

# Key Considerations When Developing an Aboriginal Tourism Business in Yukon

## I want to start an aboriginal tourism business. What should I know?

First, think carefully about what you want to offer. What products or experiences do you want to provide? What types of activities or experiences will visitors pay for? How much will they pay? What types of visitors are likely to book an aboriginal tourism product? How will you let visitors know about your product?

It's important to be aware of the answers to these questions when starting a tourism business. It's also important to understand what types of aboriginal tourism experiences already exist in Yukon and where there may be an opportunity for you to provide something unique to your culture and area.

You can find research and data on aboriginal tourism visitors to Canada and Yukon through the following organizations and resources:

### Sources of Information

- \* Department of Tourism and Culture (Yukon Government)
  - 2008 Report: Demand of Aboriginal Tourism Culture in Yukon [www.tc.gov.yk.ca/758.html](http://www.tc.gov.yk.ca/758.html)
  - Product Development and Research [www.tc.gov.yk.ca](http://www.tc.gov.yk.ca) 867-667-3053
- \* Yukon First Nation Tourism Association (YFNFTA) [www.yfnfta.org](http://www.yfnfta.org) 867-667-7698
- \* Aboriginal Tourism Canada (ATC) [www.aboriginaltourism.ca](http://www.aboriginaltourism.ca) 1-800-724-7872
- \* Aboriginal Tourism Association of British Columbia (ATBC) [www.aboriginalbc.com](http://www.aboriginalbc.com)
  - ATBC Blueprint Strategy Reports [www.aboriginalbc.com/corporate/corp\\_bluestrategy](http://www.aboriginalbc.com/corporate/corp_bluestrategy)

## Where do aboriginal tourism visitors come from?

The visitors who are most interested in aboriginal tourism experiences are those from outside North America. Many of these travellers come from Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Australia as well as other regions in Europe. Although fewer travellers from these countries visit Yukon than travellers from Canada and the United States, they are more likely to have the time and interest to participate in aboriginal tourism experiences.

## Who are they?

Research shows that the majority of visitors interested in aboriginal tourism are female. They are often well educated and financially secure. Most are in their 40's or older. They tend to be the same people who are also interested in outdoor activities and other cultural pursuits, such as theatre, music and visual arts. It's important to keep in mind that the priority for most travellers to Yukon, as with other areas in Canada, is to see and experience the natural environment.

## Who should I market my business to?

It depends on the type of experience you want to offer. Most American and Canadian travellers are interested in short experiences that fit into their overall travel itinerary to Yukon and often Alaska. Because these types of short experiences are not the focus of their trip to the north and are value-added experiences, they generally have limited time and budget and are not interested in paying a high price for the experience. If you are able to provide a short (2 to 3 hour) affordable experience, and you offer this in a location that is on their travel route and doesn't cause them to alter their travel plans to their destination, you may have better success at attracting their business.

**Example:** Visitors tend to overnight in Whitehorse then travel to Dawson City in one day. What experience can be offered in Carmacks or another community along the way, for a couple of hours that will still allow visitors to reach Dawson at a reasonable time on the same day?

If they do stop for an experience along the way that is longer in duration, is there appropriate accommodation available for them if they need to overnight?

Consider the travel patterns of visitors in Yukon when looking at what types of services and products to offer.

Most Europeans are also interested in short, inexpensive experiences. However, there is a bit more flexibility in what these travellers will pay. Some seek longer experiences (half-day to overnights) and may be willing to travel a bit

farther to reach out-of-the-way locations. Travellers are willing to pay for experiences that require greater planning and involve additional costs such as meals, infrastructure and transportation.

All travellers, regardless of the market they come from, are looking for value in the dollars they spend.

### **Should I target independent travellers or tour groups?**

There are a greater number of independent travellers to Yukon than those traveling in groups. These are generally self-drive visitors and RV'ers. Independent travellers are more likely to have participated in an aboriginal cultural experience somewhere else and research indicates that they are more likely to do so again. They often have more flexibility in their schedules and will have time to explore opportunities once they reach the destination.

**Note:** It's important to make sure that when travellers do reach Yukon they can find easily find your tour product information and can book a tour or visit an attraction on the day they choose.

Travellers in organized tour groups have most of their activities booked in advance through the tour company. The exception may be when they have "free-time" in a community that offers a variety of activities that they can easily book on their own.

For a product to be considered as part of a group tour operator's program it must fulfill a number of criteria. Some of the requirements may include:

- It must be short enough to fit into a tight schedule (1-3 hours) and ideally along the travel route of the tour group's itinerary.
- It must be accessible for large groups of elderly passengers or passengers with limited mobility, and have washroom facilities, access and parking for motorcoaches and other transportation services like vans or 24-passenger coaches.
- It must be highly structured, meaning that all groups receive the same quality tour at a scheduled time, delivered by skilled and knowledgeable staff throughout the season; it must be guaranteed to operate throughout the season especially if booked in advance.

