



**COVID-19
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UNWTO Inclusive Recovery Guide

Sociocultural Impacts of COVID-19

Issue 4: Indigenous Communities



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House building of the bornean jungle tribe of Orang Ulu, forest of Sarawak, Borneo, Eastern Malaysia.

UNWTO Inclusive Recovery Guide – Sociocultural Impacts of Covid-19, Issue 4: Indigenous Communities

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#Buildbackbettertourism

#WeAreIndigenous

##RestartTourism

Acknowledgements

This set of guidelines has been developed by the UNWTO Ethics, Culture and Social Responsibility Department, in collaboration with expert voices and Indigenous leaders from the [World Indigenous Tourism Alliance \(WINTA\)](#). The guide also benefitted from inputs of the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\)](#). These guidelines are a response to the continuing crisis caused by COVID-19, and an update on the initial recommendations issued by UNWTO in May 2020. UNWTO wishes to thank its partners for all their valuable inputs.

Note

The *UNWTO Inclusive Recovery Guides* on the sociocultural impacts of COVID-19 are living guidelines. The document is subject to revision as the health situation evolves and more information becomes available on the most effective ways to make Indigenous tourism inclusive, fair and accessible for all.



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An inclusive response for Indigenous communities

The COVID-19 emergency has evidenced the historical discrimination faced by Indigenous communities. The impacts of the pandemic on Indigenous populations are yet unmeasurable. The risks for the elderly, the lack of access to essential services and healthcare facilities, as well as the scarcity of social and economic structures catering for the communities' needs, have put entire populations at the risk of severe hardship, illness and death.

A crucial issue for Indigenous communities is ensuring **access to public services** and **economic stability** offering a good quality of life. The latter is essential to retain younger generations and improve sustainability in the economic recovery. **Reinforcing the healthcare system is particularly important**, as it is necessary for other services and economic development to be effective within Indigenous communities.

Indigenous communities were at various stages of their development and many had opted for tourism as a main source of income at the pandemic outbreak. The halt of tourism has shown the need for Indigenous communities to **diversify their economies.** **The effects of the pandemic have forcefully displayed the need to include Indigenous populations in decision-making processes affecting their livelihoods and their cultures.**

The rebound of tourism operations within Indigenous communities is likely to take longer than the tourism recovery in other populations. Nevertheless, tourism is well-placed to revise Indigenous development practices and uphold the commitments of the international community to advance Indigenous rights. Tourism stakeholders should advocate for a responsible and sustainable development of Indigenous tourism and a **meaningful intercultural exchange between the local communities and their visitors**, based on the respect of Indigenous rights, cultures and values.

The existence of a growing trend in responsible travel is undeniable, with millions wishing to experience Indigenous cultures and interact with local communities in unique natural settings. This trend requires defining and adopting a responsible behaviour of visitors, inclusive management systems and fair benefit-sharing, as standard approaches in the sector's recovery. **More equity will build mutual trust, new Indigenous tourism partnerships, authentic experiences for visitors and socioeconomic advancements for Indigenous communities.**



Recommendations

Placing Indigenous communities at the centre of recovery plans

- **Assess the effectiveness of existing response and recovery plans.** Ensure that policies and plans adequately respond to Indigenous peoples' needs against particular contexts, i.e., remoteness, demographics, language diversity, traditional medicinal practices or food security. The plans ought to result from an **intercultural dialogue with the communities** and their free, prior and informed consent to partake in designing recovery programmes, reflecting specific Indigenous entrepreneurial and informal economy models.
- **Support self-isolation measures and safe tourism re-opening.** Tourism administrations, companies and the global traveller community should understand that decisions on self-confinement and tourism restrictions respond to communities' scarce health-care services and ensuring safety of their vulnerable members. **Tourism re-opening requires solid health measures and specific protocols for travellers to avoid serious risks for Indigenous communities.**
- **Support Indigenous communities in diversifying their sources of income.** Tourism stakeholders and administrations should support those communities **opting for other sources of revenue in the immediate recovery**, not necessarily including face-to-face experiences and hosting visitors. **Virtual "talks and walks", online platforms for selling Indigenous products and art, or storytelling soirées,** can be a valid alternative for the time being.

- **Open up to innovation emerging from the Indigenous communities.** Embrace the great diversity of the revitalized Indigenous knowledge (IK) during the pandemic, as it will feed in the authentic Indigenous tourism experiences of the future, bringing market innovation and valorization of the IK for the generations to come.

Engaging Indigenous leaders now for the better tourism of tomorrow

- **Develop governance mechanisms in Indigenous tourism.** Gather Indigenous communities, policymakers and tourism industry key players in order to facilitate new collaboration platforms, establish benefits-sharing thresholds and speak with **one single voice. The communities' vision and fair business agreements shall drive the transformation** of Indigenous tourism in the post-pandemic era.
- **Build equitable partnerships and intercultural understanding.** Harness the immense capacity of tourism to **mobilize and garner support for local communities.** The solidarity of today can create the bonds of tomorrow. Building-back-better tourism shall embrace equitable partnerships, in-depth understanding and respect of Indigenous peoples' cultural values, as well as their ties with nature.



