

Nova Scotia Indigenous Tourism Enterprise Network 2024 - 2029 Five Year Mi'kmaw Sustainable Cultural Development Strategy "Walking Forward Together"

Strategic Summary

1) The Process

Over 300 stakeholders were engaged between 2022 & 2023 and have had an influence over the goals, visions, objectives and actions outlined in the strategy. Stakeholder engagement (made up of Elders, youth, community members and leaders, Mi'kmaq organizations, Mi'kmaw tourism businesses, artists, crafters, cultural experts and government organizations), took place over the course one-year in the form of:

- Community engagement sessions
- In-person visioning exercises and strategic planning workshops
- In-depth meaningful conversations made up of Mi'kmaw Community members
- Electronic and in-person surveys conducted at community events
- In-depth second hand research

2) Defining Mi'kmaw Sustainable Cultural Tourism

What Does Mi'kmaw Sustainable Cultural Development Mean To You?

To ensure that we had a common understanding of what Sustainable Cultural Tourism means through a Mi'kmaw lens, we dedicated a considerable amount of time discussing and defining what it means and why it is so important to our culture.

The process involved in defining Mi'kmaw Sustainable Cultural Tourism Development included close to 100 in-person and on-line surveys, conversations with Elders and knowledge keepers, youth, Community leaders and Mi'kmaw tourism operators, crafters, artists and knowledge keepers representing all 13 First Nations communities in Mi'kma'ki.

After careful reflection and review of all of the input and feedback from close to 100 people, we combined the information and crafted the following statement to define "Mi'kmaw Sustainable Cultural Tourism"

Mi'kmaw led tourism practices that prioritize cultural revitalization and preservation, the health and well-being of our people and environment by sharing authentic culture and traditions with visitors in a way that sustains and protects our people, culture and livelihood for the next seven generations.

3) Situation Analysis

To guide our work and to gain a full understanding of the current tourism landscape, we completed a full situation analysis which included:

- Second-hand research and statistics which included relevant data from a variety of sources from national, provincial, and local perspectives.
- Detailed information regarding our ideal visitors- key geographic audiences and demographics and psychographic information. (Who our ideal visitors are based on values, assets, experiences, and overall travel motivators)
- Information regarding when international visitors are booking flights which helps guide marketing efforts
- Current breakdown of have for tourism assets (Authentic, market-ready, Mi'kmaw sustainable cultural tourism products and experiences that motivate travel) gathered from our current membership
- Challenges businesses are facing and barriers to success
- Current marketing and promotional efforts used by our members
- Insights regarding training and development opportunities
- Insights into where most businesses go to access support, training and information. 89% identified NSITEN as the primary source of information and support.
- Trends external and internal that have an impact on tourism such as: visitors seeking authentic experiences, eco-tourism is on the rise, on-line booking, geo-political instability etc.

4) S.W.O.T (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats)

In addition to second hand research, the SWOT analysis content is a direct result of feedback provided from the strategic visioning sessions held in Truro in March 2022. These visioning sessions helped identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in regard to Mi'kmaw Sustainable Cultural Tourism Development. Some of what we heard is shared below.

Strengths

- Increased awareness of Mi'kmaw culture and an increased interest from visitors seeking unique cultural experiences and hands-on authentic Mi'kmaw cultural activities
- Our unique, rich vibrant culture and traditions
- Significant number of high-quality Mi'kmaw artists and musicians
- Large inventory of high-quality, authentic, traditional Mi'kmaq cultural events, festivals and Mawiomis throughout Mi'kma'ki
- Support from the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs
- Strong national and international interest in authentic Mi'kmaw cultural experiences and products, connection to land, holistic approach- gaining popularity in Cultural Tourism from high-yield visitors, opportunity to market our authentic Mi'kmaw culture to key audiences who are seeking meaningful connection “transformational and healing tourism” trends are on the rise for visitors seeking true human connection and meaningful experiences.

