place for two cultures that is created when the host delivers a service and the guest responds to the experience. One of the reasons visitors are drawn to an area is to experience the customs, social structure, and artistic expressions of a culture.

This interaction, especially between individuals from different cultures, can be a positive opportunity for learning and making connections, but it can also include challenges. Here are some ideas to help you work positively in the inter-cultural environment of your business:



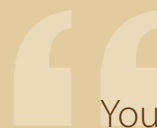
- Do visitors have access to materials that explain the host culture, communities and protocols (e.g. guidebooks, pamphlets, brochures, videos, CDs, books, website information, other materials)?
- Do guided tours or exhibits explain the aspects of the local host culture that differ from that of the guest's culture?
- Are cultural guidelines and signs for visitors posted in common areas?
- Is there a visitor orientation program in place?
- Are you providing accurate information on your culture in more than one way? e.g.:
 - Pre-tour briefings, talks or demonstrations.
 - Cultural displays or exhibits.
 - Guided tours.
 - Self-guided tours supported by print or audio.
 - Performances.
 - Audio or visual presentations.
 - Talks and workshops for guests.
 - Print materials and artwork in common areas.
 - Storytelling.

- Do the interpretive and educational programs and/or exhibits address historical issues from the colonial period, as well as current issues?



- Is interpretation and education programming regularly available in the languages most spoken by your guests, and the guests you would like to attract to your business?

- Do you offer special programs for schools and other educational institutions highlighting local culture?



Your guests will already have an idea of who you are and what they will experience. These ideas will be based on your marketing, books they have read, websites they have visited, friends' experiences and the world's view of your culture. To ensure any myths or misconceptions are clarified, you, as the host, must know how you want to share your culture, and be prepared to deal with the unexpected.



– Cheryl Chapman, AtBC



trailblazers

The **Aboriginal Tourism Cultural Interpretation** program offers entry-level tourism skills training and builds awareness for those launching a tourism career.

The **Aboriginal Tourism Business Development** program provides business planning skills training so communities or individuals can build entrepreneurial spirit and skills to identify and develop tourism business opportunities.

7.2 Provide Staff Orientation and Training

Meeting and exceeding visitor expectations means supporting your team to provide the best customer service and share your culture appropriately. When you are ready to begin training your team, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is there an employee orientation program that includes your business goals, inter-cultural relations, and knowledge about guests and their country of origin?
 - Are employees encouraged to obtain training in specific job skills
 - Are you aware of the training programs offered through AtBC (see *trailblazers* above).
 - When cultural guide training is provided, is it delivered by local peoples?
 - Do you ensure that diversity training is provided to all staff?
- Do you provide all staff with basic customer service skills? Training, such as FirstHost and WorldHost, should help ensure that all those in contact with guests and other operators:
 - Understand the Host-Guest-Place relationship.
 - Make a good first impression.
 - Know their job.
 - Recognize the value of visitors to the business and destination.
 - Know their community and culture.
 - Understand tourism basics.
 - Communicate clearly.
 - Handle problems effectively.
 - Make a good last impression.

Whether your business has a staff of two or twenty people, careful training will ensure they are great ambassadors for your culture.

7.3 Use These Checklists for Developing Your Team

Execution of your business plan will rely heavily on how well you build, support, and train your team. A well-developed human resources (HR) plan is your roadmap to finding, training and keeping a good team of employees, even if your team never grows beyond a few people. We hope these checklists will help:

Create Your Human Resources Plan

Your HR plan should provide the answers to the following questions:

- Have I identified how many employees I will need to start my business?
- Have I identified how many employees I might need as my business develops?
- Have I developed a clear understanding of the skills needed to make my business succeed?
- Have I learned what tourism-related training programs are available in my region? www.studytourism.bc.ca
- Do I know which tourism training tools (for example, occupational standards, workbooks and videos) can be used as part of my plan?
- Have I made plans for ongoing training, not just training in the start-up phase?
- Have I planned how I will reward and motivate my staff members?
- Have I identified what records will be required in terms of compensation and reporting for taxes, benefits, etc.?
- Have I determined how I will help employees understand and promote the Aboriginal cultural elements of our business?