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Setting participatory data collection systems to support an informed decision-making

- **Put Indigenous peoples' data at the top of the transformation.** Improve the collection of data on the participation of Indigenous peoples in tourism. Information related to their role in the sector, types of participation, jobs and business ventures, could support **place-based approaches that respond to the actual needs of Indigenous communities** in relation to tourism development. **Monitor the impact of tourism development** on the Indigenous cultures, as well as the biodiversity of the natural resources that Indigenous livelihoods depend on.
- **Build partnerships geared towards gathering accurate data.** Advance measurement processes and metrics aligned with Indigenous peoples' ways of life. Defining data potential for understanding Indigenous tourism, the design of data gathering systems and data collection itself, should involve **Indigenous peoples** at the community level, leveraging on all their knowledge and skills. The issues of data ownership need to be brought to the table so as to ensure "Indigenous data sovereignty."

Creating an enabling policy environment for Indigenous-led tourism

- **Transitioning from assisting towards enabling Indigenous entrepreneurship.** Address side factors that hamper Indigenous-led tourism and put together support packages tailored to the geographical features and specific realities of communities. Public entities are essential in facilitating **access to finance, business skills, training and market**. Administrations are also instrumental in supporting the empowerment of Indigenous tourism organizations to assume their leadership.
- **Promote Indigenous social enterprises, cooperatives and trusts.** Indigenous peoples face difficulties to identify the best financial models to manage their tourism resources, products and experiences. The sector should design with Indigenous leaders robust **investment and financial schemes for Indigenous ventures**, increasing the existing tourism offer and destinations' attractiveness.



Strengthening skills to leverage Indigenous peoples' resilience

- **Collaborate with communities in building new capacities.** Design training programmes to upskill communities in tourism and hospitality, **safety, access to digital markets and financial tools.** The tourism sector, academic institutions and community leaders can join forces in this process and put it in practice together. The training of future leaders for tourism undertakings can **strengthen bonds with the sector, prevent migration and reinforce competitiveness of the overall tourism offer.**
- **Foster communities' transition towards the digital era.** Leverage the potential of digital skills to promote education, mitigate unemployment, initiate new entrepreneurial undertakings and apply innovation within the value chain. **The backing of tech-companies is crucial** for Indigenous peoples to take an active role in this transition. These partnerships serve as an engine for **online promotion of experiences and services, particularly relevant for businesses run by women and youth.**
- **Adopt a place-based approach that promotes Indigenous entrepreneurship** without losing track of regional development needs that many communities have in common. If communities develop tourism, based on their own resources, in ways that align with their development perspectives, long-lasting benefits are generated. **Communities are best-placed to mobilize**

their assets and address exclusion and inequality. A regional mid-term vision may create a better spill-over effect of the overall development benefits on a given territory, populated by related Indigenous peoples.

Acknowledging the relevance of Indigenous peoples in destinations

- **Embrace the value of Indigenous creativity.** Indigenous cultural expressions should be seen as an important part of the cultural **capital of tourism destinations and their overall branding.** The opportunities for placing Indigenous products on the market require **formal employment and intellectual property schemes.** These contribute to a fairer distribution of benefits, increase cultural appreciation and curb the mass sale of counterfeit Indigenous items within destinations.
- **Develop mentorship systems for Indigenous ventures.** Catalyse the communities' role in the sphere of tourism, creative industries and traditional arts and crafts through mentorship systems tailored for different stages of business developments. When communities improve their livelihoods through their culture and traditional knowledge they gain **pride and self-confidence to scale-up their businesses.** The unique experiences and products offered by Indigenous peoples also significantly improve the cultural image of destinations.



- **Let Indigenous peoples drive the creation of their cultural destinations' image.** Indigenous communities engaged in tourism and creative arts are **the ones to decide on the image and brand development related to their cultural offer and identity.** Destination management organizations, marketing companies and community managers may provide technical support in this endeavour.
- **Make tourism the catalyst of a better life quality or good living,** according to many Indigenous peoples' vision. Tourism revenues can make major contributions to Indigenous livelihoods when communities decide to **invest in their healthcare, sanitation and educational infrastructure.** Air, land and sea connectivity and digital connections can also be improved if national and local authorities provide financial support to **tackle the geographical isolation** and lack of infrastructure in rural areas.

