

REDEFINING TOURISM THROUGH AN INDIGENOUS RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

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Background & Introduction

Nowadays, Indigenous tourism is becoming popular among many Indigenous communities, especially in Canada, New Zealand and Australia, countries which share broadly similar history of interaction with Indigenous peoples and also enjoy developed tourism economy, with improving Indigenous engagement, even though economic and social deprivation of Indigenous communities is also common across these states¹. Indigenous control is a key concept in the Indigenous tourism discourse. Hinch & Butler state that, Indigenous tourism refers to Indigenous peoples having direct involvement through control and ownership of tourism establishments and activities². Similarly, Bunten & Graburn suggest that it is a service fully or partially owned and operated by Indigenous group³. Sijer has also underlined the need for tribal communities to assert some degree of control over tourism operations while ensuring clear economic benefits are retained in the community or village⁴.

There are many Indigenous communities across the world that engage in tourism although they may not necessarily use the same terminology. It is often referred by different terms like cultural tourism, ethnic tourism, community tourism and so on. Indigenous tourism is a broad concept encompassing Indigenous communities' engagement with different kinds of tourism activities and establishments. It refers to "activities that take place in or around Indigenous communities with the purpose of exposing visitors to traditional customs and that provide the communities themselves with the resources and incentive to preserve their cultural and natural resources"⁵. Community control over these Indigenous tourism activities is essential to revitalize Indigenous culture and heritage, protect the environment, and foster the economy.

However, the dominant practice of tourism has often dismissed Indigenous ways and functioned to standardise the sector in a capitalist structure⁶. The standard approach, with respect to Indigenous peoples' engagement with tourism, has left out Indigenous voices and involvement⁷ and the rights of tourism corporations and tourists has often been given priority over that of Indigenous communities. "Tourism should be reclaimed from an industry that has defined it as a business sector for their profit accumulation, to a human endeavour based on the rights and interests of local communities in welcoming tourists"⁸.

Based on a three-month field placement, with the World Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA) in Aotearoa New Zealand, and review of related literature, this paper argues that there is a pressing need to redefine the predominantly less-inclusive tourism approach, and to advocate for a rights-based approach that values Indigenous knowledge, culture and aspirations, and hence recognizes and practically addresses Indigenous human right issues in tourism. WINTA's Indigenous Tourism Engagement Framework (ITEF) is suggested as one of the guiding roadmaps for a rights-based approach to Indigenous tourism.

¹ Weaver, "Indigenous tourism stages," 45.

² Hinch & Butler, "Indigenous tourism," 3-19.

³ Bunten & Graburn, "Current themes," 2-11.

⁴ Sijer, "To see or not to see – the impact of indigenous tourism," Travindy, 16 May 2018, Retrieved from www.travindy.com.

⁵ George Washington University International Institute of Tourism Studies, G Adventures and the Planeterra Foundation, "Indigenous People", 22.

⁶ Chambers & Buzinde, "Tourism and decolonization," 1-16.

⁷ Nielson & Wilson, "From Invisible to Indigenous-driven," 67-75.

⁸ Higgins-Desbiolles, Carnicelli, Krolikowski, Wijesinghe & Boluk, "Degrowing tourism," 16.

Why rights-based engagement?

As Bauer states, Indigenous tourism is vulnerable to exploitation⁹. Violations of Indigenous rights at tourism destinations and protected areas have been serious problems¹⁰. An earlier study¹¹ pointed out that involuntary display of Indigenous communities as tourist attraction may continue as long as Indigenous peoples lack legal freedom, access and control over Indigenous tourism planning, management & development. These rights have often been disregarded in the name of development¹². There are still systematic colonial challenges, continuous threats to Indigenous culture and land as well as objectification of people by outsiders through development activities like tourism, although there is some progress in recognition of Indigenous peoples' rights¹³.

Sijer provides two cases of recent examples of growing exploitation by tourism businesses such as tour operators often looking for shortcuts to make profits off of Indigenous tribes in the Amazon jungle in places such as Peru, and in India's Andaman Islands, where tour operators are offering 'human safaris' in the land of the recently-contacted Jarawa tribe¹⁴. In Thailand tribal villages, tour operators often make decisions, about which villages to visit, by themselves without much say from the local communities¹⁵. These cases indicate that the profit of outside tourism corporations and the needs and expectations of tourists is often prioritised over the rights of the local communities as Mowforth, Charlton, & Munt¹⁶ also suggested in their study about Indigenous peoples and tourism in Latin America and Caribbean.