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tourism in



Hire the Right People

When you are ready to seek out your opening team (many or a few), use this checklist:

- Have I talked to other local employers and reviewed information on finding employees?
- Have I talked to community members to identify potential employees?
- Are there enough people in my area who are capable of becoming good employees or will I need to look elsewhere?
- Do I have clear job descriptions for each position I want to fill?
- Have I looked at the way jobs are described in recognized tourism occupational standards? www.emerit.ca
- Have I decided how I will screen potential employees? Will I use a test, an interview, or both?
- Do I have employment application forms?
- Have I allowed enough time in the hiring process to check the references of all potential employees?
- Will new employees have a probation period, that is, a few months when they will be "on trial" to see if they are good staff members?
- Do I have a code of conduct for my employees? Do I have other policies (for example, dress codes) that my employees need to know about?



A lesson learned...



"You need to find out as much as you can about what your customers want before you start your cultural tourism business."

"We have to work hard to destroy some of the stereotypes about our people. Our tourism business helps to do this."



The host-guest relationship involves more than a financial transaction—it involves social, cultural, educational, and even spiritual transactions.



Train Your Team Properly

As you develop training for your team, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does the training include information about the personal and Aboriginal cultural values I want my business to demonstrate?
- Is the training content relevant to the work my employees will be doing?
- Do I have an orientation and training schedule for new employees?
- Have I made plans for regular, ongoing training and professional development for all employees?
- Do I have an employee handbook or manual that describes our business procedures and policies?
- Have I made plans to use customer service training programs that focus on the unique cultural elements of my operation? Are all team members **FirstHost** trained?
- How am I going to evaluate the effectiveness of my training programs?
- Do I have a process to identify training needs of our team? Will I need to employ someone to do this job?
- Have I explored ways that local post-secondary institutions or private training organizations might help me with training? www.bctorc.ca
- Have I considered teaming up with other tourism businesses to develop training programs?
- Do I have a plan for further professional and management skills development for myself?

**tourism online
resource centre**
your link to tourism & hospitality resources

Keep Your Staff Engaged

Some turnover of staff in a tourism business is expected. People leave for family reasons, to return to school or to pursue other job opportunities. However, if your staff leave because they're unhappy with working conditions, your costs will add up, both in the extra energy required to replace team members and the extra cost to train them.

When you are planning ways to motivate, reward and keep your team members, consider:

- Offering the same level of pay and benefits that other employers in the area are offering for similar jobs.
- Creating a work environment where employees feel they are valued.
- Asking employees for input into decisions related to the business.
- Offering training or upgrading opportunities when employees need them.
- Rewarding outstanding employees, formally and informally.
- Regularly check on the how employees are feeling about their jobs and the work environment.
- Scheduling enjoyable activities for staff.
- Encouraging employees to pursue industry certification if available for their role. www.go2hr.ca





Experience taught me:



“It’s not your product or how much money you start with that decides whether you’re going to be successful—it’s the people you choose.”

“You can train for skills but it is more difficult to train for attitude.”

7.4 Collect Guest Feedback

Aboriginal cultural tourism business owners always need to be tuned-in to the satisfaction levels of their guests.

- Do you have regular discussions with guests to see if they're satisfied with your products or services?
- Do you ask for feedback from the travel trade?
- Are front-line staff encouraged to share and discuss feedback received from guests with management?
- Is there a system for collecting customer comments and suggestions – for example, comment cards or suggestion boxes?
- Do you have a way to encourage customer feedback online? (e.g. TripAdvisor)
- Do managers meet regularly with employees to discuss customer satisfaction and provide feedback on the employee's performance?
- Are visitors made aware of changes that result from their comments or other sources? How is this done?
- Do you conduct research on a regular basis to obtain feedback from customers?

Tracking guest feedback will help you improve your performance as hosts over time. This is accomplished by ensuring your staff have the appropriate level of authority, knowledge and skills to build positive connections with guests.

7.5 Build Good Relationships

Businesses that value the relationship between the guest and host will be more likely to succeed. Ask yourself:

- Are there policies and programs in place to resolve customer concerns, and do front-line staff have the authority to do this themselves?
- Have front-line staff been trained and tested on the procedures for handling customer concerns?
- Do you have a customer reward program in place? (e.g. frequent purchaser discounts, etc.)
- Do you demonstrate appreciation to your guests for their business, ideas and comments? (e.g. guest discounts, photos of guests on tours, small authentic souvenirs and mementos).

