

From Good to Great! The Aboriginal Cultural Tourism Authenticity Program

● Background Snapshot of AtBC as an Industry leader

AtBC is recognized at the national level as a leader and front runner for the development of Aboriginal tourism in Canada with a depth of experience that extends back to its inception in 1996.

AtBC has pioneered the importance of “Culture” as a critical component of tourism and based this conclusion on the triangulated research from the Aboriginal Cultural Blueprint Strategy which was completed in 2006.

The federal and provincial governments have bought in and supported the argument that Aboriginal cultural tourism is good for First Nations; good for the governments and public, and for BC and Canada to grow tourism. The provincial and federal government have provided financial resources to implementation the 3-Year Blueprint Strategy.

● The Value of Authenticity Certification

- As a recognized leader for Aboriginal cultural tourism development, there is no provincial Aboriginal tourism organization that has embraced what the “market” is demanding... authentic quality experiences.
- Branding the Authenticity program and ensuring that Aboriginal businesses that qualify are of the highest quality provides a great marketing advantage.
- Tourism organizations will support the AtBC Authenticity Certification through their international marketing networks have indicated their interest in positioning authentic Aboriginal cultural tourism experiences in their products to attract international visitors to BC.

- The 2010 Winter Olympics featured First Nations and Aboriginal cultures throughout the games, helping to boost positioning Aboriginal cultural tourism as a WORLD LEADER in Indigenous and cultural tourism.
- Regional Tourism Operators say that the ability for them to promote authenticity, backed by a respected organization like AtBC, provides an exceptional marketing advantage to those businesses that qualify.
- Authenticity Certification coupled with high quality standards and Aboriginal cultural content (people and culture) gives approved operators a marketing niche.

● Setting the Standard – Operating Standards for Market and Export Readiness

Industry standards require that you must have a minimum of one year operations and a proven track record for demonstrating quality, safety and professional operations to be considered market ready. This could be shown in:

- Receiving Awards and industry recognition for standards of excellence are indicators of quality.
- Positive media coverage, such as articles in magazines and newspapers that “recommend” the experience provides evidence of quality.

Other standards require that you have the following:

- Ensure that you have checked into and confirmed with government sources that HST does or does not apply to your operation. If it does, you must register to qualify for the Authenticity program. If municipal law or Band regulations require you to have a business license or Band equivalent, you must obtain the operating permit.

- Contact city/municipal hall for business licence information or the Band administration if located on reserve.
- Contact the GST/HST help line at 1-800-959-5525 or look online at http://www.gst-tax.com/Order_GST.htm to register.
- Liability insurance is not only a “must” to protect you and your business; it speaks to the quality of your organization to the travel trade, other marketing organizations and to your clients. A minimum of \$3 million liability insurance is recommended for adventure type businesses.
 - If you are a member of an association such as the Chamber of Commerce, check to see if they have any “group buying” programs for liability insurance.
 - At a minimum, a \$2 million liability policy is recommended for a tourism business.
 - Inadequate insurance coverage is a deterrent for Receptive Tour Operators and the travel trade who may not include your operation as part of their itinerary.
- Remain open throughout the entire length of the peak tourism season (May through October) with the ability for clients and others to either contact you directly or leave a message. Industry expects an operator to respond to a message, inquiry or booking, within 24-hours.
 - At a minimum, have a telephone answering service (either machine or live operator) that can take a message or book from a wholesaler, retailer or client.
 - Set your email for auto response.
 - Respond to the inquiry or booking ASAP, ideally within the first 4 hours, or within 24 hours at a minimum.
 - Your website should be able to accept emails for inquiries or bookings. Ideally responding back by email within a couple of hours shows important optics of the companies’ operational capabilities. Use the web to keep information on your business up-to-date by posting information such as operating hours, Aboriginal history, what to expect, how to prepare for the visit, how to get there through links to Google Maps, and information on weather. Have your website professionally designed focusing on making it easy to find information throughout the site.
- It is important for you to understand how the travel trade and tour programs work with tourism operators and what their expectations are of a market ready product. You must have a multi tiered pricing system that offers published discounts for wholesale clients (like receptive tour operators), pricing for retail clients and other group discounts should they apply to your operation. This pricing must remain the same throughout the season.
- Billing arrangements with receptive tour operators, wholesale providers and other marketing agencies and companies should be set up in advance of the tourism season. You must be willing to accept client vouchers as confirmation of payment for reservations that have been made.
 - Offer discounts for day activities and transportation at 15%.
 - Provide Wholesalers discounts of 20-30%.
 - Have consistent pricing and discounts for the full season.
- High quality marketing materials and a website with contact information, hours of operation, information on how to book tours, and other facts about your product or service are important tools used by yourself and the travel trade to market your business.
 - Engage a reputable photographer to take high definition pictures of your business.
 - Utilize high definition (HD) photos for your brochures and website. Quality portrays “quality”, while low resolution / blurry pictures look unprofessional.
 - Make your HD photos available to wholesalers to help them market you.
 - Ensure that booking guidelines, hours of operations and other important information are clearly displayed on all marketing vehicles, especially the website.
- By claiming to be market ready, you are stating that the quality and consistency of your experience is of a high standard and will be delivered at that level at all times. This extends to the quality of your staff, especially the front-line people.
 - The consistency of training and the use of manuals and pre-developed training programs promote quality service.

