



# Aboriginal Tourism Celebrates Canada

BY GREGORY B. GALLAGHER

Travellers exploring Canada's rich geography are opting more frequently to discover the wonders of First Nations attractions, destinations, and ancient traditions. Since the Europeans landed on the North American continent, visitors have depended heavily on over 600 Aboriginal tribes for their sustainable expertise on local foods, wildlife habits, and interconnected relationship with the natural world-at-large. This dynamic legacy is now made available to travellers in every region of the vast Canadian landscape, directly from First Nations providers.

Long before the French and English explorers "claimed" areas of what would become Canada for their distant European kings and queens, First Nations Peoples had adapted to all types of environments: coastal, forest, tundra, and taiga. This remarkable survival synergy continues, as the Aboriginal legacy gains business acumen. Across Canada, in all of the aforementioned settings, unique cultural activities, traditions, and mementos are offered to visitors courtesy of the diverse number of Aboriginal communities throughout Canada.

Travel options from First Nations tourism outfitters now include wildlife/wilderness adventures, live music and dance performances, traditional gastronomy venues, handmade artisan outlets, Native art galleries, hotels, and magic storytelling of guides versed in the myths and legends of their dynamic spirit world. So whether travellers seek to enjoy powwow festivities, join an overnight canoe expedition, or simply visit one of the many new Aboriginal museums across Canada, these added-value samples of authentic indigenous culture are sure to impact guests long into the future.

## NORTH

Interest in the North is more vigorous now than ever before. Canada's northern lands include the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut—Canada's newest and largest territory covering almost 775,000 square miles (two million sq km) of tundra, ocean, and ice ([www.nunavuttourism.com](http://www.nunavuttourism.com)). Outfitters welcome travellers with an exciting



menu of outings, sites, and Aboriginal cultural experiences to suit all persuasions.

Bathurst Inlet Lodge ([www.bathurstarctic.com](http://www.bathurstarctic.com)), north of the Arctic Circle in central Nunavut, provides novice or veteran outdoor enthusiasts with access to one of the largest wilderness areas in North America. Daily expeditions with Inuit guide/hunters, inform travellers of traditional ways in the field, such as “reading the landscape” for sightings of musk-ox, caribou, seals, wolves and eagles. Enjoy cultural nights too, as Inuit families share stories of survival skills, model caribou and seal clothing, and proudly perform traditional drumming, dancing and unforgettable throat singing.

If Nunavut and the Canadian Arctic have always been on your bucket list, contact the partnership of Inuit-owned Cruise North Expeditions ([www.cruisenorthexpeditions.com](http://www.cruisenorthexpeditions.com)) with award-winning Adventure Canada ([www.adventurecanada.com](http://www.adventurecanada.com)) for access to Canada’s dreamy northern wilds aboard a cruise ship. Enjoy your very own Arctic safari, while watching the mesmerizing lights of the aurora borealis from the comfort of your vessel. Follow whales, seals and narwhals in small zodiac boats up close, or photograph the endangered polar bear as you cruise through this timeless, yet changing geography. Bear in mind that, on these forays, you will have to forego some of the usual cruise ship amenities and the rugged nature of these expeditions means a need for ease of mobility. Independent travellers can also take advantage of Aboriginal-owned Canadian North Airline’s “Arctic Circle Air Pass” ([www.canadiannorth.com](http://www.canadiannorth.com)), which allows tourists to explore five destinations in



SAINTE-MARIE AMONG THE HURONS • ON TOURISM

Canada’s North on one ticket, beginning and ending in the South.

The Yukon’s Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre ([www.kwanlindunculturalcentre.com](http://www.kwanlindunculturalcentre.com)) is a stunning one-stop hub for both ancient artefacts of the First Nations Peoples, and the living heritage activities of a vigorous Aboriginal population. A “gathering place for all people,” this beautiful museum-cum-studio attracts legions of locals and visitors alike to the banks of the legendary Yukon River in Whitehorse. Visitors watch the artistry of canoe carving, learn about the *Secrets of the Ice*, enjoy traditional storytelling by the Adäka Cultural Society ([www.adakafestival.ca](http://www.adakafestival.ca)), and feast on delicious indigenous foods ([www.travel yukon.com](http://www.travel yukon.com)).