Looking from a more strength-based perspective, it is important to note that tourism can reinforce connections to land, cultures, and identities¹⁷, and hence revitalize and preserve Indigenous knowledge, culture and traditions. Tours involving Indigenous heritage, culture and environment may allow other visitors open up and become receptive to difference and similarities that they didn't expect, for instance, there seems to be recognition, by some tourists, of a new way of looking at natural resources of the Indigenous peoples as spiritual places¹⁸. Tourism can also create opportunities to foster the economy and protect the environment. But, as discussed above, "tourism can and does transgress the rights of communities"¹⁹. The recognition of Indigenous peoples' rights is improving²⁰. "Translating the provisions and positive dictums of human rights law into concrete actions, however, remains one of the greatest challenges facing the human rights movement and the community of nations"²¹. Indigenous activism and movements at different levels, from grassroots activism to international network and advocacy platforms, have also been growing. The adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) has been one of the instrumental steps in this regard. In the area of tourism, such movements have resulted in the creation of World Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA) to promote Indigenous rights through facilitation, advocacy and networking activities. One of the priority actions of WINTA

⁹ Bauer, "The health impact," 276-279.

¹⁰ Cole & Eriksson, "Tourism and human rights," 107-125 & Johnston, "Self-determination," 115-133.

¹¹ Battiste & Youngblood, "Protecting Indigenous knowledge," 109-110.

¹² Tourism Concern, "Indigenous Peoples," 1.

¹³ Bunten & Graburn, "Indigenous Tourism," 1.

¹⁴ See note 3 above.

¹⁵ Samart Srisoda, "Hill tribes of northern Thailand and ethnic tourism," Next Step Thailand, 22 September 2016, Retrieved from www.nextstepthailand.com.

¹⁶ Mowforth, Charlton, & Munt, "Tourism and responsibility"

¹⁷ Bunten & Graburn, 3.

¹⁸ Ryan & Huyton, "Aboriginal tourism," 27.

¹⁹ Tourism Concern, "Why the tourism industry," 3.

²⁰ Bunten & Graburn, 1.

²¹ Leckie, "Another Step Towards Indivisibility," 87.

in its advocacy strategies is to develop & carry out Indigenous Tourism Engagement Framework (ITEF) through a rights-based approach.

WINTA's Indigenous Tourism Engagement Framework (ITEF)

The World Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA) mandate to engage in Indigenous tourism advocacy, facilitation and networking activities was recognised by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in its endorsement of the Larrakia Declaration in 2012. The Larrakia Declaration is arguably the most important statement of commitment from the international tourism industry that it intends to take on an active role in giving practical effect to the UNDRIP and the rights of Indigenous peoples through tourism.

One of WINTA's advocacy strategies is to engage in research and development projects that promote the rights of Indigenous peoples in tourism, and among the priority actions to deliver this strategy is to develop & carry out WINTA's Indigenous Tourism Engagement Framework (ITEF) through a rights-based approach. The framework is based on the principles of the Larrakia Declaration on the development of Indigenous tourism and is also aligned to a range of other international conventions, declarations & tourism industry guidelines.

As identified by WINTA, the 6 principles which collectively provide for the protection of Indigenous people's rights through tourism are:

1. **Respect:** Respect for customary law and lore, land and water, traditional knowledge, traditional cultural expressions and cultural heritage will underpin all tourism decisions.
2. **Consult:** That governments have a duty to consult and accommodate Indigenous peoples before undertaking decisions on public policy and programs designed to foster the development of Indigenous tourism.
3. **Empowerment:** Indigenous peoples will determine the extent and nature and organizational arrangements for their participation in tourism and that governments and multilateral agencies will support the empowerment of Indigenous people.
4. **Partnership:** The tourism industry will respect Indigenous intellectual property rights, cultures and traditional practices, the need for sustainable and equitable business partnerships and the proper care of the environment and communities that support them.
5. **Community Benefits:** That equitable partnerships between the tourism industry and Indigenous people will include the sharing of cultural awareness and skills development which support the well-being of communities and enable enhancement of individual livelihoods.
6. **Protection:** Indigenous culture and the land and waters on which it is based, will be protected and promoted through well managed tourism practices and appropriate interpretation.