These skills are offered very effectively through BC's WorldHost Customer Service Training



As we've discovered, your team will help share the living culture your business represents. Satisfied guests are the cornerstone of every tourism business. And while word-of-mouth will be a critical tool for increasing your business, it's important to also have an ongoing marketing plan – one that drives ever-increasing numbers of guests to your doorstep.



I gained more confidence, presentation skills, awareness of our First Nations history and, most importantly, my own cultural identity. The Trailblazers' Train-the-Trainer program allowed me to teach other participants from First Nations communities around the province of BC. This is an amazing opportunity to use inter-cultural sharing, which is the foundation for tourism.



8. Marketing Your Product

Whether you open a traditional food stand, or a culturally-themed hotel, you will need to get the word out to potential visitors.

Marketing involves promoting and selling your tourism products or services. A vital component of your business plan, and your marketing activities, is market research. This is the process of finding out who your potential customers are (your market) and what they want.

8.1 Do Your Market Research

Spending the time to do market research helps you learn some important information, including the:

- Kind of people most likely to buy your cultural tourism product or service – these individuals become your “target” market or customer group.

- Size of your target market and where they are located.
- Best way to attract the attention of your target market.
- Best way to persuade people to become your customers.
- Best way to attract the attention of tour operators, agents and wholesalers in both domestic and international markets.

Once you know more about the nature of your target market(s), you can decide what kind of advertising campaign you need to create to promote your products or services. You can then describe this campaign in your marketing plan.

8.2 Be Sure You Are “Market Ready”

Today’s tourists are more complex than in the past, and have higher expectations. Your potential guests are internet-savvy and have the world at their fingertips. Operating standards have been developed to help you stay competitive. These have been broken down into 3 categories of “readiness” – like three rungs of a ladder your business can climb. Let’s consider each one:

Visitor Ready

This refers to a business with all of their licenses, permits and insurance in place in order to operate legally. It includes the need to demonstrate:

- Good standing of all applicable business licenses, insurance, and legislative requirements.
- A staffed business location with a set schedule of operating hours.
- A contact telephone number, email and availability year round by providing an automated response.
- Clear on-site signage.
- Clean facilities, well-maintained equipment and welcoming hosts.

Meeting this standard means you qualify for a business listing in tourism directories, but you might not be considered ready for cost-shared promotions with other tourism businesses.

Market Ready

The business must meet “visitor ready” criteria plus demonstrate:

- A published pricing policy for experiences and products.
- A published consumer billing, payment, and cancellation policy.
- Marketing materials such as brochures, rack cards, and a strong online presence.
- Site-based parking in close proximity.
- A 24-48 hour response time; or less, to inquiries and a 24 hour response time to reservation/booking requests.
- Means to accept reservations by phone, fax, and e-mail, and provide same-day confirmation of booking arrangements.
- High resolution images and video footage for promotional and training purposes.
- Frontline staff trained in customer service.

This is the basic level of readiness to conduct *tourism* operations. Meeting this standard would qualify you for a business listing in a tourism directory, and the potential participate in cost-shared promotions for local and regional markets. In order to enjoy these benefits, your business must be an active stakeholder or eligible to become a stakeholder of your local or regional tourism association.

Export Ready

These businesses build on the above criteria, while using sophisticated travel trade distribution sales channels to attract out-of-town visitors. They understand commission or

net rate pricing, and agree to trade bookings and a cancellation policy. They provide highly reliable services to all guests, particularly those travelling with groups.

The business must meet “visitor and market ready” criteria plus:

- Be in business at least one year, with a proven track record for safe and professional operation.
- Demonstrate an adequate budget and marketing plan that includes national and international tourism operators.
- Understand the roles played by receptive tour operators, tour operators, travel wholesalers, and retail travel agents and understand rack or retail pricing, agent commissions and wholesale net rates at each level.
- Be willing to include receptive tour operators in your marketing and sales plan and provide contracted wholesale net rates to receptive tour operators.
- Provide detailed pricing and program information to tour operators and wholesalers at least one year in advance of selling season.
- Be prepared to set up billing arrangements with the tour operator, wholesale agency or receptive tour operator.
- Carry adequate insurance (discuss this with your receptive operator as sometimes they can add suppliers to their existing policies at nominal cost).
- Provide support (free or reduced rates) for international media and travel trade familiarization tours.
- Offer currency exchange rates consistent with industry norms.

