

OUR STORYTELLERS



INDIGENOUS | **AUTOCHTONE**

TOURISM ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

DU CANADA

ASSOCIATION TOURISTIQUE

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INDIGENOUS STORYTELLER BOOKLET

We have a story to tell. Indigenous People in Canada are at a point of cultural reclamation and rejuvenation using tourism as means to rediscover and share their culture with the world. In this booklet, the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) features some of the storytellers, cultural leaders and knowledge keepers that make Indigenous tourism experiences so unique. This will be an ongoing project and more storytellers will be featured throughout the year.

Indigenous Peoples are Reclaiming and Celebrating their Culture

Despite the diversity of Indigenous Peoples in Canada (First Nations, Metis and Inuit), there are certain important cultural traits and traditions that unite Indigenous Peoples in Canada. The importance of Oral Traditions, a deep respect for Elders, and a strong connection to nature are common across all Indigenous communities. And although many of the sacred traditions and practices were put under pressure or even abolished under colonial rule, Indigenous Peoples today are reclaiming and rejoicing in their Indigenous heritage, and invite visitors to join in as we all celebrate the Indigenous Renaissance.



Getting in touch with Storytellers

If you would like more information or to get in touch with any of the storytellers mentioned in this booklet, please contact Ryan Rogers, ITAC's Communications Specialist at Marketing@IndigenousTourism.ca.



JOE URIE

Métis

Jasper Tour Company

JASPER, ALBERTA

JasperTourCompany.com

It was an impulse decision that set multi-award-winning Jasper Tour Company founder, Joe Urie, on his path to tourism and a return to the roots of his people on the Athabasca River. Working in Jasper after seeing a sign advertising jobs in the region, Urie realised that he was surrounded by natural beauty – but stuck indoors. He quit and got a job with a tour company and the rest is history. “My Grandma was born on a trapline on Fort Chipewyan, the river is the blood in my veins. It dawned on me that I didn’t come here by accident; I was supposed to come here.”

After 20 years in the guiding business, Urie created his boutique tour company in 2010 with a vision of reconnecting with his Métis heritage by telling stories to connect small groups of visitors to the natural beauty of Jasper. “Guests come from around the world, and they have a Hollywood notion that every Indigenous person lives in a teepee or rides a horse; they come here and want to know better. I bring people into our story without the baggage of the guilt of history, after all, everyone at some time was indigenous to a place, but for most visitors that connection is so far away. But they go home to their urban environment, and they help natural spaces, healings and emotions grow.”

A tireless champion of Indigenous tourism, Urie is also a consultant with Métis Crossing and the Métis Nation of Alberta. “I have no inclination to grow my company; I love it as a boutique experience. Unfortunately, we have to say ‘no’ to so many people, but it’s just my wife Patti and I— I’m the storyteller and she’s the brains!”



KYLIK KISOUN TAYLOR

Inuvialuit / Gwich'in

Languages Spoken: English and currently learning Inuvialuktun

Tundra North Tours

INUUVIK, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

TundraNorthTours.com

After moving from Ontario to the North aged 16, Tundra North Tours founder, Kylik Kisoun Taylor was fortunate enough to spend time with Inuit family members who were attuned to their Culture. "This had a profound impact on me; I was lost before that, and it changed my perspective on life. I realised that non-Indigenous people could benefit from this too, but there was no way to access this Culture, tourism was the best way for me, as an entrepreneur, to do that."

That was 16 years ago, and since then Taylor has forged ahead delighting visitors, creating Culturally based jobs for locals, and winning a solid reputation for excellence and a brace of awards along the way. Receiving the International Arctic Future Challenge provided the springboard for Taylor to tap into research grants and now he has a team of students from Ryerson University from soil analysis to business planners working on expansion plans. "The hope is for 80% of our food to be done in-house, but we're not looking at food security from a southern perspective, this is through the lens of our Culture: hunting, fishing, foraging."

All these projects are low profit but once you add in tourism, everything becomes feasible. "Being here was the spark that started my fire, we're building an eco-lodge which will manufacture its own goods, we'll have a farm and greenhouse, a dog team, it's all on the way. Once you add visitors coming to immerse in our way of life, everything becomes feasible. For me the rewarding thing is to see a hypothesis come to fruition and see the difference that I can make here. We're building something that's never been done before."



