

Recommendations on Sustainable Development of Indigenous Tourism

World Committee on Tourism Ethics





Indigenous folk dances of Kamchatka, Russian Federation

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Adopted by the Resolution A/RES/723(XXIII) of the General Assembly of UNWTO



Traditional costume of the Akha hill tribe in festival

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Introduction

1. Indigenous peoples are characterized by some of the richest, most unique and diverse cultural expressions of humankind which have developed over thousands of years across our planet and are spiritually linked to indigenous traditional lands. These expressions represent a clear pull factor for potential tourists who wish to experience indigenous natural and cultural heritage in physical, intellectual and emotional terms.
2. As one of the most thriving economic activities of the 21st century, tourism is well placed to contribute to indigenous people in improving their livelihoods. If managed responsibly and sustainably, indigenous tourism spurs cultural interaction and revival, bolsters employment, alleviates poverty, curbs rural flight migration, empowers local communities, especially women and youth, encourages tourism product diversification, allows people to retain their relationship with the land and nurtures a sense of pride.
3. However, this type of tourism also raises some ethical, socioeconomic and human rights-related concerns that need to be addressed by all relevant stakeholders. Throughout the centuries, indigenous people have faced different forms of discrimination, displacement from their ancestral territories, cultural assimilation and more recently a severe depletion of

the natural resources they depend on. It is against this backdrop that the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 (UNDRIP)¹. Ten years after the adoption of the Declaration, the majority of governments have endorsed the UNDRIP to varying degrees and are focused on enabling specific legislation, policies and programmes for its implementation.

4. The tourism sector was one of the first corporate sectors to recognize the importance of the UNDRIP when the Larrakia Declaration was adopted by the World Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA) in 2012 in Darwin, Australia. Since then, UNWTO has referred to the Larrakia Declaration as a document for the empowerment of indigenous peoples through tourism and as such it has also served as a basis in the drafting process of the present Recommendations. The Larrakia Declaration calls for more equitable partnerships between the tourism sector and indigenous people in order to improve not only the well-being of communities, but also enable the enhancement of individual livelihoods.
5. The Larrakia Declaration follows the principles of UNWTO's core policy document, the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, adopted by the General Assembly of UNWTO in 1999 and



Traditional indigenous textiles of Luang Prabang, Laos

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¹ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), available at http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf



Native handicrafts in Monument Valley, United States of America

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Native of the Amazon, Bolivia, Ecuador

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acknowledged by that of the United Nations in 2001. While serving as a guide for sustainable and responsible development of tourism, the Code makes a reference to the role of tourism stakeholders in protecting and respecting the cultures of indigenous people, their rights and their ancestral traditions.

6. It has become evident that the development of indigenous tourism cannot be undertaken without sound partnerships among indigenous communities, governments, tourism destinations, the private sector and the civil society. Moreover, academic institutions need to partner with these stakeholders in order to be able to produce solid research and data to be used in the course of the tourism development. Only multi-stakeholder partnerships can really assure that indigenous people can reap direct benefits from tourism and keep their core values intact.
7. After having observed the need for more systematic guidance to foster the sustainable, responsible and ethical development of tourism involving indigenous communities, the UNWTO Ethics, Culture and Social Responsibility Department prepared this set of Recommendations. The drafting process included a thorough multi-stakeholder consultation which was extended to major associations of indigenous people engaged in tourism, as well as individual tourism enterprises and experts from different regions.

8. The World Committee on Tourism Ethics, the independent and impartial body of the UNWTO responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, examined and endorsed this initiative coinciding with the 2017 International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development.
9. The aim of these Recommendations is to encourage tourism enterprises to develop their operations in a responsible and sustainable manner, while enabling those indigenous communities that wish to open up to tourism to take full grasp of opportunities that come along, following a thorough consultation process. The Recommendations also target tourists that visit indigenous communities, and whose numbers are steadily increasing given the growth of tourism motivated by the interest to experience indigenous cultures and traditional lifestyles.
10. The Recommendations are divided into two sections; the first one summarizing general considerations on key aspects in indigenous tourism that concern all stakeholders (governments, indigenous communities, destinations management organizations, tourism companies, civil society, etc.), followed by a section featuring specific recommendations addressing four main groups of stakeholders directly involved in tourism operations on the ground, namely:



Indian tourists riding camels in the Thar desert, Rajasthan, India

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(a) tour operators and travel agencies;

(b) tour guides;



Native tour guide in Uluru, Australia

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(c) indigenous communities; and



Indigenous inhabitants dancing with traditional clothes in Kamchatka

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(d) tourists.

