

# **ABORIGINAL CULTURAL TOURISM: LAND OF THE FOG**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Cape Breton Island, is located off the eastern most portion of mainland Canada at roughly 47°N, 60°W (Brown, 2006). The indigenous peoples, the Mi'kmaq, have lived in the region for approximately 11,000 years and have had contact with Europeans for 400 hundred years. They call Cape Breton Island, Unama'ki, Land of the Fog (Milburn, 2004).

Aboriginal cultural tourism and the importance of product authenticity are discussed. The paper provides a case narrative of Aboriginal cultural tourism involving five First Nations communities on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, Canada. The island contains five reserves of the Mi'kmaq Nation, these being: Eskasoni, Membertou, Wagmatcook, We'kopaq/Waycobah, and Potlotek/Chapel Island. The combined population of these five communities is 7149, approximately 7% of the island's population (INAC, 2007).

Key Words; aboriginal cultural tourism, Cape Breton Island, Mi'kmaq First Nation

## **INTRODUCTION**

The authors of this paper have taken an inverted pyramid approach to discuss an emerging and distinctive approach to cultural tourism development within the context of North American First Nations. At the outset, the dynamic of Aboriginal cultural tourism is presented. The research then takes a more focused approach and presents how recent developments in Aboriginal cultural tourism are illustrative of a special elaboration in sustainable cultural tourism policy and programming, and how Canada's First Nations communities are asserting control and direction in this unique niche development for a variety of economic, social and cultural goals. An internationally renowned tourist destination, Cape Breton Island, is highlighted as a case narrative and a review of its Aboriginal cultural tourism opportunities.

The Government of Nova Scotia established the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage in 1971. In 1975, revenue from tourism for the entire province was \$380 million. In 2004 revenue topped \$1.3 billion. Tourism officials in Nova Scotia are predicting a 100% increase in revenue by 2012 to \$2.6 billion (Province of Nova Scotia, 2005b, p.21). Cape Breton Island tourism revenues reached \$150 million per year by the late 1980s and was approximately \$213 million in 2006 (N.S. Tourism, Culture and Heritage, 2006).

In 2004 Condé Nast named Cape Breton one of the greatest island vacation destinations in North America. Cape Breton has also won similar accolades from other international travel magazines such as National Geographic Traveler in 2004. In its own tourism promotional material, the Government of Nova Scotia refers to Cape Breton as "Nova Scotia's Masterpiece". This island, deemed a premier tourist destination by such travel guide magazines as Gentlemen's Quarterly (August, 2007) which ranks Cape Breton as the number two summer escape with Pueblo, Mexico as

number one and Livingstone, Montana ranked as number three. Travel & Leisure magazine (August, 2007) under World's Best Islands, ranks Cape Breton as number two in the islands, "Continental US and Canada category." In 2007, Cape Breton was first in the Island category for Continental US and Canada and fourth overall in the world (Tourism Research, E-marketing, New Media, 2008).

The paper concludes with a critical appraisal of Aboriginal cultural tourism initiatives within Cape Breton, and a reassessment of the importance of Aboriginal cultural tourism to the broader concept of cultural tourism.

## **ABORIGINAL CULTURAL TOURISM**

As the cultural tourism niche market is associated with the importance of history, heritage, art, music, crafts, cultural attachments to geography and place, and the search for cultural identity, meaning and affirmation, it is no surprise that as this aspect of the tourism industry has developed over the past two decades, such development has attracted growing interest amongst members of Canada's First Nations. This interest is part of a broader renaissance in how Aboriginal Canadians view their place in this country, how they perceive the socio-economic challenges and opportunities their peoples face and how First Nations can assert control and direction of their own economic futures through the advent of self-government. As Aboriginal authors such as Diabo (2003), Hager (2003), Mather-Simard (2003), and O'Neil (2003) have all asserted, First Nations' self-government is integral to improving economic sustainability in First Nations and, as First Nations governments seek the ways and means of promoting economic development opportunities for their peoples, they will be carefully addressing the social and economic environment of cultural tourism operations for their peoples.

According to Barry Parker (2004), a member of the Okanagan First Nation and a national tourism advisor for the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, "[t]here is significant market demand for cultural tourism, and this can be translated into real business opportunities for Aboriginal people in Canada and Indigenous people around the world".. "At the same time", he continued, "it is a platform for which people can enhance, sustain, strengthen and protect their cultures" so long as Aboriginal tourism initiatives are undertaken "with dignity and respect for cultures, communities and the environment" (Canada World View, 2004, p. 8).