DAVID DALEY

Métis

Wapusk Adventures

CHURCHILL, MANITOBA

WapuskAdventures.com

Meet the Owner of one of Canada's largest sled dog kennels, David Daley of Wapusk Adventures. A self described "Churchillian Metis boy" and a dog sledding fanatic, David has completed 16 impressive long-distance dog sledding races, more than 200 miles long.

David originally worked as an aircraft mechanic for 36 years, always dreaming of one-day owning his own dog team. He jumped at the chance once his kids were older, originally promising his wife only a six-dog-team. Thirty-eight dogs and twenty years later, Wapusk Adventures has since grown to become Churchill, Manitoba's largest sled dog kennel, offering the popular I Did A Mile tour where travellers can learn about the dogs, sledding, Churchill and Metis culture.

David says his favourite part of working in tourism is sharing his Indigenous culture, something he wasn't always able to do. "It wasn't fashionable to be Indigenous in the 60s and 70s. We always did things in secret or kept it within the family. Now we're free to share our culture. It's fun to be open!"

Throughout the years, David has shared his passion for the sport with his children who also can be found running the tours, as well as many young people from around the world, "We always take kids in at the kennel who want to learn the art of dog sledding. Right now we have a girl from France and one from New Zealand learning to be dog mushers."

Once restrictions are lifted, travellers can expect new snowshoeing and e-bike tours around the region, a reflection of the family's passions and knowledge.



MARILYN JENSEN

*Inland Tlingit/Tagish Khwáan from the Carcross/Tagish First Nation;
belonging to the Dakhl'aweidí Clan under the Tagish Keét Hít
(Killerwhale House) in the Southern Yukon Territory.*

Dakhká Khwáan Dancers

WHITEHORSE, YUKON

DakhkaKhwaaanDancers.com

“There are so many moments when we’re dancing, singing and drumming and as a group we’re really interconnected and we sometimes go into another realm. And I’ll catch a glimpse of someone in the audience witnessing this and I can see that they are bawling. That their spirit has been touched as well as their heart.” - Marilyn Jensen, dancer and co-founder of The Dakhká Khwáan Dancers, and Instructor of First Nations Governance at Yukon College.

Marilyn was inspired to create The Dakhká Khwáan Dancers in 2007 when she learned of an inauthentic tourism initiative within the community. The group provided an opportunity to reclaim their languages and values and revitalize the art of singing, drumming, dancing, storytelling and making regalia.

The group has gone on to win awards, perform in the Vancouver Olympics, and dance across Canada, the US, New Zealand and Taiwan. They have even been nominated for awards for their album produced in collaboration with DJ Dash.

Marilyn sees her work as a performer deeply connected to her work outside of the group teaching about lateral Indigenous violence. “We’ve created and given training about lateral kindness, about reclaiming our unified loving selves, and rejecting violence. I find that work has aligned with the meaningfulness and spirituality that I experience with dancing and sharing our culture.”

The dance group is currently putting on virtual performances. They are also working on a repertoire of new songs and regalia with the hopes of travelling and sharing their story with the world.



Photo by Travel Alberta

BRENDA HOLDER

Brenda follows her lineage as a traditional Métis guide from the Kwarakwante and Aseniwuche Winewak of Jasper/Grand Cache and a descendant from the Michel First Nation

Mahikan Trails

CANMORE, ALBERTA

Mahikan.ca

Mahikan Trails owner Brenda Holder's journey into tourism began more than 20 years ago when she had an epiphany whilst working for the British military at an adventure training camp in Alberta. After a day sharing Traditional Knowledge with soldiers on a hike, she realised that she had skills that other people from around the world didn't have – and she loved sharing them. So, in 2000, she left her admin job and Mahikan Trails was born. "There's so little known about us as Indigenous people, tourism offers a great opportunity to showcase who we are when we share our Culture and educate our guests," says Holder.

A multi-award-winning company, Holder's most proud of being awarded the Esquao Award from the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women (IAAW) in the health, Medicine and Culture category. "I specialise in Indigenous medicine, and I pride myself that I can take guests from around the world on a medicine walk and find them a plant they'll have at home. That connects with them on a profound level and can send them on a deep journey."

A recent move to 161 unspoiled acres by a lake in Sundre has opened up new territory for Holder, "I'll still be doing Medicine Walks in Banff, but this gives me the chance to be more hands-on, we'll show guests how to harvest respectfully and make things like soaps and teas. When you engage with visitors like this, you get to know them and connect on a deeper level."