As it is depicted on Figure 1 below, the ITEF is a roadmap being developed to enhance respectful engagements, based on these principles, between Indigenous communities and all the other key players in Indigenous tourism.

The diagram illustrates the key foundational components of the engagement framework. As discussed before, the six integrated guiding principles of respect, consult, empower, partner, benefit and protect emanate from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Larrakia Declaration, and they have been benchmarked against other important international guidelines on the rights of Indigenous peoples. The arrow on the left indicates a broad category of the key players in Indigenous tourism, including Indigenous rights-holders, who were also represented in the resolution of the Larrakia declaration. If individuals and groups within these interdependent bodies come together and embrace the Larrakia principles in their engagements, it is highly likely that respectful and reciprocal engagements will be encouraged. The arrow on the right shows the importance of culturally grounded approaches to Indigenous tourism engagement. WINTA strongly believes that

Indigenous tourism activities should respect protocols rooted in Indigenous culture. The framework requires to ensure that respect is given to the cultures, languages, knowledge, values and aspirations of Indigenous peoples. This is important because the dominant practice of tourism has dismissed Indigenous knowledge, voices and involvement and functioned to standardize the sector²². But, “Indigenous knowledge is rich and dynamic, it embodies the relationships and connections we make”²³. Therefore, the ITEF recognizes that integration of Indigenous thoughts and worldviews is central to enhance respectful engagements.

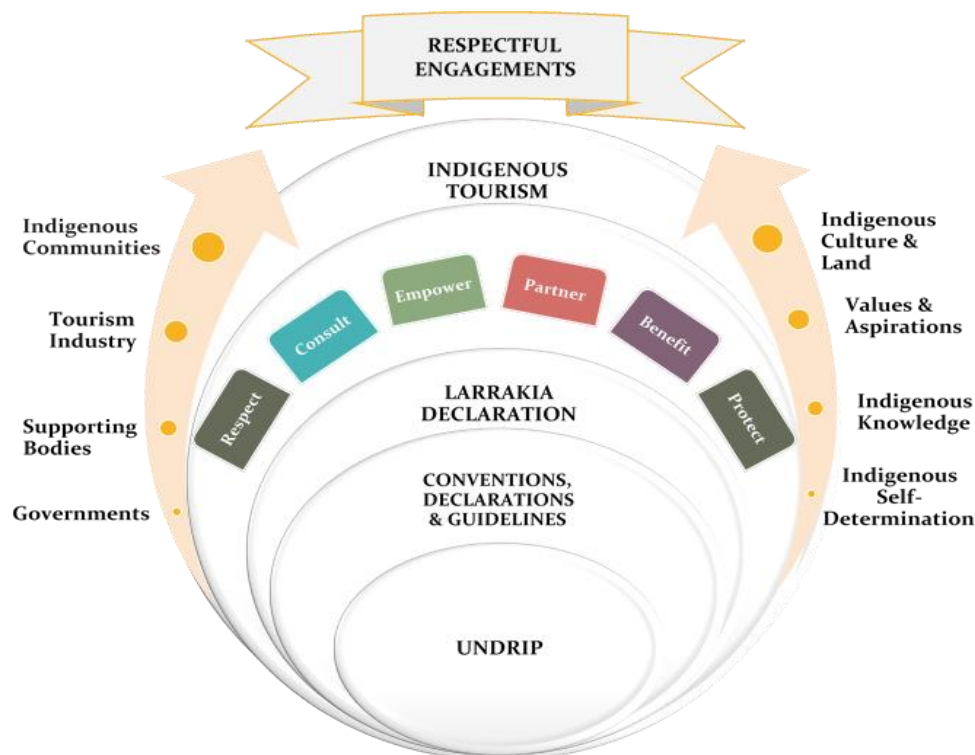


Figure 1: WINTA Indigenous Tourism Engagement Framework (ITEF)

The other key reason to take a culturally grounded Indigenous driven approach in the ITEF is to support Indigenous self-determination in tourism, which means, “the right of a community to decide whether it wants to have a tourism economy, which parts of its culture will be shared and which will remain private, and what type of protocols will govern access to and use of cultural property”²⁴. Upholding this right is thus fundamental for positive outcomes through a rights-based Indigenous tourism engagement. Besides, understanding and honoring the values and aspirations of the indigenous communities that are/will be engaged with is the other important element of this framework. These aspirations may include: recognition and identity, self-determination, language retention, protection of customary land and resources, need for free, prior and informed consent, education, health, employment, etc. The ITEF does not intend to outline a one-size-fits-all approach to Indigenous tourism engagement. It is rather an approach that requires the integrated use of the knowledge, traditions, values, and aspiration of each Indigenous communities as guiding frameworks. It is an approach that could inform good practices of engagement, and one which could be adapted to different locations and circumstances.