Diabo (2003) has written that while mainstream tourism is largely associated with strictly commercial values centred upon the "commoditization of culture", tourism itself "has its' origins as social and cultural exchanges that preceded tourism as a commercial activity"(Diabo, 2003, P.2). "...[T]he engagement of Aboriginal communities in the tourism sector must occur on their own terms and at their own pace, since it is their existence as distinct peoples that is at stake"(Ibid). The key to successful Aboriginal cultural tourism development, to Diabo (2003), is for Aboriginal communities themselves to fully control the planning, development, implementation and on-going management of all tourism initiatives within their lands. In this manner of "self-government", First Nations can realize the benefits of tourism related economic development in terms of employment, commercial activity, revenue generation and community vibrancy while also ensuring that such tourism development serves to respect cultural heritage and traditions, promote cultural authenticity in tourism content, products and messages, and enhance cross-cultural understanding and awareness between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations (Diabo, 2003, p. 2. See also Notzke, 2004, Kortright, 2002).

Hager (2003) and Mather-Simard (2003) echo these conclusions asserting that while Aboriginal cultural tourism initiatives offer First Nations significant potential for economic development, job creation, and opportunities for Aboriginal youth, all such tourism undertakings must be subject to the control, direction and wisdom of First Nations governments, elders, and members of the community. This is to ensure that Aboriginal cultural tourism initiatives do not result in the sell-out of Aboriginal culture, that such initiatives are reflective of Aboriginal authenticity in both historical and contemporary presentations of Aboriginal life, and that First Nations communities are

fully comfortable with the tourism initiatives occurring within their lands (Hager, 2003, Mather-Simard, 2003). On this point the message from Aboriginal Elders is unequivocal: "Aboriginal spirituality is not for sale, and there is not a place for spiritual ceremonies in tourism products" (Notzke, 2004). Hager has also emphasized the importance of asserting cultural and historical authenticity in all presentations respecting the nature of Aboriginal life, culture, arts, crafts, beliefs and world views (Hager, 2003, pp.4-5).

## **A NEW TREND**

Research to date on Aboriginal Cultural Tourism is recent and limited: "A new trend developed during the early and mid-1990s, when the concept of Aboriginal tourism became a 'hot topic' nationwide" (Notzke, 2004). The Aboriginal tourism debate in Canada during the 1990's is that Aboriginal people have been adamant that the concept of "Aboriginal tourism" should designate only those tourism ventures which are characterized by Aboriginal ownership and control. Notzke (2004) notes that the new millennium is bringing great projections for Aboriginal tourism development and operationalization from both within and without First Nations.

The federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs has also become seized with the importance of what cultural tourism can bring to First Nations both in terms of its economic and socio-cultural impact. This department has sponsored the inauguration of Aboriginal Tourism Canada (2003) as a national organization mandated the task of promoting cultural tourism development initiatives within Canada's First Nations, assisting First Nations in the creation of cultural tourism business plans, and in providing the institutional linkages between First Nations, interested federal, provincial and territorial departments and agencies, and relevant private sector tourism developers and marketers. "One route to improving economic sustainability [within First Nations] is tourism, which is proving increasingly attractive as Aboriginal people look for new commercial and job-creation opportunities. There is especially potential for Aboriginal 'cultural' tourism, through which Aboriginal people can share various aspects of their customs, traditions, and arts as well as their relationship to the land"(Canada World View, 2004, p. 8). But what would Aboriginal cultural tourism, as a business venture, look like, and what would it entail?

As Aboriginal Tourism Canada (2003), and Notzke (2004) have asserted, Aboriginal cultural tourism initiatives, both present and future, will likely share certain fundamental traits. There will be an emphasis on Aboriginal arts and crafts, ranging from traditional items such as beadwork or porcupine quillwork, jewelry and moccasins through paintings, drawings and sculptures, to soapstone carvings. There will likely be an emphasis on music and dancing, traditional foods and ceremonies, all commonly associated with Pow-Wows and other music and cultural festivals. Aboriginal cultural tourism initiatives have the potential to enable members of First Nations to promote their cultural and environmental awareness and sensitivity to members of the general population, both from Canada and abroad, while allowing tourists from a variety of other cultures to experience the historical background and contemporary realities of life on First Nations, and their cultural approach to life, land and the spirit (See also Brown, 2006, Ryan and Pike, 2003, Brown and Geddes, 2007, Brown and Pyke, 2005).