Weaknesses

- Low inventory of market ready and export ready Mi'kmaw products and experiences
- Lack of tourism online presence to attract visitors seeking authentic Mi'kmaw cultural tourism experiences/products
- Lack of visibility of Mi'kmaw people and culture including language
- Lack of visible signage
- Lack of Mi'kmaw led tourism training especially in regards , access to funding, inclusive training and development support, need to reach youth
- Lack of adequate infrastructure for hosting traditional Mi'kmaw Mawio'mi, feasts and cultural events

Opportunities

- Development of high-quality authentic Mi'kmaw cultural tourism products/experiences
- Work with partners to develop a Mi'kmaw led tourism experience development “toolkit”
- Work with communities to develop Mi'kmaw Sustainable Cultural Tourism Development strategies
- Elder/youth mentorship programs to transfer knowledge and to preserve our intangible cultural knowledge
- Post-COVID there is an increased demand for authentic, meaningful cultural experiences. Now more than ever, visitors want to experience people and places that include a personal, meaningful, “transformational” experience.
- Develop infrastructure to increase visibility of Mi'kmaq people here in Mi'kma'ki. This is long overdue. Examples- Mi'kmaq flag at all border crossings, Highway signage, trail signage etc., should all have Mi'kmaw culture visible. Authentic Mi'kmaw cultural products and promotional material should be visible and at all VIC's in Nova Scotia (Mi'kma'ki)

Threats

- Access to land use for the purpose of land-based Mi'kmaw sustainable cultural tourism experience development
- Environmental racism- example -Boat Harbour
- Colonial Influence on Mi'kmaw cultural tourism development
- Access to adequate funding to support development
- Over-consumption and overharvesting of Mi'kmaw cultural natural resource
- Elder/Youth connection and mentorship needed- we need to make sure that the knowledge held by our Elders and cultural knowledge experts is not lost and that our intangible cultural heritage and traditions are passed down so that we never lose what is truly ours.

5) Our Vision For Mi'kmaw Sustainable Cultural Tourism Development

The crafting of the vision statement was an important piece of work which could only be accomplished following the foundational work of understanding the "current landscape" . It is only with a full understanding of where we are, and what we have, can we truly identify where we need to go.

Through meaningful engagement, visioning sessions, and research, our vision statement created by Mi'kmaw people, for Mi'kmaw people is:

"Mi'kmaw culture and tradition is vibrant and thriving in Mi'kma'ki.

Nova Scotia is globally recognized as the destination of choice for many visitors seeking meaningful experiences which will contribute to the opportunity of showcasing authentic, Mi'kmaw cultural experiences and products.

Growing a strong and healthy socio-economic Mi'kmaw economy through tourism, and guided by the philosophy of Netukulimk as the primary measurement of quality of life, meaningful steps towards reconciliation will be achieved."

6) The Goal

Work with our Mi'kmaq people, communities, partners, and tourism stakeholders to increase the number of authentic market and export-ready Mi'kmaw tourism businesses and experiences by 100% by 2028. This currently includes 25 market ready companies and 5 export ready businesses.

Accomplishing this goal will foster the revitalization of Mi'kmaw culture and traditions, support a healthy, thriving, sustainable Mi'kmaw tourism economy and socio-economic conditions for Lnu'k throughout Mi'kma'ki (Nova Scotia) for generations to come.

7) Strategic Pillars & Objectives

The following 7 key strategic objectives have been identified as a result of research, and meaningful engagement and will guide the implementation, and increase our efforts towards reaching the goal and supporting the vision:

→ **Mi'kmaw Cultural Tourism Leadership and Governance**

- Work with NSITEN Board, Advisory Committee, and NSITEN members to provide guidance and support for the Mi'kmaw tourism industry and Communities

→ **Authenticity- What is Ours? Authentic Product Development**

- Work with Mi'kmaw tourism leaders, organizations and cultural experts to develop tourism products and experiences that are authentically Mi'kmaw

→ **Sustainable Cultural Tourism Development**

- Work with Mi'kmaw Communities and the Mi'kmaq tourism sector as a whole to develop quality, authentic cultural products and experiences that contribute to the long-term well being of our people, places and culture. Guided by the philosophy of Netukulimk.

→ **Partnerships & Collaboration**

- Continue to work with our Mi'kmaw and non-Indigenous partners and allies who have aligned values and goals and collaborate on mutually beneficial projects and initiatives for the benefit of all.

→ **Branding, Marketing & Communication (Visitor & Members)**

- Develop a Destination Mi'kma'ki visitor facing brand identity, marketing strategy and communications strategy.

→ Training, Skill Development

- Work with our partners and industry to provide valuable training opportunities to the Mi'kmaw tourism sector to increase market readiness and to build capacity within the industry.

When surveyed our membership identified the following training opportunities to be the most valuable:

- Market/export readiness - 83.7%
- Website development - 77.6%
- Tourism industry knowledge training - 75.5%
- Marketing/social media training - 69.4%
- Heritage interpreter training - 53.1%

→ Infrastructure Development

- Work with partners on infrastructure development projects that increases the visibility and improves the promotion of the Mi'kmaw culture.
- Work with Mi'kmaw communities, business owners, mainstream tourism industry partners and create new anchor points for Mi'kmaw tourism growth across the Province.
- Identify existing infrastructure projects (new and existing) that can elevate Mi'kmaw tourism in key tourism points (ie Cabot Trail, Downtown Halifax, Halifax Airport, Sydney Airport, high traffic VIC locations and entry points (PEI, Yarmouth & NFLD Ferry, Amherst provincial border, etc).