- Develop a clear interview process that screens potential employees for service quality, integrity, and commitment.
- Offer incentives to staff for giving above-expected service to guests.
- Train staff on understanding the protocols and authority for decision making and solving customer concerns.
- Provide support through free or reduced rates for international media or the travel trade familiarization tours that may wish to view and then ultimately market your business.
- Develop a marketing and sales plan for each new operating season that includes receptive tour operators and other wholesalers. Your plan should include budgeting for the cost of discounts for wholesalers.

• **Aboriginalizing the Experience – Adding Cultural Activities**

Heighten the experience by including activities that engage as many of the senses as possible. In your experience, ask yourself the questions below and how they can include your Aboriginal culture.

Body	Sense	Question
Eyes	Sight	What will the visitor see?
Ears	Hearing	What will the visitor hear?
Nose	Smell	How can scent be included?
Mouth	Taste	Is there an opportunity for the visitor to taste foods and drink?
Hand	Touch	Will the visitor be able to touch and do activities?
Heart	Feel	What is the sense of feeling the visitor will have?

Ways to “Aboriginalize” your experience

1. **Host cultural events – pow-wow, feast, dance performances, dinner theatres, storytelling** – that allow guests to taste and smell traditional foods, see dance and apparel and decor, hear and learn about the history and cultural values and beliefs, invite visitors to dance or drum or sing, and feel the spirit of celebration. These could be done seasonally, that respect a cultural season or event (i.e., Haida New Year), or seasonal activity (i.e., salmon run). When hosting celebrations – it is ideal that:
 - Annual events are done at the same time each year – and consistently every year.

- Weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, quarterly events – are hosted when they say they are.

CONSISTENCY IS THE KEY!