As of the first decade of this new millennium, however, Aboriginal cultural tourism remains more an idea and an aspiration than a developed reality. While there are certain important initial steps in the creation of Aboriginal cultural tourism initiatives, such as the UNESCO World Heritage site of Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump in southern Alberta, the K'san Historical Village in British Columbia, and the Wanuskewin Heritage Park in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, these undertakings are still very much pioneering ventures, suggestive of what can be. There remain many difficulties to be overcome in the development of Aboriginal cultural tourism initiatives. Notwithstanding the work of Aboriginal Tourism Canada (2003), there has been limited opportunities in the recent past for those interested in such tourism initiatives to coordinate with one another due to the lack of government-business expertise with this market, a lack of a well-established and integrated Aboriginal cultural

tourism policy community, and market-readiness. These challenges are experienced by all First Nations regardless of their geographic location.

Having assessed the theoretical dimensions of Aboriginal cultural tourism this article now turns to a case narrative of how Aboriginal cultural tourism initiatives have been and are being developed in one of Canada's premier tourist markets, namely Cape Breton Island.

## **UNAMA'KI AND CULTURAL TOURISM INITIATIVES**

The indigenous peoples, the Mi'kmaq, have lived in the region for approximately 11,000 years and have had contact with Europeans for 400 hundred years. They call Cape Breton Island, Unama'ki, Land of the Fog (Milburn, 2004). The five First Nations of Membertou, Eskasoni, Potlotek/Chapel Island, We'kopaq/Waycobah, and Wagmatcook have a combined population of 7149 which represents 68% of the Aboriginal population of the Province of Nova Scotia (INAC, 2007).

Most well known nationally have been the economic development initiatives with the Membertou First Nation. As Brown and Pyke, (2005), and Scott, (2004) have shown, since the mid 1990s Membertou Inc. has become known for its initiatives in partnering with firms engaged in offshore oil and gas exploration, providing records management for client enterprises, and developing working relationships and establishing Aboriginal job opportunities with firms engaged in the development and implementation of environmental remediation work.

But beyond all of these initiatives, a number of the Mi'kmaq First Nations in Cape Breton have developed explicit policy and program interests with respect to Aboriginal cultural tourism. Over the past decade the leaderships of all five Cape Breton First Nations have supported the promotion of tourism opportunities for their Nations ranging from the economic support of local, native arts and crafts artisans to the support of summer cultural festivals and Pow-Wows. Furthermore, the leaderships of the Wagmatcook, Waycobah, and Membertou First Nations have supported the development of community centres within their nations, with such centres having a direct role to play in providing tourism services via museums, art galleries, cultural exhibits, arts and crafts production facilities, gift shops and restaurants.

Participants involved in Mi'kmaq cultural tourism on Cape Breton Island during a period of two months in the summer of 2007 and 2008 form the basis of the primary research of this paper. Those interviewed are involved, to varying degrees, with Mi'kmaq cultural tourism in their respective communities. The target groups, in response to ten semi-structured, in-depth interviews comprised of 100 questions, register broad views to the proposed survey questions. A brief description of the interview participants follows. Chief Terrance Paul, Membertou, Chief Morley Googoo, Waycobah, Rebekah Price, Mi'kmaq Tourism Manager, Wagmatcook, Mary Collier, Mi'kmaq Tourism Coordinator, Chapel Island, Louis Joe Bernard, Economic Development Officer, Waycobah, Betty Gould, Corporate Services Manager, Waycobah, Rosalie Francis, Research Director, Membertou Band Office, Lindsay Marshall, Associate Dean, Mi'kmaq College Institute, Cape Breton University (former Chief, Chapel Island), Virick Francis, Economic Development Officer, Eskasoni and Leroy Denny, Band Councilor, Eskasoni and Member of Volunteer Board for Cultural Promotion, Recreation and Youth Programs.

The analyses include examining the interviews for common themes or differences to speak specifically to the Cape Breton Aboriginal cultural tourism context and the development, marketing, and promotion of Mi'kmaq products and services to tourists.