Tourists and Maori doing a haka in New Zealand

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**Dragon dance ceremony,
Kopar village, Papua New Guinea**

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Recommendations on Sustainable Development of Indigenous Tourism

I. General considerations on key issues in indigenous tourism

1. The Recommendations on Sustainable Development of Indigenous Tourism are referring first and foremost to tourism development within those indigenous communities that wish to open up to tourism or to improve the management of the existing indigenous tourism products and experiences within their communities.
2. In this endeavour, the indigenous people need the support of governments, which should create an enabling environment for sustainable development of tourism, along with that of other economic sectors. According to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and other UN bodies representing indigenous people, the role of the States is crucial in adopting the relevant legislation and regulation, and in putting in place concrete instruments to ensure non-discrimination, the protection of indigenous rights, territories and resources, and the socioeconomic inclusion and political participation of indigenous people. It is equally important that public authorities recognize indigenous peoples' own governance models and obtain their free and informed consent on any process affecting their lives.
3. In order for indigenous tourism to develop and prosper in a respectful and equitable manner, all stakeholders need to take into consideration the following key socioeconomic and human rights aspects directly related to indigenous communities:
 - **Respect:** Respect cultural values and the cultural capital of indigenous groups, their physical, spiritual and cultural relationship with their traditional lands and customary laws, in order to be able to understand their expected benefits from tourism and the role they wish to play in it. Respect the management models that the indigenous communities wish to apply in tourism development.
 - **Consultation:** Engage in a thorough, transparent and permanent consultation process on the planning, design and management of tourism projects, products and services. This process includes a dialogue between indigenous and non-indigenous stakeholders (governments, destinations, tourism

companies and others), as well as among indigenous community members whose consent to any tourism development is absolutely necessary.

- **Empowerment:** Help facilitate skills development and empowerment of indigenous communities through organizational structures and governance models, including self-governance, that enable efficient decision-making with regards to tourism.
- **Equitable Partnerships:** Support equitable indigenous enterprises and sustainable business practices which not only ensure an enhanced economic benefit, but also contribute to protecting cultural and natural resources, intellectual property, fostering community development and improving individual livelihoods.
- **Protection:** Ensure that outcomes of tourism development are positive, and that adverse impacts on natural resources, cultural heritage and the way of life of the communities are timely identified and prevented or eliminated. Participate in the protection of natural and cultural assets of indigenous communities, as well as of their traditional lands.





Indigenous tribe playing the wooden flute, Amazon, Brazil

© Filipe Frazao - Dreamstime.com



Masai with costumes in Kenya

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II. Specific recommendations

a) Recommendations for tour operators and travel agencies

Tour operators represent a key component in the value chain of indigenous tourism given their role in developing indigenous tourism products and commercializing the offering through their network of retail distributors, namely travel agencies. While indigenous tourism creates a great platform for both non-indigenous and indigenous operators to work together, the tourism sector stakeholders should take into account the following recommendations:

Design of indigenous tourism products

- Design indigenous tourism products and services in a participatory manner with the communities, led by the commitment to build mutual confidence and protect indigenous culture, environment and community well-being above all other interests.
- Work with indigenous communities in the design of new products and in all management phases, using mutually agreed consultation processes, to ensure cultural authenticity and to enrich tourist experience. Develop codes of conduct in order to avoid the commodification of indigenous culture.

- Engage indigenous communities in developing equitable business collaboration models. Listen to different voices within the communities as different individuals may bring different ideas.
- Work with communities to ensure prior assessment of carrying capacity and appropriate visitation volume. Manage tourism growth to help sustain traditional economies where this is desired by indigenous communities.
- Develop indigenous tourism products, services and experiences in a way that tourism-related benefits revert to as many individuals of the indigenous communities as possible, whether engaged directly or indirectly in tourism activity. This will create greater acceptance of tourism by the indigenous communities and more sources of revenue.
- Understand traditional indigenous land use and support the creation of outdoor experiences and tourism trails that respect and interpret the use of the land, engage more indigenous communities in a wider area, and ultimately enrich tourist experience.
- Understand the history and social reality of the indigenous groups. Analyze how these elements influence local receptivity to tourism as a key component to forging

lasting partnerships built on trust and respect.