2. Develop **special programs for children** – to attract schools during shoulder season, and families in peak season.
3. **Arts and crafts demonstrations** – can be included as a daily activity in a facility. Schedule activities throughout a day, and set up a weekly schedule with different activities each day – such as, Monday-cedar weaving, Tuesday-bracelet beading, Wednesday-pottery bowl painting, Thursday-drawing traditional designs, Friday-carving, Weekend-hide tanning and pottery painting. Longer workshops could also be scheduled in the evenings and offered to local area residents. Have arts and crafts made by community Members for sale in a gift shop.
4. **Guided Interpretive Tours** – delivered by Aboriginals who are trained interpreters, and on your culture and history as well as other Aboriginals. The guide should use traditional language and know how to engage the visitor by asking questions, and involving them in activities.
5. **Show Your Culture** – in:
 - **Apparel** – it can be traditional or modern clothing with cultural designs. If you choose to have staff wear traditional apparel, you may want to ensure it is clear to visitors they know this is not how you dress now.
 - **Aboriginal Design and Decor** – in building design, landscaping, community art sculpture program (i.e., Osoyoos Indian Band), art displays, dinnerware design, in entrance ways like doors and door handles, in bedding and linens, etc.
6. **Cultural Foods** – Let people sample your traditional foods – in a restaurant, at a food stand, in a dinner theatre, at an afternoon tea with bannock and storytelling session. It may be everyday food to you, but from the visitor’s perspective it is an experience they may not be able to get home. Some of these drink and food products could be packaged for resale with traditional language and stories as part of the packaging. Post recipes on your website, make recipe post cards that guests receive free or buy, develop a cook book.
7. **Share your Language, Culture and History** – with a traditional greeting when people enter your facility, on voice messaging, on the website, in

community and site signage (don't forget to replace "No Trespassing" signs with "Welcome" signs... in your language).

- Include words in your language to describe things on printed materials, your website, and guided interpretation.
- In accommodations, a guidebook in the guest room on the history of the Nation and its culture could also be provided.
- Play music over the audio system, in the reception – it could be pre-recorded or a live performance. Have CDs available for sale.
- Set up displays and exhibits of your culture and history – this could be in permanent or temporary displays that are guided, have information placards or audio-tour tapes for self-guided tours. It could be in or out doors.
- All front-line staff are ambassadors to your business, community and culture – have them greet visitors in your traditional language and be knowledgeable of the Aboriginal history, culture and region, as well as other First Nations. Ensure their hospitality skills are top-notch.

8. **Let Guests take Home a Bit of Your Culture** – as mentioned, this could be in arts and crafts, general knowledge, books, and foods.
9. **Get Visitors Involved** – in doing things. Have them prepare a meal, tan a hide, catch a fish, make a craft, dance, walk, or help.

● Cultural and Environmental Integrity

What operating policies or guidelines does your business have that:

- ensures culture and the environment are protected and sustained? and
- the community and Members benefit?

Ideas

1. Hire Aboriginal people.
2. Pre-employment training programs.
3. Provide on-the-job training, with management skills.
4. Regular hospitality and cultural training.

5. Offer a standardized interpretation program developed or accepted by the Cultural Keepers in your community / nation.
6. Only have Aboriginal people deliver cultural activities including interpretation. When foreign language or specialized interpretation is required, this may be the exception to the rule.
7. Offer community benefits - host community events, offer discounts, give local's specials.
8. Support community initiatives and activities.
9. Include ways for community cultural people to provide services or perform on-site.
10. Recycle materials, including donating items.
11. Package items in reusable bags.
12. Use recyclable and biodegradable products; make your own cleaning supplies.
13. Collect and use rain water for ground watering.
14. Identify zones in your community and area that are "no go" or "community only" to minimize the impact on the natural environment.
15. Offer a visitor orientation program that prepares them on how to visit a site, honor the culture, and respect the community.

● Honoring Your Culture, Protecting Your History... Respecting Our Past

Protocols are recognized ways for making decisions and communicating. In the Aboriginal community we have protocols for sharing and respecting culture. The Authenticity program recognizes the authority a First Nation has over its own culture and its lands, and the values and beliefs of each. The program recognizes that in BC, the more than 30 First Nations and Métis peoples have differing values and beliefs that at times contrast those of other Aboriginals. Aboriginal tourism experiences are required to ensure and demonstrate that they have honoured and gained the proper approvals for sharing the cultural components through tourism. This has been done through:

- Band Council Resolutions
- Community Presentations
- Approval from Chief and Council
- Acceptance by Hereditary Chieftainship authority
- Letters or Declarations from the Indigenous Nation of business recognition