Meeting this standard would qualify you for a business listing in a tourism directory. You would typically be entitled to participate in all cost-shared marketing programs, including programs directed at overseas markets and/or the travel trade. If you plan to pursue group business, ensure you're able to accommodate and adapt to the needs of the market (e.g. tour bus access and parking, clean washroom facilities, maximum group size, group pricing, and frontline staff that speak the language of your target markets).

Different markets will expect different levels of readiness. Are you looking to attract backpackers? Then a visitor-ready attraction might meet their needs perfectly. Do you want high-end cruise tour groups to frequent your business? Then an export-ready product is the best match for this group. Take the time to carefully consider your potential markets, and develop your marketing plan accordingly.



**A lesson
learned...**



The basics of running an Aboriginal cultural tourism operation are the same as for any business: attracting customers and keeping them happy.

8.3 Prepare a Marketing Plan

Preparing a marketing plan, like many of the building blocks for a successful cultural tourism business, takes some effort, and you may wish to get professional advice. The essence of any marketing plan is the “*Four Ps of Marketing*”:

- **Product:** what you make or do for your customers (in cultural tourism it is often referred to as an “experience”)
- **Price:** how much you charge for your product or service.
- **Place:** where you distribute your product or serve your customers.
- **Promotion:** how you let people know about your product or service (for example, through advertising, publications, social media or direct selling).

When using the four Ps to prepare your marketing plan, ask yourself the following questions:

Product

- Is my product or service culturally authentic?
- What are the most attractive features of my product or service?
- Is it clear what the benefits are for customers to choose my product?
- What sets my product or service apart from anything offered by my competitors, both in cultural and non-cultural tourism businesses?

Price

- Who are my competitors and what are their pricing strategies? How will I find out?
- What is my approach to pricing? Am I going to match the price offered by my competitor, offer a price lower than my competitor's, or provide better quality and service at a higher price?
- How much of a profit margin do I need?
- Will I be offering regular or occasional discounts or sale-prices, and have I taken this into account in my plan?
- What commission rates are expected if I use tour operators, agents or wholesalers?
- Have I considered charging different prices for different types of customers?

Place

- Where do most individuals in my target market live?
- What are their preferences in websites, magazines, newspapers and TV/radio?
- Do they travel independently or with a group?
- Where are they most likely to see my advertising?
- Do they book their own tours or do they rely on travel agents and tour operators?

Promotion

- What are **best** ways to promote my business? For example: websites or social media? Advertising in local or other newspapers or magazines? Personal selling? Offering familiarization (FAM) tours for people in the travel business? Discount sites such as “GroupOn”? (Remember, not all will be effective for your business).
- Does my business name clearly indicate what my goods and services are?
- Do I have a business card and brochure that emphasize the cultural elements of my business?
- Can people reach me easily?
- Do I have a website or a page on someone else's site that describes my business? Are the benefits of purchasing my product or service clear, and appealing, on this site?
- Do I have clear roadside signs to guide visitors to my business?
- Do I have materials (for example, brochures or videos) that educate and inform customers about our culture?
- Do I have materials that tell visitors what they need to know in advance (for example, how to find my business, what to wear or bring when they come, what to expect regarding accommodation and meal arrangements, what level of cultural contact to expect, and whether a visitor code of conduct exists)?
- Do I need to hold an information or orientation session for visitors when they first arrive?
- Do I have something my guests can take home that will remind them of my business (for example, a hat printed with our business name)?
- Do I have a way for guests to provide feedback (for example, a survey form) on their experiences?
- Do I need to hire someone to work on sales and marketing?



Did you know?



AtBC will primarily focus on five key markets: British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, California, Germany.

Destination BC's target markets are: Ontario, California, United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, Japan, South Korea.



Experience taught me:



Unhappy customers can do a lot of damage to your business. Make sure you address their issues promptly.



Did you know?



The visitors experience starts with your on-line marketing.

9. Making the Internet Work for You

9.1 Realize the Benefits

Not so long ago, the internet was something small tourism businesses, or those in rural areas without broadband access, wouldn't pay much attention to. Times have changed and even the smallest of cultural tourism operations can now benefit by using internet marketing, and developing a good "online presence".

Developing a website can cost thousands of dollars or you can do it yourself; a Facebook page is free. Consider using an online site like www.wix.com; where you can update, add and



change your information based on what is happening at your location and your region. Small operators that cannot afford their own web-

site can ensure their services are effectively noted on partner websites (AtBC, other DMO's, etc.).