**Note:** If you are unable to provide your tour or service on a particular day due to cultural protocols, such as a death in the community, you will need to make arrangements with someone to run the tour that day for the group. They should be able to provide the same quality of program as normally offered.

### **When I develop my Aboriginal tourism business, who is my competition?**

You are competing for customers with other First Nation businesses and non-First Nation tourism businesses in Yukon, the rest of Canada, Alaska and in other parts of the world.

Tourists who are interested in aboriginal experiences will choose a destination where a variety of opportunities are available to them. For most tourists, Canada, and in particular Yukon, are not the first places they think of to experience aboriginal tourism.

**Note:** A partnership with Aboriginal Tourism Canada and the Canadian Tourism Commission to increase awareness about aboriginal tourism experiences in Canada is happening in conjunction with the 2010 Olympics through a project called "The Significant 28." With this campaign comes the opportunity for other aboriginal tourism operators to strengthen their marketing efforts so when visitors are searching for aboriginal tourism experiences in Canada they can easily find out about your tour product or services.

Tourists who come to Yukon for other reasons but have some interest in Aboriginal tourism experiences must be convinced to take the time to participate in your tour instead of booking a competitor's tour or another non-aboriginal experience altogether.

**Example:** If you are a new operator offering a half-day canoe trip on the Yukon River and a non-First Nation operator offers a similar trip; how can you persuade visitors to choose your tour over the other? What unique cultural factors can you add to your tour that the other operator doesn't? It is that unique cultural factor that will help them make the choice.

### **What should I charge?**

The price you charge will depend on what's included in *your* product. However, having a rough idea of the price tourists are willing to pay for an experience is a good start.

Europeans may be willing to pay slightly higher prices than Canadian and American travellers but there is a greater expectation that the product is of a high quality.

The 2008 Yukon Aboriginal Tourism Survey asked tourists how much they would be likely to pay for a two-hour experience such as a guided hike or a craft-making workshop. The majority said they would be willing to pay between \$10 and \$39, with most indicating the lower end of that range.

For a full-day experience with meals included, like a canoe expedition with an aboriginal guide, a trap line tour or fish camp tour, the prices varied widely but usually were between \$30 and \$120.

### **Where do tourists look for information on aboriginal tourism experiences?**

Most travellers discover information on aboriginal tourism products and services when researching other aspects of their holiday, but research has indicated it is not the focus of their search. Of those who do look specifically for aboriginal tourism information prior to arrival, the most frequent source they use is the Internet.

Once visitors are in Yukon, many of them will pick up available brochures at tourist attractions, shops and visitor information centres. They will speak with staff at the information centres and to locals to discover what's available.

**Note:** It is a good idea to have a website describing your product or service and that includes prices and contact information. This allows visitors to plan and/or book an experience with you before they arrive. They'll be able to budget both time and money to participate in an experience.

### **What are travellers looking to get out of an aboriginal tourism experience?**

Travellers interested in aboriginal culture want to try something different that they can't get at home, to learn about other cultures and enrich their lives. They are not usually looking for pure entertainment, but for a fun and educational experience where they feel welcome and can acquire new knowledge.

The most popular experiences mentioned in the 2008 Yukon Aboriginal Tourism Survey included:

- "Hearing about traditional uses of the land"
- "Seeing the way Aboriginals used to live"
- "Watching traditional crafts being made (e.g. carving, making moccasins)"
- "Hearing Aboriginal legends"
- "Interacting with local Aboriginal people"

Older travellers (especially those in their 60s or older) tend to be more interested in experiences where less participation is required. Some examples include:

- Listening to stories
- Watching short presentations
- Exploring exhibits

Younger travellers (between 18 and 40) may be open to more active types of experiences like acquiring new skills or trying new activities. However, this is a smaller group of travellers and most visitors to Yukon are middle-aged or older.

### **In summary the key considerations are:**

- Develop shorter experiences (2 – 3 hours).
- Understand *your* pricing and what visitors expect to pay.
- Develop products for target markets (e.g. independent travellers, groups, older or younger travellers).
- Create and maintain marketing information on a website, and link that website with other travel sites for Yukon.
- Produce rack cards for visitor information centres and other locations that feature rack cards, like shops, campgrounds, hotels, and other tourist attractions, and tell locals what you offer.
- Be readily available during the tourist season for visitors who want to book with you that day.
- Build consistency and structure to your tours. Build your reputation as a quality operator who can and will deliver your tour when booked.