SUSTAINABLE INDIGENOUS TOUIRSM SYMPOSIUM

Innovations in Community Based Tourism and Management

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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SUSTAINABLE INDIGENOUS TOURISM SYMPOSIUM: COMMUNITY BASED TOURISM AND MANAGEMENT

THOUGHTS FROM THE THINK TANK

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Sustainable Indigenous Tourism-Innovations in Community Based Research and Management for Sustainable Indigenous Tourism Symposium was held on April 12-13, 2017, on the unceded territory of the Snuneymuxw peoples, at Vancouver Island University, Nanaimo, British Columbia.

The Symposium brought together over 80 students, Indigenous peoples, tourism associations, tourism operators, members of government and academics. The structure was intended to create an interactive forum to facilitate the sharing of knowledge, support community empowerment, cultural expression and economic prosperity within the tourism industry for Indigenous communities within Canada and globally.

As an introduction to discussion and action by and with the attending network of current and future professionals, the second day of the symposium hosted a Think Tank. The purpose of this Think Tank was to engage all stakeholders in developing a strong network to share innovations in sustainable Indigenous tourism. The objectives of this activity was threefold:

1. Identify key challenges and issues facing the development and competitiveness of sustainable Indigenous tourism;
2. Share innovations in sustainable Indigenous tourism amongst all stakeholders;
3. Identify how to support stakeholders in Canada and abroad with the knowledge and tools to develop sustainable Indigenous tourism

The Think Tank was organized into four talking circles, which were visited by each participant. Each talking circle was asked a series of questions. This document attempts to capture the main points raised and the rich discussions of each talking circle. It seeks to synthesize key outputs and information collected with the intention of generating future next steps. It was immediately apparent that the general consensus was that these conversations become irrelevant if they failed to produce responsibility and action. What has been created is a framework to inform future conversations and promote dialogue in forthcoming forums.

The four talking circles focused on the themes of community engagement and leadership; funding; knowledge mobilization and cultural/environmental preservation and promotion. The following is a brief synopsis of the results from each talking circle.

Community Engagement/Leadership

This talking circle focused on discussing the barriers to developing a community based tourism product; how to develop a community based tourism product; and how to engage communities and potential leaders.

Three main barriers emerged through this discussion. The first concerned authenticity and the concept of creating an authentic product. There are fears of positive intentions being misrepresented, fear of portraying an attitude of appropriation and/or suggesting assumptions of homogeneity between cultural groups. The second barrier concerned reciprocity. Due to Canada's tumultuous history with their Indigenous peoples there was the lack of trust between parties, limited engagement opportunities and the concern of all voices being heard. Some of these barriers stem as a result of failures of previous scholars/operators to follow through on promises made. The third barrier concerned the lack of, or failure to distribute tangible and human resources with the development of a tourism product. There is a need for credible and educated leadership who consult and clearly articulate processes of tourism development as well as short and long-term strategies.

In discussing how to develop a product the community wants, it was identified the desire to "ask the community" and being mindful of practices, teaching and activities that the community holds sacred. It is also necessary to acknowledge both the community and ecological feasibility. It is important to ensure that all stakeholders were aware and understood the potential benefits and costs of tourism development. Communities should also receive incentives such as the opportunity to be involved in policy development and to create self-governance. In order to create a successful Indigenous tourism industry, future leaders need to be encouraged through training, education and mentorship in addition to creating a safe space for youth to learn of and experience their cultural practices and teachings.

Funding

This talking circle focused on the barriers to funding the development of community based tourism products; how to create partnerships and other forms of support. Many of the participants expressed their frustration in securing funding for their ventures. Strict criteria for grant funding as well as timelines which were incongruent with peak seasons were identified. How to tap into resources that were available such as assistance in grant writing was also identified as a barrier. Funding alternatives through partnerships and micro funds for smaller start up ventures were explored. It was identified that mentorship opportunities would be beneficial as well as the need to support business operations in addition to navigating the grant writing process.

Knowledge Mobilization

This talking circle focused on how to share best practices amongst stakeholders effectively; what training and engagement practices would best serve communities and how to build a strong network for support and sharing of innovative initiatives.

The hosting of webinars and online forums as well as the creation of a tool to distribute checklists, policies and case studies was deemed necessary to mobilize knowledge. Curriculum development and experiential learning that allowed for opportunities of both doing and sharing were also discussed as important tools. One program highlighted as a best practice in this area was the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada Road show or Signature Series, which highlights top operators across the country and provides others in the field a range for measuring success in practices. EMERIT, Canada's online tourism and hospitality training was also discussed as an effective tool for knowledge mobilization. It was identified however that the most efficient method of training occurred in the community - on site and by culturally competent practitioners. Such training allows for specific needs to be targeted and addressed

at the right level supporting the alignment of outcomes by and from all stakeholders. It was further identified that it is vital to both nurture the venture operators as partners in the training process and to "follow up" and support the "next steps" to ensure sustainability in practice and learning.