- Ensure that indigenous interpretation programmes facilitate and encourage a high level of public awareness and support, which are necessary for the long-term survival of natural and cultural heritage of the indigenous communities.
- Make sure that the marketing of indigenous tourism experiences is led or controlled by the indigenous peoples themselves. Pictures illustrating individuals or specific spaces and the use of certain words may need permission.

Distribution of benefits to the indigenous communities

- Determine the benefits that indigenous communities expect from opening up to tourism and any disadvantages that may be foreseen. Projects with sound and long-term social benefits should be prioritized by the indigenous communities, instead of short-term and profit-seeking initiatives.
- Assist indigenous communities in setting up their priority support facilities, including healthcare, sanitation and education infrastructure. These resources will help them stay on their ancestral land and improve their overall well-being.



Fabric used in indigenous and cultural activities of the Karo tribe of North Sumatra, Indonesia

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Variety of colors of corn, native plants, from Latin America

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- Support the establishment of cultural indigenous interpretation centers if communities decide to create them to present their heritage and sell their products and tourism experiences.
- Assist indigenous people in protecting their natural and cultural environment which is crucial for their well-being, and can also provide assets for tourism experiences.
- Refrain from giving gifts or donations to indigenous communities that may not comply with local customs, induce dependency or influence their decisions on opening up to tourism.
- Work with local authorities, indigenous community organizations and leaders in order to establish a transparent and accountable mechanism of distribution of revenue generated through tourism.
- Get acquainted with gender relations and roles within indigenous communities and contribute to distributing the tourism-generated revenue between men and women.
- Ensure that tourism operations do not prompt any form of exploitation of human beings, notably of children, youth and women.

- Encourage the transfer of skills and knowledge to increase the capacity of indigenous people to participate in the delivery and management of tourism activities.
- Support communities seeking to participate in local/regional/national tourism planning processes which can have an impact on their livelihoods.

Contribution to indigenous communities' empowerment

- Offer mentoring and training to indigenous communities if they wish to start new businesses or improve their supply chain. Access to markets, business skills training and hospitality standards are important for the success of indigenous tourism enterprises.
- Support indigenous people to engage in community-based tourism ventures and train human resources to develop their own management capacities.
- Assist youth and women in prospering through tourism as successes can stimulate them to acquire more independence, better education and concrete business skills for their personal endeavors.





Hamar women in Omo, Ethiopia
© Dietmar Temps - Dreamstime.com



Native American with traditional costume

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b) Recommendations for tour guides

The role of non-indigenous tour guides working with indigenous communities is important not only for correctly interpreting the culture of indigenous groups or their linkages with the nature, but also in serving as a principal cultural mediator between the indigenous communities, local governments, tourists and tourism companies. As this privileged position also entails a series of responsibilities and requires a high extent of sensitivity both towards indigenous cultures and tourists' expectations, tour guides should take into account the following recommendations:

- Work side-by-side with indigenous community leaders in order to avoid the promotion of non-authentic cultural performances and handicrafts or an inaccurate interpretation of indigenous culture.
- Study and comply with the codes of conduct of the communities or those agreed with the tour operators, so as to respect the indigenous culture and socioeconomic characteristics.
- Partner with local indigenous guides and cultural custodians and engage them in co-guided tours to ensure benefits to indigenous communities, authenticity, and enrichment of tourist experience.

- Transfer knowledge and skills on tourism guiding to community members so that they feel more empowered to become guides themselves.
- Inform tourists of local traditions, beliefs and protocols before arriving into an indigenous community.
- Participate in cultural awareness training when offered by community leaders. Practice full immersion into the communities as part of the tour guide training, if invited by indigenous hosts.
- Appreciate that some features of the indigenous culture may be of spiritual nature and need to be experienced first-hand, if allowed, in order to be well understood.
- Make sure that sites that are “off limits” and the restricted access to certain cultural practices and ceremonies are clearly understood and respected by both the guides and the tourists, whether for spiritual reasons, privacy or safety issues.
- Tour guides that have been contracted by a tour operator should ensure, together with their employer, that retail travel agencies offering indigenous experiences convey the necessary information to their clients on the communities

to be visited. Failing to do so may create erroneous conceptions and even misunderstandings during cultural interaction.

