

The Amazing Women of Indigenous Tourism

On a snowy trail in the Alberta Rockies near Canmore, Brenda Holder, owner of Mahikan Trails, pointed out some animal tracks and asked my brothers and me to identify which animal they came from. We each enthusiastically shouted our guesses while Holder patiently waited. In response, she taught us how to identify the tracks. As we moved along the trail in snowshoes, she proceeded to explain how the surrounding plants were used in traditional Indigenous medicine, captivating us with stories of how her grandmother used these plants in her everyday life. Despite the passing of many years, I remain profoundly affected by my first Indigenous tourism experience and the Métis woman who led it.

BY KELSEY OLSEN

There was a time when Indigenous People were largely excluded from, and sometimes exploited by the tourism industry. But things are changing in Canada with Indigenous women like Brenda Holder who is now the Vice-Chair of the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) leading the way.

Nationally, about one-third of Indigenous businesses are owned by women. In some provinces, these numbers are even higher. Through their contributions to the tourism industry, Indigenous women are challenging stereotypes, preserving and sharing culture, creating new economic opportunities and promoting Reconciliation. Join us in celebrating some of the authentic Indigenous tourism businesses made possible through the efforts of remarkable Indigenous women.

For a decade, the **Adäka Cultural Festival** has been held along the banks of the Yukon River in Whitehorse, YT. It is an incredible celebration of Indigenous arts and culture that brings together Indigenous artists and entrepreneurs from across the territory. Charlene Alexander was formerly co-founder of this amazing multidisciplinary arts event and is also the Executive Director at Yukon First Nations Culture & Tourism Association, the organization that hosts the festival. The Adäka Cultural Festival has grown into a world class event that brings both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together in a true celebration of culture.

Michela Carriere lives off the grid in the Saskatchewan wilderness and practices as a Cree herbalist. Her experience, knowledge and passion



Aski Holistic Adventures, Cumberland House, Saskatchewan

led her to start **Aski Holistic Adventures**, a tourism company that offers year round adventures in the Saskatchewan River Delta. She believes in the power of nature. "My philosophy is that nature is healing, and I want to reconnect you with nature," she says. Her bespoke adventures include herbal medicine walks, guided canoe trips, nature therapy workshops, snowshoe tours, tipi camping, and more.

One of the most celebrated Indigenous restaurants in Canada is owned by a woman who is passionate about food and community. Christa Bruneau-Guenther, owner and executive chef of **Feast Café Bistro** in Winnipeg, Manitoba, weaves her Peguis First Nations background seamlessly into her restaurant's dishes. By taking inspiration from her culture and traditional land, she provides modern dishes that come with stories that leave guests' hearts, minds, and of course, stomachs full. In her culture,



Adäka Cultural Festival, Whitehorse, Yukon

respect is given to the plants and animals that nourish us, and Feast ensures that good spirit is used in everything that is harvested, cooked, and eaten.

Located at an ancient trading stop on the Ottawa River between Ottawa, Ontario, and Gatineau, Quebec, **Indigenous Experiences** offers many experiences that highlight Indigenous culture, practices, and beliefs. "We give people an introduction to Indigenous People in Canada," says Linda Sarazin, director of operations. Visitors can

enjoy dancing, drumming, food, and a voyageur canoe experience. Indigenous Experiences offers programs and experiences at two sites - Mādahòki Farm and the Canadian Museum of History. Sarazin manages the operations and marketing and also delivers training programs across Canada through the Indigenous Cultural Ambassador program.

Take a medicine walk with Brenda Holder, owner of **Mahikan Trails**, and you will be met with gorgeous views of the Canadian Rockies and prairies and tales of survival and hope. Holder draws from her family lineage as a Métis



Mahikan Trails,
Canmore, Alberta

guide from the Kwarakwante People of Jasper and her knowledge is exceptional. Mahikan Trails offers programs in Banff, Canmore and Sunde, Alberta that leave you reconnected to the natural world and with a new knowledge of traditional ways of life.