8) Action Plan and Next Steps

The Action Plan contains measurable tactics that we will aim to implement over the lifespan of the strategy. The implementation is dependent on the support of all partners and receiving adequate funding and support for each action. Action items include anticipated time frames for completion as well as identifying potential key partners. The full action plan is outlined in full detail in the strategy.

Some key action items from each identified strategic priority are listed below:

Tourism Leadership, Advocacy & Business Development

Actions

- New NSITEN Board and Executive Board Established
- Community Grassroots Development Committees Established
- Creation of a Province wide Mi'kmaw Tourism Advisory Committee
- Establish tourism human resource and employment targeted initiatives
- Business specific advisory committees established
- Focused initiatives such as culinary tourism, cultural showcases, artist support
- Industry & government cross cultural awareness training

Authenticity

Actions

- Share the Authenticity Guidelines Broadly
- Implementing Authenticity Brand to NSITEN membership
- Work with Mi'kmaw Tourism Industry to help incorporate authenticity into tourism experiences and products
- Identify Funding to support the implementation of the Mi'kmaw Authenticity Tourism Experience Development Program

Partnerships & Collaboration

Actions

- Sign MOU's with partners working to support Mi'kmaw tourism development
- Partner with organizations to gather Mi'kmaw specific visitor data
- Provide Cross Cultural Training to organizations who identify key mutually beneficial projects to help support Mi'kmaq tourism development
- Continue to develop and work with Educational Institutions to grow the Mi'kmaq Tourism Industry
- Encourage government and NGOs to fairly compensate Elders and Cultural Knowledge keepers for sharing intangible Cultural heritage and knowledge

Sustainable Cultural Tourism Development

Actions

- Partner to increase awareness of Mi'kmaw Sustainable Cultural Tourism Development
- Seek funding to hire two full time Mi'kmaw Tourism Development Officers
- Work with partners to create Mi'kmaw specific Sustainable Cultural Tourism Development "Toolkit"
- Support the development of an Elder/Youth Mentorship program
- Collaborate with partners to create a Mi'kmaw Tourism Program teaching the philosophy of Netukulimk
- Partner with Organizations to develop land-based cultural workshops
- Seek funding to support communities to develop Mi'kmaw Community Tourism Strategies
- Secure Funding to conduct Key target markets and visitor insight research
- Seek funding to conduct research regarding Sacred sites and places to be used for cultural tourism
- Complete a full Mi'kmaw Tourism Asset Inventory

Advocacy, Marketing and Communications

Actions

- Continue the valuable work with Mi'kmaw tourism development advocacy
 - Industry specific partnership development
 - Accessing additional funding through government departments
 - Creating
- Seek Funding to Develop a updated Marketing Strategy & Website
- Develop an organizational marketing and communications strategy
- Seek funding to hire a full time Marketing and Communications Coordinator
- Continue to grow existing NSITEN organizational Social Media and Newsletter followers
- Secure funding to develop high-quality, authentic Mi'kmaw digital content that reflects the new visitor brand identity

Training and Skill Development

Actions

- Work with partners to deliver valuable training to NSITEN members
- Work with Elders and Cultural Knowledge Experts to deliver Cultural Training and Workshops to members
- Develop Mi'kmaw Cultural Authenticity Program
- Work with Tourism Industry Partners to deliver skill/capacity building training based on need

Infrastructure Development

Actions

- Work with partners to increase the visibility of Mi'kmaq people - signage, VIC's, Airports, trails etc.
- Seek funding for infrastructure development that increases the visibility of the Mi'kmaw culture
- Work to lobby the government to ensure that all Mi'kmaw communities have reliable internet
- Seek funding for Cultural beautification and Placemaking funds for Mi'kmaw Communities

Next Steps

This five-year strategy is a living document, developed by Mi'kmaw people who live and work in Mi'kma'ki. Everyone has a role to play in its success.

This document will be reviewed regularly to ensure that it remains relevant and takes into account the trends and changes of the industry. Implementation and review of the strategy will require ongoing engagement with stakeholders to measure success moving forward.

Over the period of the next five years, this strategy, and all action items implemented are to support the vision, goals, and values laid out in this document. We are grateful to everyone who contributed to this strategy.