- In case of local indigenous tour guides, the best ambassadors of their own culture, some training on interpretative skills may help to convey the cultural content efficiently.



**Totem in Sitka, Alaska,
United States of America**

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c) Recommendations for indigenous communities

Indigenous communities should be the ultimate decision-makers and beneficiaries of tourism development which concerns their cultures and the territories they inhabit. In that capacity, they have the leading role in the consultation process for setting up indigenous tourism operations which, at times, may even result in refraining from tourism development. In order to make tourism partnerships as equitable and sustainable as possible, indigenous groups should take into account the following recommendations:

- Provide representative organizational structures suitable for effective engagement with tourism partners, as well as community self-management mechanisms seeking to make the distribution of benefits more equitable and fair.
- Discuss and agree on consultation and grievance remedial processes with tourism partners.
- Ensure that tourism partners know what cultural information can be shared with visitors.
- Provide tourism partners with information on the cultural specificities of indigenous peoples when they engage and work with the indigenous culture, communities and businesses.

- Provide indigenous cultural awareness training for non-indigenous tour guides.
- Assist with the preparation of clear guidelines or codes of conduct to assist visitors to respect community traditions and protocols.
- Provide information for tourists on acceptable behaviour and etiquette while at a community facility or site.
- Ensure privacy, safety, security and comfort of visitors while respecting the privacy of indigenous community members in tourism development.
- Ensure cultural sites that are “off limits” to visitors are clearly described/delimited.
- Provide information for visitors on what they can expect from their cultural experience.
- Provide respectful opportunity for visitors to interact with indigenous people during the cultural tourism experience.

In addition, indigenous community leaders may also consider to:

- Assess to which extent the natural environment is suitable for tourism development by taking into consideration water consumption

needs, waste management and needs to protect species and ecosystems. Assess and avoid any potential threat.

- Engage young people from the community in guided tours in order to enable their own cultural learning, motivate them to become tour guides themselves and facilitate mentoring of future entrepreneurs.
- Support and encourage the creation and development of community-based tourism enterprises associated to the territorial organization.
- Supervise the influx of visitors, which can quickly exceed manageable numbers and put high pressure on local infrastructure, community members and their resources.
- Preserve local culture without adopting practices or models of other indigenous groups just because they are popular with visitors and “sell” well.
- Observe sound environmental practices while providing dining services to tourists, particularly in terms of sustainability of resources, food waste, water consumption and waste management.



Handmade knitting machine

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d) Recommendations for tourists

Tourists visiting indigenous communities are becoming increasingly sensitized about cultural traditions of different ethnic groups and the need to behave responsibly when travelling. However, soaring tourist numbers may convert visits to some indigenous communities into a fashionable trend, which may raise the issues of carrying capacity, cultural misunderstandings or expectations that may not be met. Besides the duty of tourism companies and guides to brief their clients on indigenous tourism experiences, tourists should take into account the following recommendations:

Before the trip

- Research and gather information of the indigenous community prior to the visit. Understanding the history, culture, codes of conduct and linkages with nature of the indigenous groups will also help in appreciating their customs.
- Choose tourism operators that are managed by indigenous entrepreneurs or have direct business relations with local indigenous providers. In case of the latter, consider giving preference to shared or partial ownership models benefiting the indigenous communities.