Paul (2007) mentions the European tourists are very interested in Mi'kmaq culture and heritage. He stresses there is a market for Cape Breton Mi'kmaq cultural tourist products and has already realized economic benefits from tourists who have visited the restaurant, convention centre and gift shop in his community. Marshall (2008) agrees there is a market for Mi'kmaq products and

services on Cape Breton Island. Ten years ago there was not as much infrastructure in place in the communities as there is today. Membertou has the Trade and Convention Centre and Wagmatcook has a newly erected cultural and heritage centre. Notzke (2004) argues, there will be an interest in the development of cultural centres designed to be focal points within First Nations communities for both the members of these communities as well as for cultural tourists seeking to learn about the history, culture and contemporary life of that First Nation.

Googoo (2007) indicates there is a market for Aboriginal cultural tourism on Cape Breton Island. He supports his view by saying that Cape Breton offers other tourist destinations such as the Fortress of Louisbourg and the scenic Cabot Trail. Partnering to offer a Mi'kmaq cultural tourism component would attract more visitors. Baskets are made in his community on a small scale. He suggests that, "we need to identify who we are and what we want to sell to tourists". First Nations communities show a willingness to share their lives and heritage with tourists, which is something special in itself. The concerns Notzke's (2004) research addresses deal with how well the Aboriginal tourism product fits with market demand and the host society's socio-cultural background: what quality partnerships are fully utilized by Aboriginal product suppliers and tour operations; and what is the travelers' degree of familiarity, knowledge and interest in the Aboriginal tourism experience. Googoo (2007) adds that other parts of the country (British Columbia) are doing very well selling Aboriginal products, so there is demand for this type of offering. According to the Aboriginal Tourism in Canada, Part 1: Economic Impact Analysis (2003), while Aboriginal tourism was previously sought mostly by a small niche market, mainstream tourists are now showing a keen interest in participating in Aboriginal tourism experiences.

Price (2007) further supports the growth of Aboriginal cultural tourism on Cape Breton Island. In recent years she has witnessed an increase in the number of tourists to her community. She believes the Mi'kmaq culture provides a unique experience to visitors through tour packages, craft demonstrations, and traditional ceremonies. She says that Elder's stories provide special insight showcasing Mi'kmaq history and heritage of local First Nations people, but some things are sacred and not shared with visitors. A twin concern for reaping the economic benefits of commercially successful Aboriginal tourism initiatives while also respecting and promoting the uniqueness and integrity of Aboriginal cultures is echoed by Diabo (2003), Hager (2003) and Mather-Simard (2003).

Collier (2007) agrees there is demand for Mi'kmaq products and services. He further explains there is a specific market wanting to experience new adventure and products. In his opinion, tourists want an ecotourism experience, comprised of nature walks and camping. This adventure is something local communities could readily offer to visitors. Francis, R (2008), fully supports the idea of developing and promoting Mi'kmaq cultural products to visiting tourists. She is directly involved in the development of the Membertou Heritage Park, scheduled to open in 2009. She mentions results of a market study which determined what tourists want in an Aboriginal cultural experience. Research data revealed tourists are more interested in ecotourism and so the park will provide such experiences as storytelling, canoe making, basket making, bead work and all writings and oral communication will be in both Mi'kmaq and English. Notzke (2004) indicates there will be a strong connection to the land, with First Nations giving visitors a cultural appreciation of Aboriginal connections to the natural environment through such activities as hunting and fishing trips, wilderness hiking and camping excursions, nature flora and fauna walks, wildlife observation, and environmental and ecological appreciation ventures.

Bernard (2007) argues that local Mi'kmaq cultural tourism is being underutilized. He suggests there is something to offer tourists, but "we need to clearly identify what they want and then offer what we can, given the resources at hand". The challenge for those interested in promoting Aboriginal cultural tourism undertakings, according to Diabo (2003), is to develop cultural tourism offerings that are grounded in the reality of First Nations. Bernard (2007) mentions that Cape Breton Island has a large Mi'kmaq population, so people are available to make crafts and provide cultural and heritage performances.