Let customers know about you. Create an 'about' section that accurately describes you and your business. Be honest about what you offer (this is a good place to include in the pre-trip info/etiquette), where your business is located, and how to get there. A connection to Google maps can be imbedded, followed by a list of transportation options to get to your business.

Sell your product or service. This can be as simple as a list with prices or a collection of photos with people participating in what you are advertising.

9.2 Develop an online Presence

Here are key points to consider when developing a strong cultural tourism business online presence:

Content is king. This includes text, images, video and other information. The look and feel and layout of the pages is important. What stories do you want your visitors to see and hear? How does the design and artwork help your goal of promoting the culture?



Keep it simple on a welcoming home page. Ensure the banner at the top includes your business name and an eye-catching image(s). A couple of product/service offerings ("teasers") will create interest in finding out more, and encourage further exploration of your website. Add your social network connections right on your home page. Keep it simple – and don't shy away from borrowing concepts from other websites you like!

Let satisfied customers do the talking. Create a testimonials page or online guestbook. People will respond positively to other people's comments and experiences.



Let guests know how to reach you. With a clear “Contact” page, include your email address, telephone number and mailing address. Important: let customers know how long they’ll wait for a response (24 hours, 1 business day, etc.).

Amplify your message using social media. In addition to Facebook, use online platforms like YouTube, Flickr, and Twitter and emerging technologies that are developed to promote your business. Clients can generate content for you by commenting and liking your pages, and uploading their own videos and images.



Engage in the conversation. As mentioned, sites like TripAdvisor.com allow guests to comment on their experiences. Be sure to respond – whether their feedback is positive or negative! The most important thing is how well, and graciously, you treat your guests online. Thank them for praise, and offer to fix situations for guests who weren’t 100% satisfied. Your online ratings, and reputation, will grow from there.

Whether you’ve built your own site or have content posted elsewhere, here’s a checklist to make sure your online presence is strong:

- Is my content up-to-date and accurate? Do I update daily or weekly?
- Can I develop a website myself? If not, do I know someone who has designed tourism websites?
- Who is my target market and what information will they be looking for on the website?

- What do I want to achieve with my website, and does the design of my home page reflect this?
- How do I let them know my website is available? Is it easy to find?
- How should my website look? Does it have a simple, uncluttered appearance with easy-to-find information and attractive visuals?
- Are the photos I use high quality, and suitable for the website?
- Is my website user friendly?
- Is it attractive, with minimal download time?
- Do I have an email address that reflects my website presence?
- Am I using social media as a tool for connecting with my existing and potential customers?
- Am I tracking how my business is being viewed by my guests/visitors?

The internet is, more than ever, a key part of the marketing plan for any tourism business. We hope this section has inspired you to take charge of your marketing and promotions. Attracting the right customer, at the right time, for the right price is an essential component of your cultural tourism business success.

This next section will wrap things up by providing ideas about ways you can build support as you continue to develop your business.


**Experience
taught me:**


You need to make sure there is a price incentive for customers to try your product rather than your competitor’s. I lost a lot of customers at first because my product was overpriced.



10. Building Your Support and Networks

As you move ahead with your business idea, you'll need to make sure you have support for your efforts. Some reflection about your goals, and then establishing the right contacts, will help ensure this.

10.1 Establish a Personal Support Network

Think back to the first section of this handbook and your goals. Most successful business people have a support network to help them reach their objectives. Who will yours be?



Mentors, Family and Friends

If your business is small, you may wish to seek out a mentor, someone with business experience, who understands what you're planning, and appreciates the importance of strengthening and promoting your culture.

It's important to talk things through as your business develops. A mentor can discuss upcoming decisions, provide a second opinion, or just provide moral support as things get busy and complicated! You may also rely on a trusted family member or friend for support when things get challenging, or to help celebrate your achievements.

You'll know the best support circle to create for yourself. The important thing is to use it...

Professional Advisors & Consultants

If your plans are more ambitious, you may wish to identify a business consultant to assist with development. These professional advisors have advanced business skills and experience. They include food and beverage/accommodation specialists, adventure tourism specialists, tourism planners, architects, urban planners, accountants, museum planners and designers, event managers and many other professions. They may work independently or they may work for a larger consulting firm.

Many new and well-established cultural tourism businesses use consultants for different aspects of their operations. A good consultant can help by taking care of business planning and operating aspects you don't know how to do or don't have enough time to do.