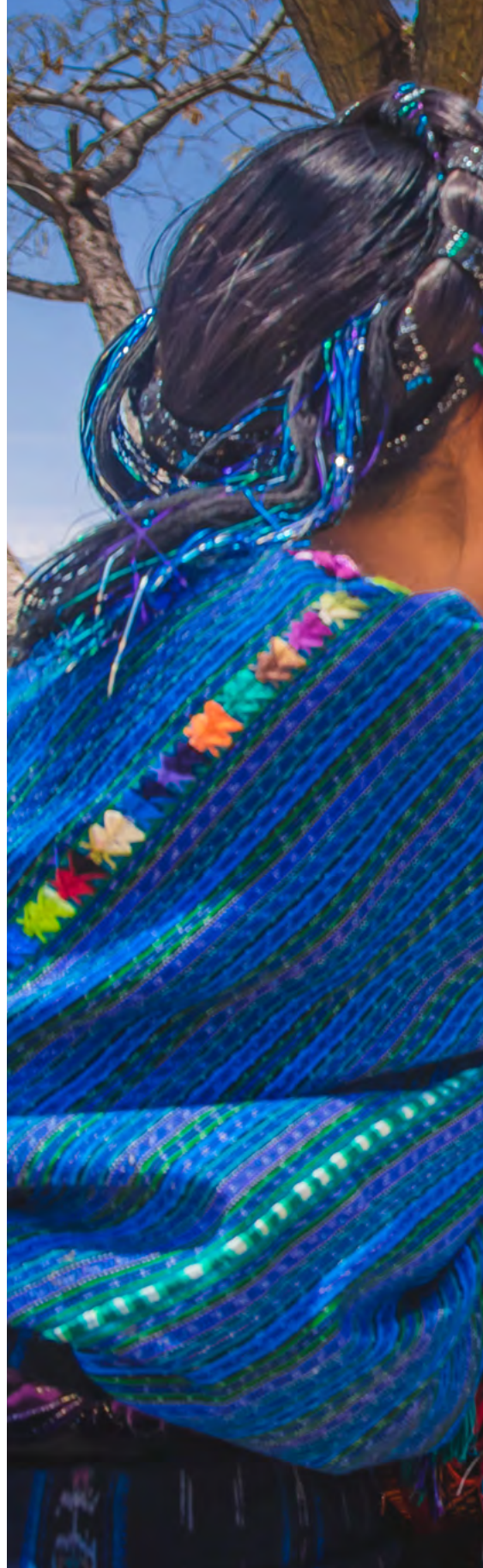
During the visit

- Leave a minimum footprint. Conserve water, fauna and flora and ask your guide for **do's** and **don'ts**.
- Reduce waste disposal as much as possible. Indigenous communities may not use a waste management system similar to the one visitors are accustomed to.
- Learn about indigenous handcrafts and art. Buy only those made by local indigenous artisans as many indigenous groups do not have their intellectual property registered.
- Refrain from buying handicrafts made of endangered plants or animals. Irresponsible purchasing can boost a demand that may bring some species to extinction.
- Do not remove any objects from archaeological sites as this may suppose irreversible damage to cultural heritage assets associated to indigenous communities and their beliefs.
- Access only the places open to tourists in areas managed by indigenous communities. Some locations or rituals have spiritual significance and are therefore considered sacred, or may simply be off-limits or unsafe for tourists.
- Always ask permission before taking a photo of indigenous people, significant locations or rituals. In some communities, it is considered inappropriate to be photographed.
- Hire indigenous guides with in-depth knowledge. Indigenous people are the best custodians of their culture and the natural world that surrounds them.
- Ask for the consent of community members and a local guide service if you would like to participate in spiritual ceremonies and private rituals. Hire a local guide if you wish to visit indigenous families and interact with them.
- Be flexible and patient as the concept of time to some indigenous communities may differ from yours.
- Ask lots of questions; ask the tour operator, guide, accommodation establishments and indigenous communities about their environmental practices and commitment to protecting indigenous rights. Asking questions helps to create a demand for environmentalism and responsible tourism throughout the tourism sector.

- Avoid giving money and gifts to children. This will not improve their future as it will make them more dependent on tourists' charity. If you wish to show solidarity, talk to your guide or some community leader on how to contribute.
- Remember that indigenous cultures are evolving and ever changing like any other culture, and be aware that they might not fit your expectations of authenticity. A visit to a community should be seen first and foremost as a learning experience.

After the trip

- Support environmental, healthcare or education projects of indigenous people that improve their well-being and enable them to stay in their territories.
- Make sure your indigenous hosts actually wish to attract more tourists before your positive experiences and images reach thousands of people through social media and digital platforms.
- Send pictures back home but be cautious of how you use them even if you have got permission. Third parties may end up commercializing photos of your travel experience without any benefits to the indigenous communities or their previous consent.





**Indigenous women talking in front of
the lake of Atitlan volcano,
Panajachel, Guatemala**

© Pablo Hidalgo - Dreamstime.com



Indigenous women dance with traditional costumes during Corpus Christi parade, Pujili, Ecuador

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Zulu people celebrating in South Africa

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