Francis, V (2007), firmly believes there is a market on Cape Breton for Mi'kmaq cultural tourism products. He feels tourism is strong on CB and is rising in terms of visitor numbers and money spent by them. There is a basket shop in his community which does very well, but promotion of it is limited. In his opinion, if tourists know more about what is offered, then more people will visit the communities. Denny (2008), asserts there is demand for CB Mi'kmaq cultural products. He sees an increase in the number of people attending the Pow-wow in his community every year. Most artists make products from their homes, therefore he feels there is need for more promotion so tourists will know what is available. In Gould's (2008) opinion, there is definitely an interest by tourists in Mi'kmaq cultural products and services. In her community there is a gas station which displays some Mi'kmaq products. There are several people who do very well selling their beadwork and baskets from their homes. However, the only means of advertising for them is word-of-mouth and signage along the highway. All agree there must be a better way to promote their products so visitors will know what they have to offer. With respect to the development of Aboriginal cultural tourism initiatives Notzke's (2004) research highlights three important operational requirements to the successful promotion of Aboriginal tourism ventures: professional product identification and elaboration, market development, and the evolution of strategic partnerships. Such partnerships should exist between, on the one side, First Nations leaders, Aboriginal tourism development officers, and Aboriginal cultural tourism product suppliers, and, on the other side, public sector departments and agencies responsible for Aboriginal policies and regional economic development, and private sector agencies, groups, and entrepreneurs active within local and regional travel industries.

All those interviewed shared a general concern for the authenticity of product offerings. They agreed they do not want products or services sold which do not portray authentic Aboriginal culture and history. Heritage presenters and product producers must be knowledgeable, sincere, genuine and of Aboriginal descent. The consensus among those interviewed indicates the need for collaborative tourism development initiatives by all five First Nations communities on Cape Breton Island. There was recognition that the uniqueness of each community and its tourism offerings was a cultural strength for the entire Mi'kmaq cultural tourism venture, with such diversity serving to attract the interest of those non-Aboriginals seeking to learn more about Mi'kmaq culture and identity, history and current life. Interviewees also stressed the needed involvement of local non-Aboriginal government and tourist operators to further develop and promote Aboriginal products and services for the tourist trade. In asserting Aboriginal leadership in the development of First Nations tourism developments, Hager (2003) has commented upon the importance of Aboriginal cultural tourism promoters within First Nations building partnerships with like-minded persons, government officials, elders and community groups within their own First Nation as well as with sympathetic individuals, government officials and business leaders in the non-Aboriginal community.

### **The Cape Breton Aboriginal Cultural Tourism Initiative: Analytical Reflections**

The foregoing overview of the Aboriginal cultural tourism initiative within Cape Breton reveals a business venture still in the state of becoming. This is unsurprising given the relatively recent interest by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal actors in seeking to promote cultural tourism undertakings as a major aspect of economic and tourism developments within Cape Breton Island. The relative newness of this emerging field of business reveals both challenges and opportunities that need to be recognized and either enhanced or ameliorated by those wishing to see the future success of Cape Breton Aboriginal cultural tourism.

That there is a nascent Aboriginal cultural tourism initiative within Cape Breton is perhaps the single greatest mark of success for those Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians who can visualize the future importance of this tourism industry. At the heart of this tourism venture stand the Cape Breton First Nations, their governmental leaders and elders, and those within these First Nations who have already inaugurated cultural tourism initiatives ranging from the Wagmatcook Culture and Heritage Centre through the Eskasoni Pow-Wow to the Membertou Trade and Convention Centre. Representatives of these First Nations recognize the potential that Aboriginal cultural tourism ventures can offer their peoples in terms of economic development, employment, and the generation

of wealth within these communities as well as promoting an authentic portrayal of Mi'kmaq history and culture, and encouraging cross-cultural communication and understanding between members of the Mi'kmaq nations and members of the general Cape Breton community.

The existence of this emerging cultural tourism industry is also a tribute to the work of a variety of governmental and private sector entities within the non-Aboriginal community who can also envisage the future importance of Aboriginal cultural tourism ventures and offerings as a significant component of the Cape Breton tourism reality. This field of cultural tourism offerings, however, should not be a cause for complacency amongst those interested in developing Aboriginal cultural tourism ventures within Cape Breton. While this unique tourism product is coming into being and is beginning to reap benefits for Mi'kmaq First Nations there are certain problematics that will need to be overcome if Cape Breton Aboriginal cultural tourism initiatives are to reach their full potential. One is that the Aboriginal leaderships with each of the five First Nations within Cape Breton will need to effectively come together as a unified force providing co-ordinated direction and leadership for all Aboriginal cultural tourism ventures within "Unama'ki"(Cape Breton Island). At present, each First Nation tends to work as a separate actor in their economic development initiatives and their stress on the authenticity of cultural tourism products and services. While each First Nation retains responsibility for its own economic development initiatives, First Nation leaders and their peoples need to be encouraged to realize that, given the unique and special nature of the Mi'kmaq cultural tourism offering, collective and co-operative tourism development respectful of Aboriginal authenticity will yield greater results than individual, uncoordinated and ad hoc initiatives. The whole can be greater than the sum of the parts. This same admonition also needs to be directed to cultural tourism policy leaders within the non-Aboriginal community.