Just saying the words “Nahanni National Park Reserve” conjures up visions of one of Canada’s undisputed natural treasures in the Northwest Territories ([www.spectacularnwt.com](http://www.spectacularnwt.com)). You will enjoy this thrilling and recently expanded landscape by paddling, hiking, jet boating, or flying in a helicopter into areas the Slavey Athabaskan People call *Nailicho* or Virginia Falls—twice the height of Niagara Falls. Winter or summer, book treks into the wilderness in the company of Aboriginal hunter/guides like Joe Bailey, owner of

North Star Adventures, who boasts “50,000 years of experience” ([www.northstaradventures.ca](http://www.northstaradventures.ca)).

## CENTRAL

The enormous landmass of Ontario and Québec is highlighted by thousands of lakes, rivers, mountains and forests. You may wish to indulge your more adventurous side by venturing to the James Bay Cree community of Wemindji ([www.creetourism.ca](http://www.creetourism.ca)). This is the gateway to a rich fishing, hunting, and boating wonderland. Stay at the newly expanded Maquata Inn, join the annual wilderness canoe trip, or greet your new day at a sunrise ceremony led by Shaman Earle. Powwow festivities in June and July are fun too, while the mysteries of the Cree view of our ancient world are shared in a “walking out” ceremony. Live music, songs, dances, and crafts abound, and sometimes these sacred events include processions in the large rabaska canoes to historical sites, where powerful rituals ensue ([www.tourismeau tochtone.com](http://www.tourismeau tochtone.com)).

Fly into Chibougamou-Chapais Airport from Montréal and explore the sensational new Cree museum and extensive menu of traditional activities. Meanwhile in Oujé-Bougoumou ([www.creeculturalinstitute.ca](http://www.creeculturalinstitute.ca)), just north of the Saguenay Fjord, the Montagnais First Nations boast the Mashteuiatsh Amerindian Museum ([www.museeilnu.ca](http://www.museeilnu.ca)), a dynamic centre for Aboriginal knowledge, history, and cultural

SQUAMISH LIL’WAT CULTURAL CENTRE • TOURISM VANCOUVER







BLOOD RESERVE, GLENWOOD, AB • GOV'T OF AB

exchange. This is a great destination to arrange hunting and fishing expeditions too. Or, contact Nunavik Tourism for the farthest points North throughout Québec for dogsledding, hunting, and supreme fishing ([www.nunavik-tourism.com](http://www.nunavik-tourism.com)).

If boutique hotel luxury is more your style, but you still wish to experience Aboriginal hospitality, head to Québec City's suburb of Wendake. Here, you will discover a comprehensive menu of exciting cultural offerings and entertaining activity options. Begin by staying at the Hôtel-Musée Premières Nations ([www.hotelpremieresnations.ca](http://www.hotelpremieresnations.ca)), an award-winning architectural work of art echoing the traditional longhouse, decorated with the utmost attention to Native lifestyle

(Aboriginal amenities, artefacts, and contemporary art throughout), and set amidst lush gardens with walking trails designed to follow the river. Don't miss the dining treats at La Traite on-site for a delicious merging of original and traditional gastronomy, and tour their amazing museum, or the only Huron village site in North America nearby ([www.huron-wendat.qc.ca](http://www.huron-wendat.qc.ca)). Meanwhile, Montréal's Kahnawake Mohawk Nation welcomes all to their famous yearly powwow in early July to camp on-site and marvel at drumming sessions, Native games, the war dance, women's buckskin dress, and the inter-tribal dance, where everyone is welcome to join ([www.kahnawakepowwow.com](http://www.kahnawakepowwow.com)).

Midland, Ontario's Huron/Ouendat vil-

lage is a pre-contact site featuring a shaman's lodge, burial rack, longhouse, sweat lodge, bone pit, wigwam, fur drying exhibit, and sensational masks ([www.huroniamuseum.com](http://www.huroniamuseum.com)). Established in 1956, this captivating site illustrates Aboriginal life prior to Europeans arriving *circa* 1500-1600, and will have visitors travelling into another dimension when scaling the lookout steps, listening to the elders, or witnessing festivities with residents in their colourful regalia. Enjoy National Aboriginal History Month during June while in Ottawa, where the party includes the solstice Inuit celebration called *Quaggiq* on June 21. Festivities are held at the Family Resources and Health Promotion Centre and include an opening prayer, lighting of the traditional *kudlik* stove, Elder storytelling, traditional feasts of caribou, musk-ox, frozen whale skin and blubber, plus Inuit throat singing, drum dancing, games and sports.