²² Chambers & Buzinde; Nielson & Wilson

²³ Martens, Cidro, Hart, McLachlan, “Understanding Indigenous,” 32.

²⁴ Johnston, 121

Respectful engagement with Indigenous culture and land is the other key component of WINTA's ITEF framework. Indigenous territories are often areas of high cultural and ecological diversity with an immense Indigenous tourism potential. There is a deep relationship between Indigenous peoples and the land and this connection to the land is fundamental for the cultural identity of Indigenous peoples. It is estimated that Indigenous peoples are the guardians for more than 80 per cent of the world's biodiversity²⁵. A strong Indigenous connection to the land underpins their intergenerational stewardship of natural resources and ecological knowledge. WINTA's ITEF embraces clear understanding of this symbiotic relationship between culture and nature and intends to support Indigenous communities' efforts to curb the disruption of their connections to their traditional lands, customs and traditions.

Acknowledgement of Indigenous communities as rights-holders in Indigenous tourism

Indigenous communities are the key rights-holders in Indigenous tourism engagement. As we know, tourism brings together various individuals, groups and organizations that have various interests and roles. These include: communities, tourists, tourism service providers, governments, and other supporting bodies like NGOs. These are often referred to as stakeholders, actors, key players and the like. They all play key roles in Indigenous tourism and they all have rights and responsibilities in their engagements. As discussed in the introduction section, the central concept in Indigenous tourism is the right of communities to have control over their engagement with tourism. As Boesen & Martin state, "rights holders have an obligation to respect the rights of others and to take responsibility for their own actions"²⁶. Hence, others involved in Indigenous tourism also have their own rights and responsibilities. Tourists, for instance, have both rights and responsibilities, but when they take part in Indigenous tourism, they bear a duty to respect destination communities²⁷. When tourism service providers like tour operators engage in Indigenous tourism, they also have a responsibility to recognize and respect the rights of Indigenous rights-holders²⁸. "Travel companies that interact with Indigenous communities have a special responsibility to help them safeguard their resources and can play a key role in helping to do so"²⁹.

A rights-based approach, which centers on recognizing and addressing human rights issues in tourism³⁰, is important to ensure community control, mitigate the potential undesirable impacts of tourism, and in order to foster harmonious partnerships among Indigenous rights-holders and other tourism industry stakeholders. The central principle of Indigenous rights is self-determination or the right to decide for or against a tourism development and the degree to which cultural heritages are shared with outsiders³¹. It means, "the right of a community to decide whether it wants to have a tourism economy, which parts of its culture will be shared and which will remain private, and what type of protocols will govern access to and use of cultural property"³². It is the right of the Indigenous communities to decide on such matters and therefore Indigenous communities are not just mere stakeholders of Indigenous tourism, their role is beyond having some stake in the process. They are rights-holders who should be the key decision makers regarding their engagements with other Indigenous tourism stakeholders.

²⁵ World Resources Institute (WRI) in collaboration with United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, and World Bank

²⁶ Boesen & Martin in Cole, "Tourism and water," 99.

²⁷ Cole, 99.

²⁸ Tourism Concern, "Why the tourism industry".

²⁹ George Washington University, 5.

³⁰ See note 28 above

³¹ Bauer; Johnston

³² Johnston, 121

The importance of respectful engagements in Indigenous tourism

Engagements between various players in tourism and Indigenous rights-holders can have unfavorable consequences when the rights of Indigenous communities are violated. This section focuses on the importance of respectful engagements to bring about favorable consequences for all involved in Indigenous tourism.

The term respect is consistently used by Indigenous peoples to underscore the significance of our relationships and humanity. Through respect, the place of everyone and everything in the universe is kept in balance and harmony. Respect is a reciprocal, shared, constantly interchanging principle which is expressed through all aspects of social conduct... The denial by the West of humanity to Indigenous peoples, the denial of citizenship and human rights, the denial of the right to self-determination—all these demonstrate palpably the enormous lack of respect which has marked the relations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples³³.