For Holder, it's reaching that deeper level of connection that drives her work, "I love that through tourism I can continue to engage in my own Culture, and experience what others teach me too."



JOE BAILEY

Dene

North Star Adventures

YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

NorthStarAdventures.ca

Meet the original Aurora Borealis Hunter, Joe Bailey of North Star Adventures. Joe was one of the first in the world to offer an “Aurora Hunter” tour that helps travellers find the northern lights - a concept inspired by the popularity of tornado chasers.

Joe has a wealth of knowledge about the land and is an expert at chasing the Aurora thanks to his grandparents’ teachings. “I was raised by my grandparents in the Northwest Territories until I was seven-years-old. My grandfather taught me how to read the weather so even on cloudy nights I can find the Aurora,” said Joe, who also shares that travellers can enjoy the northern lights 260 days of the year in his area around Yellowknife, NWT.

North Star Adventures was founded in 2007 by Joe and his family who wanted to showcase the Dene culture in a way that would respect his grandparents and ancestors. “I wanted to have an Indigenous-led company offering Indigenous tours. That’s why our tagline is 100% Indigenous owned, 50,000 years of experience.” In addition to various snowmobile, fishing, camping, canoe and boating tours, it was important for Joe to also share his culture, offering travellers experiences where they can also learn about the Dene people, sample traditional foods and learn more about spirituality, as well as land conservation practices.

What’s next for this family-run business? Joe shared that for the immediate future, the family will be offering live, guided and interactive virtual tours in hopes to satisfy the travel bug until restrictions ease up. Joe will continue his advocacy work to ensure Indigenous experiences are front and centre both with his work on the ITAC board, and through his local community.



CANDACE CAMPO

Sechelt First Nation and Squamish First Nation

Talaysay Tours

VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

[Talaysay.com](https://www.talaysay.com)

Meet Candace Campo, ancestral name xets'emits'a (to always be there), owner-operator of Talaysay Tours and Aboriginal Eco Tours. Campo started in the tourism industry as an administrator, working long hours in the office when she was offered a position as a cultural guide for a local tour company on the Sunshine Coast. After she finished leading her first cultural tour, she was immediately hooked. "After I did my very first tour and our guests went away happy, I shared with the owners of the company - I told them honestly that I was going to start my own company."

Trained as an anthropologist and a school teacher, Campo's journey was made possible by growing up on the land and being taught the stories and history of her people by her parents and elders in the community. Campo takes great pride sharing outdoor education and culture with visitors from around the world. "We get to introduce guests throughout the world and even our local community members to the rich history and culture of our people. We get to share our experiences on the land with our guests and those are special moments. It doesn't matter how many times you've done that tour, it's a unique experience that's shared together between host and guest."

What's next for these outdoor education and culture tour companies? Campo shared how she has adapted and pivoted to the new realities offering virtual tours, which have now been delivered to seventeen countries. Campo is also creating and selling short films to educational institutions and large corporations, which also become a learning tool for her staff and community.



RITA MESTOKOSHO

Innu Nation

Languages Spoken: French, Innu Aimun

Maison de la culture Innue

EKUANITSHIT, QUEBEC

Ekuanitshit.com/Maison-de-la-Culture

Born on Nitassinan in 1966, Rita Mestokosho is a poet and writer from Ekuanitshit, an Innu community on Quebec's North Shore. A passionate activist, her work exposes her struggle for the preservation of her homeland, her first language and her Innu Culture. Graduating with a political science degree from the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, she decided to run for the Ekuanitshit Innu Council at the request of the women of her community, where she dedicated herself to the issues of culture and education. She published her first book of poetry in 1995, *Eshi Uapataman Nukum / Comment je perçois la vie, grand-mère*, which was then republished in Sweden by Beijbom Books in 2009.

Mestokosho also contributes to several publications, anthologies and collective works. She travels the world to promote her culture and the struggles of her people. Her second book, *Née de la pluie et de la terre*, was published by Éditions Bruno Doucey in 2014. Supporting art in all its forms, she encourages the new generation to express themselves, to heal Indigenous People through creation and to go beyond the boundaries of the invisible.

Mestokosho is the general manager of the Maison de la culture Innue since its opening in 2015. Her involvement in the tourism industry is essential according to the hospitality aspects of the Innu Culture. These great nomadic Peoples have always been open to welcoming visitors. The House of Innu Culture allows visitors to discover more about the nation and transform peoples' lives through heart to heart experiences.



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