Celebrate the 34<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the "Champion of Champions" powwow at Grand River Six Nations Reserve of Oswegen, Ontario near Brantford, on July 27-28. Chiefswood Tent and Trailer Park is the hub of action, where a brimming program of activities for all ages is offered. Over 125 Native craft and food vendors greet bus tours, campers, and independent travellers to this two-day experience on the former estate of the Mohawk poetess, E. Pauline Johnson. Hundreds of traditional dancers, drummers, and singers highlight this social event, with coveted cash prizes offered during exciting competitions ([www.grpowwow.com](http://www.grpowwow.com); [www.bit.ly/ZcwA2P](http://www.bit.ly/ZcwA2P)).

## WEST

Manitoba's noted Aboriginal celebrations occur in Winnipeg from the end of October to the beginning of November. Aboriginal Music Week presents an amalgam of live First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and indigenous entertainment covering hip hop, rap, electronic, world, blues, and country music styles ([www.aboriginalmusicweek.ca](http://www.aboriginalmusicweek.ca)), while the Manito Ahbee Festival reaches beyond into the areas of their ancient heritage, contemporary art, and storytelling for all ages ([www.manitoahbee.com](http://www.manitoahbee.com)).

If spiritual renewal attracts you, visit Saskatchewan's Northern Plains People just north of Saskatoon. An authentic



set of body/mind/spirit experiences unfold at the Wanuskewin Heritage Park, including overnight in a teepee, witnessing a buffalo hunt, and exploring the medicine wheel circle to learn about the close relationship locals maintain with healing plants, culinary wisdom, and the cycles of the animals ([www.wanuskewin.com](http://www.wanuskewin.com)). February is Aboriginal Storytelling Month, and there is no better place to experience this rich tradition than at Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, Saskatoon ([www.sicc.sk.ca](http://www.sicc.sk.ca)).

The UNESCO World Heritage Site in the community of Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump is a must-see when coming to Alberta. Just east of Calgary, this sprawling geography leads Alberta's Aboriginal tourism sites with a stunning weave of First Nations architecture, world-class museum collections, and outdoor activities for the whole family ([www.head-smashed-in.com](http://www.head-smashed-in.com)). Favorites here include teepee camping, hiking to the buffalo runs with Blackfoot guides, drumming and dancing on the plaza, and the annual Alberta Arts Days the last weekend of September. Every Heritage community

throughout the province holds this event and at Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, this is especially popular with the Aboriginal artisan works on sale. Don't miss the World Chicken Dance Championships at nearby Blackfoot Historical Park ([www.blackfootcrossing.ca](http://www.blackfootcrossing.ca)), or the Glenbow Museum Aboriginal collection in Calgary ([www.glenbow.org](http://www.glenbow.org)).

## EAST

The day after the popular Mi'kmaq powwow on P.E.I.'s Lennox Island in late July, hungry crowds go to the Aboriginal Food Festival where, after dining at the café, guests take home fresh *lusgnign* or bannock, a fluffy biscuit-type of bread ([www.lennoxisland.com](http://www.lennoxisland.com)). Across the bay in Nova Scotia, Elders share stories about Creation at the Wagmatcook Culture and Heritage Center ([www.wagmatcook.com](http://www.wagmatcook.com)). Listen to their ancient tales of how to live properly, how animals interact with the elements, and details about powerful ceremonial tools of their society—like the medicine wheel. Less than two hours from Halifax view petroglyphs created



DENE ELDERS, HAY RIVER • NWT/TERRY PARKER

by the Mi'kmaq First Nations People in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries at Kejimikujik National Park, where it is also possible to camp out under the stars ([www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/ns/kejimikujik/index.aspx](http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/ns/kejimikujik/index.aspx)). 🌿



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