

Redefining tourism through an indigenous rights-based approach for tourism and cultural exchanges among IORA members

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August 2025

Background

The Indian Ocean, spanning 20% of the world's ocean surface, connects Asia, Africa, Australia, and Antarctica, promoting community-based tourism, eco-tourism, cultural heritage, and economic potential. The IORA Core Group on Tourism (CGT) aims to enhance tourism profile and cooperation among Member States, contributing to sustainable tourism development. The CGT's work plan includes promoting regional tourism cooperation, facilitating improved travel processes, fostering quality tourism destinations, showcasing unique attractions, highlighting cultural diversity, capturing traveler's imaginations, embracing science and technology, enhancing visitor experiences, improving destination management, and addressing sustainability challenges.

Why rights-based engagement?

Participating in a variety of sustainable tourism activities is crucial, considering the significance and pertinence of tourism within the framework of the IORA. One of these is through a tourist strategy based on indigenous rights, which is the focus of this article. Despite social and economic hardship, indigenous tourism is becoming more and more popular among Indigenous communities, especially in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. In order to preserve their cultural and natural resources, Indigenous peoples participate directly in tourism-related businesses and events. Nonetheless, the prevalent tourism industry frequently disregards Indigenous customs and homogenises the industry within a capitalist framework. This article values Indigenous knowledge, culture, and ambitions and argues for a rights-based approach to Indigenous tourism. The Indigenous Tourism Engagement Framework (ITEF) is recommended by the World Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA) as a road map for an Indigenous tourism strategy that is based on rights. This strategy should put local communities' rights and interests first, taking tourism away from the commercial sector that uses it to make money.

The exploitation of Indigenous populations and their lack of legal freedom provide serious obstacles for Indigenous tourism. Development frequently takes precedence over these rights, which results in systemic colonial challenges and dangers to Indigenous territory and culture. In Peru and the Andaman Islands of India, for example, tour operators frequently take advantage of Indigenous communities for financial gain. In Thailand, local communities have little say in the decisions made by tour operators. Indigenous knowledge, culture, and customs can be revitalised and preserved through tourism, which can strengthen linkages to the land, cultures, and identities. It may, however, also violate community rights. Although the rights of Indigenous peoples are increasingly being acknowledged, it is still difficult to put human rights legislation into practice. Through networking, lobbying, and facilitation efforts, Indigenous activism and movements—like WINTA and the UNDRIP—have played a crucial role in advancing Indigenous rights.

WINTA's Indigenous Tourism Engagement Framework (ITEF)

Through research and development initiatives, the World Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA) seeks to advance the rights of Indigenous peoples in the travel industry. The Larrakia Declaration serves as the foundation for the organization's Indigenous Tourism Engagement Framework (ITEF), which also complies with other international agreements and directives. Respect, consult, empower, partner, benefit, and safeguard are the six guiding principles of the framework. These values are based on the Larrakia Declaration and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and they are compared to other international agreements on the rights of Indigenous peoples. Enhancing respectful interactions between Indigenous communities and other important stakeholders in Indigenous tourism is the goal of the ITEF. It highlights how crucial it is to engage Indigenous tourists in ways that are culturally grounded and how important it is to adhere to Indigenous-based customs. In order to promote respectful interactions in the tourism sector, the ITEF acknowledges the significance of incorporating Indigenous ideas and perspectives.

By guaranteeing that communities have the autonomy to choose their own tourism economy, cultural property exchange, and access procedures, the ITEF framework promotes Indigenous self-determination in the travel industry. It respects indigenous groups' ideals and goals, such as identity preservation, acknowledgement, language preservation, and the preservation of traditional lands and resources. Instead of providing a one-size-fits-all strategy, the framework calls for the integrated application of each community's expertise, customs, values, and goals. Given the great cultural and ecological richness of Indigenous territory as well as their enormous tourism potential, respectful interaction with Indigenous culture and land is equally essential.

Acknowledgement of Indigenous communities as rights-holders in Indigenous tourism

With a range of stakeholders, including communities, travellers, tourism service providers, governments, and non-governmental organisations, Indigenous communities are the primary rights holders in Indigenous tourism involvement. These people, organisations, and groups have a range of roles and interests in Indigenous tourism. The right of communities to manage their tourism-related activities while upholding the rights of others and accepting accountability for their actions is the fundamental idea behind Indigenous tourism. In order to maintain community control, reduce any unintended effects of tourism, and promote amicable collaborations between Indigenous rights holders and other players in the tourism sector, a rights-based strategy is crucial. Self-determination, the fundamental tenet of Indigenous rights, gives a community the authority to choose whether to have a tourism economy, what aspects of its culture will be shared or kept private, and what kinds of procedures will control access to and use of cultural property.

Indigenous peoples' desire to participate in tourism is supported by respect for their rights. Questions like whether tourists come for a true cultural immersion, whether they educate themselves about the tribe they want to visit, whether governments protect Indigenous communities through laws, non-governmental organisations raise awareness, tour operators adhere to a strict code of conduct, and whether Indigenous peoples are fully aware of planned tourism activities on their lands are all ones that the tourism industry needs to address. The International Tourism Forum (WINTA) supports rights-based Indigenous tourism engagements worldwide through a variety of platforms, including conferences, summits, seminars, workshops, research projects, community meetings, and consulting services. Communities, governments, the tourism industry, NGOs, academia, other supporting bodies, and tourists are all viewed as important participants and beneficiaries of WINTA's rights-based engagement framework, which acknowledges the lack of knowledge among various tourism players regarding fundamental declarations such as the UNDRIP and Larrakia.

For the sake of community control, potential effect mitigation, and the development of respectful partnerships, the rights-based approach to Indigenous tourism is essential. Initiatives led by WINTA and ITEF that involve academia and Indigenous communities have proven useful in advancing this strategy. These programs ought to be extended to encompass other Indigenous tourist organisations and regions, enabling participants to exchange perspectives and work together on lobbying, networking, and facilitation.