Creating visibility of Indigenous-led tourism networks

- **Facilitate platforms to reinforce Indigenous peoples' networks.** International bodies, governments and trade associations should **enhance the visibility** of Indigenous-led networks so they could implement their business development strategies as ultimate decision makers. Many Indigenous organizations share objectives but require partners to unfold their tourism roadmap and promote their success stories. Solid **networks gather talent, skills and ideas, and create competitive business environments.** Associative structures also nurture the awareness-raising efforts on key issues affecting Indigenous development in all spheres, including tourism.
- **Join hands with technological partners to connect businesses, entrepreneurs and communities. Bridging the digital divide** and lack of internet connection and technological tools is crucial to creating prosperous and economically sustainable Indigenous tourism undertakings. In times of restricted access to communities, an affordable Internet connection can **channel communication** between Indigenous creators, products and experiences **with their audience and customer networks.**



Resources and good practices

Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

In the recent years, OECD has published relevant research and compilations of good practices addressing the Indigenous development, including tourism. Relevant publications include:

- *Linking Indigenous Communities with Regional Development,*
- *Indigenous Employment and Skills Strategies in Australia,*
- *Linking Indigenous Communities with Regional Development in Canada and*
- *Linking the Indigenous Sami People with Regional Development in Sweden.*

United Nations

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is the most comprehensive international instrument on the rights of Indigenous peoples. It establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous peoples.

UN Chief Executives Board (CEB), gathering the heads of 31 UN agencies, issued in November 2020 *A Call to Action: Building an Inclusive, Sustainable and Resilient Future with Indigenous Peoples*, which underlined that the "(...) respect for Indigenous peoples' rights must go hand in hand with their meaningful participation,

inclusion and empowerment to make informed decisions, as full and equal members of society." The message marked the 5th anniversary of the *UN System-Wide Action Plan on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (SWAP)*.

The UN system also issued a *Statement by the Chair of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on COVID-19 and Indigenous Peoples and COVID-19: A Guidance Note for the UN System prepared by the UN Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues*. On the occasion of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples in 2020, the UN issued *COVID-19 and Indigenous peoples' resilience statement*, while the UN Secretary General's *Message for 2020, International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples 9 August* also shed light on key issue affecting the human rights and vulnerability of Indigenous peoples amidst the pandemic. Relevant UN resources also include *The United Nations Development Group's Guidelines on Indigenous Peoples' Issues*.

The *UNESCO policy on engaging with Indigenous peoples* builds upon the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)*, making clear references to *cultural expressions of Indigenous peoples*.

World Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA)

The *Larrakia Declaration on the Development of Indigenous Tourism*, adopted by the World Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA) at the Global Indigenous Tourism Forum in 2012, in the Larrakia Country, Australia, as a global Partnership Framework for Indigenous Human Rights in Tourism. WINTA and UNWTO started their collaboration after UNWTO had supported the principles of the Declaration. The publication *Indigenous Tourism & Human Rights in Asia & the Pacific Region*, produced by the Pacific Asia Tourism Association (PATA) in collaboration with WINTA, sets the *Larrakia Checklist* to ensure tourism development respects the Indigenous human rights.

World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

Art 4 of the *UNWTO Convention on Tourism Ethics* and the *UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism* outlines that “[...] stakeholders in tourism development and tourists themselves should observe the social and cultural traditions and practices of all peoples, including those of minorities and Indigenous peoples and recognize their worth.”

The UNWTO *Recommendations on Sustainable Development of Indigenous Tourism*, were adopted by the World Committee on Tourism Ethics and endorsed by the UNWTO General Assembly in 2019, as a milestone document for UNWTO Member States and the private sector to develop Indigenous tourism in a responsible and sustainable manner, following a thorough consultation process with Indigenous peoples. The Recommendations also contain responsible traveller tips for visiting Indigenous communities.

Weaving the Recovery – Indigenous Women in Tourism is a UNWTO led project, in partnership with leading Indigenous organizations (WINTA, IMPACTO and CAI), aimed at fostering Indigenous women’s empowerment through a people-centred recovery model for community development, in the post-COVID-19 tourism.

World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) issued in 2021 a study on *Boosting Tourism Development through Intellectual Property*, which brings the issue of cultural guardians and custodians of traditional knowledge that should be subject to Indigenous communities’ trademarks or original designs protected by IP rights.

Independently of COVID-19, UNWTO published *AIUla Framework for Inclusive Community Development through Tourism* in 2020, with the aim of fostering a truly holistic and integrated approach to inclusive community development through tourism.

Other sources

The *ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169)* was adopted in 1989, calling for governments’ responsibility for developing, with the participation of the peoples concerned, co-ordinated and systematic action to protect the rights of these peoples and to guarantee respect for their integrity.

The American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted in 2016, by the Organization of American States (OAS), reiterates the commitment of the governments to ensure their economic and social well-being, as well as the obligation to respect the rights and cultural identity of Indigenous peoples.

Other sources specific to the tourism sector include:

National Guidelines – Developing Authentic Indigenous Tourism Experiences from the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada; and

Indigenous People and the Travel Industry: Global Good Practice Guidelines from G Adventures, the Planterra Foundation and the International Institute of Tourism Studies of the George Washington University.



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