Depending on your level of experience and your needs, you can hire a consultant to do one or more of the following jobs:

- Help develop your business plan and/or your marketing plan.
- Train front-line staff and management.
- Conduct market research and do feasibility studies.
- Prepare a policy manual.
- Recommend marketing strategies.
- Design and develop products for guests.
- Design physical facilities.
- Create a design and communications package for your business
- Recommend operational and financial controls.
- Evaluate performance.

Despite all the potential benefits of using the right cultural tourism business consultant, be savvy! Hiring the wrong consultant can cost you time and money.

10.2 Network with Other Tourism Professionals

It's a good idea to find out who your competitors are, and explore opportunities to meet and learn from them. Tourism/hospitality organizations can help make these connections, and help you meet people in other sectors of the industry. It is often a good idea to work with competitors to increase the overall number of visitors to a region or community.

A network of tourism professionals can be a great source of information, support, and clients. This table demonstrates

how the tourism industry is structured, and the different levels of potential support. While you may not meet personally with international organizations you can certainly explore the cultural tourism resources and ideas available on their websites. Join AtBC and become involved with your local and regional Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO's).

Types of Support Organizations¹¹

Wherever you turn for support, be it professional or family; remember that no successful cultural tourism operator does it alone. Your network can make, or break, your business.

				
Local	Regional	Provincial	National	International
Community-based Destination Marketing Organizations	Regional Destination Marketing Organizations	Provincial Destination Marketing Organizations (e.g., Destination BC and regional DMOs)	National Tourism Destination Marketing Organization (Canadian Tourism Commission)	International Government (United Nations World Tourism Organization)
Chambers of Commerce	Regional District Governments	Provincial Government (e.g. BC Ministry responsible for Tourism)	National Product Sector / Trade Associations (e.g., Hotel Association of Canada)	Private Sector (World Travel and Tourism Council)
Visitor Centres	First Nation Governments	Other Related Government Funded Agencies (e.g., 2010 Legacies Now)	National Industry Organizations (e.g., Tourism Industry Association of Canada and the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council)	International Product Sector / Trade Organizations (e.g., International Ecotourism Society, and National Geographic Sustainable Destinations)
Local/Municipal Governments	Universities and Colleges (Tourism/Hospitality Programs)	Provincial Product Sector/ Trade Associations (e.g., Aboriginal Tourism Association of BC and the BC Hotel Association)		International Industry Organizations (e.g., Destination Marketing Association International, and the International Institute for Peace through Tourism)
Community-based Product Sector / Trade Associations		Provincial Industry Organizations (e.g., Tourism Industry Associations of BC, LinkBC network, and go2)		
Community-based Service Organizations				


Experience taught me:



“You’ve got to know the right questions to ask when hiring a consultant. I made a real mistake and hired the wrong person to write my business plan.”

“I wish I had developed my support network earlier, without this, I wouldn’t have achieved all that I have.”

10.3 Make the Most of the Journey

Aboriginal tourism operators agree that the key to running any business successfully – preparation, hard work, patience, and persistence – all apply to their businesses. But in addition, these operators say that anyone running an Aboriginal cultural tourism business needs to remember the following:

- Maintain your cultural focus – keep your business uniquely Aboriginal by listening to your community's Elders and leaders.
- Start small and keep your costs down.
- Be flexible and adapt your business as needed – pay attention to your guests and make changes based on their suggestions.
- Stay informed about current trends and opportunities in your industry – attend trade shows or conferences and keep in touch with others locally, regionally, and nationally.
- Be active at the local level with other tourism operators.
- Know that running your business is usually a full-time job (and sometimes more than full-time).

Final Words

We started this handbook by helping you define your goals, and we hope by now you have a better sense of where you want to go, and how to get there. Thank you for contributing to BC's future as a sustainable cultural destination by considering a business in this sector. We hope you'll revisit and use the checklists in the handbook as you think about, plan for, and develop your own Aboriginal cultural tourism business. Good luck!

Resources

Aboriginal Tourism Association of BC

www.AboriginalBC.com

BC Tourism Online Resource Centre
(Aboriginal tourism collection)

www.bctorc.ca

Destination BC consumer website

www.hellobc.com

Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council

www.cthrc.ca

go2: BC's Tourism & Hospitality Careers & Training Resource

www.go2hr.ca

BC Small Business Resource Centre

www.resourcecentre.gov.bc.ca

Endnotes

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