Built on a traditional camping site of the Innu People, **Maison de la culture innue** is a gathering place for those who wish to experience the culture and way of life of the Innu People of Ekuanitshit, Quebec. Rita Mestokosho, director of the exhibit, is a talented poet and a proud Innu woman who has worked to develop this attraction into a place that not only preserves her culture, but shares the beauty of it with all. A visit to this exhibit is a gateway to the community's past, present, and future.



Maison de la culture innue,
Quebec

Tracey Klettl is a descendant of the Cree and Mohawk People from the area which is now Jasper National Park. She comes from a long line of Métis trappers, hunters, and guides and she shares her knowledge and ties to the land at **Painted Warriors** Ranch near Sunde, Alberta. Visitors can enjoy glamping, archery, horseback riding, snowshoe tours, storytelling and more. The ranch also offers outdoor training, hunter education, and wilderness skills certification.

Chef Tammy Maki opened **Raven Rising** as a way to reconnect, explore, and celebrate her Saulteaux Ojibwe kwe culture. The gourmet chocolate shop in Sudbury, Ontario is unique because Maki incorporates traditional Indigenous ingredients into each and every one of her recipes. Being taken away from her family due to the sixties scoop resulted in Maki being disconnected from her culture. Raven Rising has provided a way for her to reconnect with her Indigenous culture and to share and celebrate it with others.

Salmon n' Bannock is Vancouver's only Indigenous owned and operated restaurant. The intimate atmosphere provides guests with a cozy dining experience as aromas of freshly baked bannock comfort your senses. Owner Inez Cook co-founded Salmon n' Bannock in 2010. Growing up, Cook was disconnected from her culture when she was forcibly removed from her family and Nuxalk Nation community as a part of the sixties scoop. Her restaurant has allowed her to relearn the traditional ways of her people and celebrate her Indigenous roots.

Attending a wellness retreat at **ShaMaSha Centre** is a wonderful way to reconnect with nature, relax, and become a better version of yourself. Daphne March is the Mi'kmaq woman who founded the centre in St. John's, Newfoundland as a place to provide holistic healing through the teachings of her culture and allow a space for reconnecting to the land. Through yoga, meditation, healthy eating, and traditional practices, March provides life-changing moments in the heart of Newfoundland.



ShaMaSha Centre,
St. John's, Newfoundland



Feast Café Bistro,
Winnipeg, Manitoba



Talking Trees Tour, Stanley Park,
Talaysay Tours, Vancouver,
British Columbia

Since 2002, **Talaysay Tours** has been providing cultural experiences in the Vancouver, Squamish, and Sunshine Coast areas of British Columbia. Founder, Candace Campo, draws from her experiences growing up as a member of the Shíshálh Nation. She attributes much of her knowledge to her parents and Elders from her native community of Sechelt, BC. The various outdoor tours offered by Talaysay Tours share stories and legends of the land, Indigenous ways of life, and the natural beauty of British Columbia's west coast.

Mother and daughter duo, Matricia Bauer and Mackenzie Brown-Kamamak share their Cree background through **Warrior Women**, a traditional drumming group. Both talented musicians, the pair passionately share their culture through traditional music and teachings in the Jasper and Calgary areas of Alberta. The pair have performed over 300 shows. Warrior Women also offers guided plant walks, fireside chats, storytelling and a variety of workshops and experiences.

President of the **Yukon First Nations Culture & Tourism Association** (YFNCT), Marilyn Jensen, is a passionate Indigenous woman from the Carcross/Tagish First Nation. For close to twenty years, Jensen has dedicated her time to revitalizing Indigenous culture through facilitating workshops and teachings. Her talents of storytelling, traditional dancing and singing, and Indigenous drumming, enable her to share her culture through a number of avenues that engage and empower her audience. YFNCT is a non-profit organization that is committed to growing and promoting vibrant and sustainable arts/culture and tourism sectors.

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Warrior Women,
Jasper, Alberta

