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For Immediate Release

National Aboriginal Tourism Research Report confirms economic impact is growing while investing in infrastructure, training and marketing remains critical

April 30th, 2015 Coast Salish Territory (Vancouver BC) – The first major study of Aboriginal tourism in more than a decade points to the increasing importance, growth and sophistication of Aboriginal tourism across Canada.

The study, commissioned by the Aboriginal Tourism Association of Canada (ATAC) and conducted by O'Neil Marketing and Consulting, found that Aboriginal tourism accounts for \$2.5 billion in gross economic output, \$1.34 billion in national GDP, \$817 million in wages and salaries and more than \$63 million in tax revenue to municipal, provincial and federal governments.

“From coast to coast to coast, Canada has a rich Aboriginal history and culture that dates back millennia, providing a foundation for uniquely authentic tourism experiences” says Keith Henry, chair of the ATAC. “Aboriginal tourism stands to benefit greatly from the modern traveller's appetite for immersive educational experiences, and, at the same time, has room to improve its market visibility, product quality, and coordination with other tourism agencies and organizations to realize its full potential.”

Aboriginal tourism employs roughly 32,000 people, 2 per cent of the entire Canadian travel sector workforce. Aboriginal tourism companies are involved in a variety of business areas, including outdoor and adventure related activities, event and conference management and attractions related products, experiences and services.

The United Kingdom, Germany, United States and China remain key markets for Aboriginal tourism, with France, Indonesia and India showing positive growth. The recent weakening of the Canadian dollar combined with a resurgent American economy has also placed extra emphasis on the United States as a priority for all Canadian tourism marketers.

British Columbia, home to one third of Canada's First Nations and the second largest Indigenous population, has experienced strong growth in Aboriginal tourism over the past decade. In 2010, 3.7 million visitors included Aboriginal experiences on their itineraries and spent \$40 million learning about and experiencing First Nations culture. This represents nearly 100 per cent growth since 2006. Today there are more than 200 Aboriginal tourism businesses in BC, an 85 per cent increase over 2006, which together contributes \$561 million in value added GDP.

"This report reinforces the value and growth opportunities of Aboriginal tourism in B.C.'s economy," said Naomi Yamamoto, B.C. Minister of State for Tourism and Small Business. "Aboriginal tourism is one of our fastest growing cultural tourism experiences and will continue to play a role as an important economic driver in our province."

Neighbouring Alberta is home to 140 Aboriginal-themed businesses that contribute nearly \$170 million in value added GDP. Meanwhile Ontario, home to the largest Aboriginal population in Canada with nearly 470 Aboriginal tourism businesses, can attribute almost \$1 billion in value added GDP generated by Aboriginal tourism.



However, the report also acknowledges that there are some critical challenges and weaknesses that need to be addressed. The greatest negative impact since the last national study (2002) on Aboriginal tourism has been the loss of regional Aboriginal tourism organizations. Surveys of 132 Aboriginal tourism business and 36 travel trade representatives also identified barriers that are limiting the ability of Aboriginal tourism to reach its potential. Access to financing, and training and retaining qualified staff are ongoing challenges. Marketing strategies among Aboriginal tourism operators and regions are often poorly coordinated; visibility at transportation gateways such as airports is weak, as is overall market awareness. Travel trade relationships and guidelines governing authenticity of the Aboriginal tourism experience are others areas that survey respondents highlighted as in need of improvement. On the marketing side of the equation, there is a need for more coordination between regional Aboriginal tourism initiatives and Aboriginal tourism organizations.

“The message from this recent study is clear; Aboriginal tourism is an important part of what makes Canada's tourism experience unique and attractive,” says Henry who is also the CEO of the Aboriginal Tourism Association of British Columbia (AtBC). “More importantly it also lays out where we can make improvements across the country in order to remain competitive. Indigenous tourism worldwide is experiencing growth and it is important we continue to invest in Canada's Aboriginal tourism infrastructure and set best practices.”

ATAC Chair Henry concluded; “Thank you to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) and the Government of Canada for recognizing the importance of this study. Aboriginal tourism has untapped potential and our operators and members from across Canada want to contribute to the trip planning for visitors from throughout the world. The history and culture of Canada's Aboriginal people is celebrated and honoured through Aboriginal tourism and our industry is poised for future growth.”

About the Aboriginal Tourism Association of Canada:

Originally formed as the Aboriginal Tourism Marketing Circle, in 2014 the Aboriginal Tourism Association was formally established. Over 20 Aboriginal tourism industry organizations and government representatives from across Canada are represented with ATAC. Through a unified Aboriginal tourism industry voice, ATAC focuses on creating partnerships between associations, organizations, government departments and industry leaders from across Canada to support the growth of Aboriginal tourism in Canada. <http://aboriginalcanada.ca/corporate>

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