To build a strong network for support and sharing of innovative initiatives it was suggested that post secondary institutions offering tourism and sustainability coursework should collaborate to address competencies for students that promote shared outcomes and professional networks inclusive of Indigenous peoples. In addition, current operating professionals should take ownership over the development of sharing networks within the tourism field. Suggestions from participants to build upon current work included a structured forum for sharing ideas, facilitating more discussion with and between Indigenous communities and working with international associations in an effort to learn and share collaboratively.

Cultural/Environmental Preservation and Promotion

This talking circle explored the themes of ensuring authenticity. It was discussed that when discussing core community values, it is imperative that the community spearhead the conversation. The centralized conversation must stem from the idea of what is sacred versus what is shareable. This may include identification of foods, language, crafts, regalia, stories, teachings, practices and spirituality. Fundamentally, these decisions belong to the community, and to the owners of such inherent birthrights. Participants discussed that experiences and retail items should be local and authentic. The Authentic Indigenous Arts Campaign has successfully been created to ensure that products for sale are authentic pieces and ensuring that artists are compensated fairly. It is suggested that any and all conversations about authenticity and culture must involve local Elders, traditional knowledge keepers and cultural leadership.

Tools such as continuing education programs on tourism, culture and the environment as well as employing community cultural ambassadors are necessary to promote collaborative and inclusive practices. Setting policy around tourism parameters and protocol, which identify what guides and cultural ambassadors are able to share and what the community has identified as sacred. The creation of cultural sharing plans could assist in assuring that the most appropriate resources are allocated to programs and services, thus creating the most authentic products. In addition, participatory video action research (PVAR) can be used to record teachings from community members before their knowledge is lost.

It was immediately apparent by all participants that each person at the table was responsible for taking their experiences and education further into the future and to continue having conversations, advocating for, and creating action to support sustainable Indigenous tourism in their communities, province, country and globally. It was also identified that every global citizen should have a sense of responsibility to promote and support the objectives of sustainable Indigenous tourism. At a community level, community leaders, tribal councils, community advocacy groups and Elders should hold responsibility in providing the tools needed to ensure cultural and environmental preservation. Further, it was identified that educational institutions should be accountable to the development of sustainable Indigenous tourism through mentorship opportunities, providing students with the initial awareness of the benefits of sustainable Indigenous tourism, creating dual credit schemes and the provision of mandatory courses in local culture, sustainability and ecological stewardship. Agencies such as the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada are also responsible for providing tools to ensure authenticity.

This discussion paper provides a summary of the think tank held on April 12 and 13, 2017 and should be the basis for further action in the development, support and promotion of sustainable Indigenous tourism.

**The Snuneymuxw Declaration on the Development of
Sustainable Indigenous Tourism**

The first Sustainable Indigenous Tourism Symposium was held in Nanaimo, Canada on the traditional lands of the Snuneymuxw people on the 11th and 12th, April, 2017. There were 82 delegates in attendance, and 528 delegates joining via webinar and Facebook live. These delegates represented Indigenous communities, tourism operators, government agencies, the tourism industry and supporting bodies.

This declaration is built upon the Larrakia Declaration on the development of Indigenous Tourism, March 2012, which resolved to adopt the following principles, to guide the development of Indigenous tourism:

- Recognizing that often Indigenous people are marginalised, disadvantaged, and remote from the opportunity for social, economic, and political advancement.
- Recognizing that whilst tourism provides the strongest driver to restore, protect, and promote Indigenous cultures, it has the potential to diminish and destroy those cultures when improperly developed.
- Recognizing that as the world becomes increasingly homogenous Indigenous cultures will become increasingly important to provide differentiation, authenticity, and the enrichment of visitor experiences.
- Recognizing that for Indigenous tourism to be successful and sustainable, Indigenous tourism needs to be based on traditional knowledge, cultures and practices and it must contribute to the wellbeing of Indigenous communities and the environment.
- Recognizing that Indigenous tourism provides a strong vehicle for cultural understanding, social interaction and peace.
- Recognizing that universal Indigenous values underpin intergenerational stewardship of cultural resources and understanding, social interaction and peace.

Determined to take steps forward in the commitment of the preservation and promotion of culture and environment in Indigenous tourism practice, the delegates of the Sustainable Indigenous Tourism Symposium 2017, offer the following principles for action:

- Recognizing the need to acknowledge and understand both the community and ecological feasibility prior to embarking on tourism development;
- Recognizing the need for cultural preservation in Indigenous tourism development and to work in collaboration to ensure the preservation of traditional knowledge and the environment;

- Recognizing that Indigenous tourism development should be based on intrinsic authenticities and should protect what is sacred to the community;
- Recognizing that Indigenous tourism development should be focused on reciprocity and that open communication and collaboration between Indigenous communities, non-indigenous communities and tourism industry stakeholders is essential;
- Recognizing the need to mentor and support Indigenous youth and future leaders to ensure that there is capacity, self-determination and continuance in the values of the community in Indigenous tourism development;
- Recognizing the important role of education in Indigenous tourism development including experiential hands on learning opportunities, place-based learning and exposure to best practices;
- Recognizing that financial resources need to be identified, secured and accessible in order to enable tourism development priorities of Indigenous communities and business

Sustainable Indigenous Tourism

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