As the Mi'kmaq First Nations pursue their goals of developing a major Aboriginal cultural tourism industry within Cape Breton, a number of non-native organizations will have to be involved in the development of this industry due to the fact that a number of other organizations have a direct jurisdictional, organizational and entrepreneurial stake in the development of such an industry. These other organizations range from the Government of Nova Scotia's Department of Economic Development and Tourism Nova Scotia, through municipal Regional Development Agencies such as the Cape Breton Country Economic Development Agency and the Strait Area Economic Development Agency, to private sector tourism industry promotional and marketing agencies such as Destination Cape Breton (Johnson, 2007). All of these institutions have a vested interest in matters respecting economic development within Cape Breton in general, and with respect to the elaboration and promotion of the Cape Breton tourism industry in particular. As Aboriginal cultural tourism ventures are developed and take root on Cape Breton, there will be a need for close interaction and mutual support from all of these interested institutional actors, especially in relation to the institutional sensitivity needed by non-Aboriginal tourism policy leaders with respect to Aboriginal cultural tourism initiatives.

Just as the Cape Breton First Nations will need to speak with a single voice if they are to fully realize their cultural tourism potential, so too will the non-Aboriginal agencies and actors interested in promoting Aboriginal cultural tourism have to develop the ways and means to co-ordinate their policy and program development initiatives so as to promote greater coherence in initiative design, development, authenticity and implementation.

This paper reveals that Aboriginal cultural tourism has great potential to provide economic growth for First Nations communities. The literature identifies concern for authenticity of tourist product and need for self-governance by First Nations communities with full involvement in all levels of decision making. Aboriginal communities see tourism as a "means to promote better understanding of their history, culture, and values, as well as a means to preserve and build interest amongst their people in preservation and revival of their culture and language" (Aboriginal Tourism in Canada, Part 1: Economic Impact Analysis, 2003). Aboriginal leaders, although they realize the potential cultural tourism could bring to struggling communities, do not ignore the call for unified support from non-Aboriginal interested parties, government bodies and tourist operators. This case narrative has

achieved its objective by presenting a unique situation highlighting Cape Breton Island's five Aboriginal communities. Leaders from these communities realize they must come together collectively to promote Aboriginal cultural offerings at their respective communities. By working together, these communities can present an image of product abundance and collective knowledge to attract tourists for the long-term. While agreement is reached by Cape Breton First Nations leaders that collaboration to develop and promote Aboriginal cultural tourism is the most viable approach, consensus surrounding authenticity of the tourist experience is unanimous.

The literature is replete with evidence to suggest that authenticity must be controlled by the culture of which it represents. Taylor (2001) suggests that if the concept of authenticity is to have any legitimate place in the discussion of culture, its definition must rest with the individuals who "make up" that culture. He argues that due to the recent explosion of interest in "cultural tourism", authenticity should also be considered important to those involved in the industry itself (Taylor, 2001).

The paper has also identified government's willingness to become involved with advancing local Aboriginal cultural tourism. These findings are significant because they form the basis of recommendations for Cape Breton Island's Aboriginal tourism direction. The issue of how to bring all interested parties together to discuss the challenges and opportunities presented by this new niche market is raised. The authors propose that Cape Breton University is the neutral body, where meetings take place to discuss issues surrounding Aboriginal cultural tourism development. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal entities want Aboriginal cultural tourism advanced and promoted as part of the Cape Breton tourism product. A pattern of cooperation must be established between government, tourist operators and the host communities in pursuit of a common interest.

In its first attempt, this study has advanced the understanding of Aboriginal cultural tourism development in a particular case within Canada. As a result, it has served as a catalyst for further research in this unique market which has recently grown in popularity in Canada and worldwide. As revealed in the literature, the challenges and opportunities presented in this study are not unique to Cape Breton Island's First Nations communities; however, the direction proposed by the authors has implications for further Aboriginal cultural tourism development in this region and elsewhere. It is hoped that tourists in the near future will not only be visiting Cape Breton Island to experience its culture and beauty, but also for the Aboriginal cultural adventure offered by our local First Nations communities.

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