Respect for the rights of Indigenous peoples underpins Indigenous aspirations for engagement in tourism. The following are few of the questions that need to be addressed by the tourism industry when considering respectful and reciprocal engagements:

- Do visitors come for a true cultural immersion and genuine engagement or merely hoping for the perfect photo opportunity?³⁴
- Do travelers inform themselves on the tribe they wish to visit and make sure that any payments go directly to benefiting the indigenous people?³⁵
- Do governments act to protect Indigenous communities with legislation; NGOs with awareness raising campaigns; tour operators by following a strict code of conduct?³⁶
- Before bringing any guests into remote tribal villages, do tour operators talk with village chiefs and make sure that their visitors won't disturb the community and everyone in the village is involved in the decision to accept guests and knows what to expect?³⁷
- Does everyone adhere to the principle of free, prior and informed consent?
- Are Indigenous peoples fully aware of planned tourism activities on their lands, which they themselves authorize and benefit from?³⁸

Practical Application of ITEF

Driven by the needs and requirements of communities and others involved in Indigenous tourism, the practical delivery of the framework is informed by detailed actions or good practice provided by both general and tourism specific Conventions, Declarations, & Tourism Industry Guidelines and it is designed to provide support to a range of stakeholders in the tourism industry in a way that provides suggestions for practical action. WINTA's role is to work with all involved and facilitate suggestions for practical actions towards enhancement of respectful engagements. The ITEF principles, practices, and good practice actions inform and guide WINTA's facilitation, advocacy and networking initiatives with Indigenous rights-holders and other key players of Indigenous tourism who are intending to develop and/or implement policies and programs that have the potential to enhance the rights of Indigenous peoples.

WINTA uses platforms like community gatherings, conferences, summits, seminars, workshops, research projects and consulting services to support rights-based Indigenous tourism engagements across the world. As part of these initiatives, we have recently facilitated

³³ Smith, "Decolonizing Methodologies," 120.

³⁴ Sijer

³⁵ ibid

³⁶ ibid

³⁷ Srisoda

³⁸ Tourism Concern, "Indigenous peoples and tourism".

workshop and seminar projects in the Wellington Region of Aotearoa New Zealand. One was a workshop project with Kapiti Island Whanau (family) which was positioned as the communities' workshop, not as WINTA workshop, and good lessons that might inform future deliveries to other communities were obtained. The most recent project is the delivery of a seminar on 'Tourism industry engagement with Indigenous peoples as rights-holders' in collaboration with Victoria University of Wellington for the academic community and other invited guests from tourism and related organizations. The seminar presentation was designed in a way that integrates Indigenous protocols, methodologies and literature, and in a way that encourages active engagement of seminar participants through practical information shared by Kapiti Island whanau (family).

Subsequent trainings and workshops facilitated with various communities and stakeholders are aimed at enhancing respectful engagements. WINTA recognizes that there is lack of awareness among various tourism players about fundamental declarations like the UNDRIP and Larrakia, and hence the rights-based approach to Indigenous tourism. The framework is thus designed in a way that enhances awareness and inspires positive actions by everyone involved in Indigenous tourism. The engagement framework considers communities, governments, the tourism industry, NGOs, academia, other supporting bodies, and tourists both as key players and beneficiaries of WINTA's rights-based engagement framework.

Conclusion

A rights-based approach is indeed important to ensure community control and benefit, mitigate the potential undesirable impacts of tourism, especially in terms of violation of Indigenous rights, and in order to foster harmonious partnerships and respectful engagements among Indigenous rights-holders and others in the tourism industry. The rights-based Indigenous tourism projects that have been guided by ITEF and undertaken by WINTA in collaboration with an Indigenous community and the academia are among the key initiatives that have so far resulted in an added value by promoting a rights-based approach to Indigenous tourism to a diverse group of audience that comprised of a Maori whanau, University professors, tourism industry leaders, policy makers, NGOs and tourism consultants. Such initiatives should be strengthened to encompass different Indigenous tourism bodies and should be expanded across various geographical locations. That way it provides a wide range of participants more opportunities to share their insights about tourism industry engagement with Indigenous peoples as rights-holders, and also on the potential areas of collaborative advocacy, networking and facilitation works among all interested groups and organizations in Indigenous tourism from local to international levels.

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