

# Free Spirit

Add indigenous culture to spice up a Canada escape, says Nikki Bayley

Whether it's a couple of hours at a cultural centre, an afternoon dog sledding followed by First Nation storytelling over fresh-made bannock, or a fully immersive adventure in the wild, adding a First Nations element to a client's Canadian holiday can really enrich their trip and spark interest in exploring deeper.

There are more than 600 First Nations communities across Canada, making up about 5% of the population, although you will find First Nations, Métis and Inuit

people living in cities and towns all over the country.

There are dozens of fantastic market-ready indigenous-owned and operated tourism businesses across Canada, so here are some to spark your imagination.

## ▶ ALBERTA AND THE PRAIRIES

**Sleep in a teepee:** Just 15 minutes from downtown Saskatoon, Wanuskewin Heritage Park is home to some of North America's most exciting archaeological finds, many of which pre-date the

pyramids of Egypt. Stay overnight in a teepee, come for the day and take part in a moccasin-making workshop, hike the trails or enjoy delicious First Nations-inspired cuisine such as bison stew and Three Sisters Soup.

**wanuskewin.com**

**Drive a dog sled:** Churchill, in Manitoba, is home to Wapusk Adventures Dog Sled Camp, where visitors can learn to drive a team of dogs through the snowy boreal forest in winter or head out birdwatching up the Churchill River in a jet boat, looking out

for beluga whales along the way in the summer. They can also learn about traditional and contemporary Métis life with the award-winning owner-operators. **wapuskadventures.com**

**Learn survival skills:** Just an hour from Calgary, the Painted Warriors Ranch offers year-round cultural programmes from snowshoe stargazing, animal tracking, horse riding, archery and mother-daughter retreats to survival weekends on which guests can learn Métis and First Nations skills. They can be



## ASK THE EXPERT

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Dené Sinclair,  
director of  
marketing,  
Indigenous Tourism  
Association of  
Canada

Indigenous tourism experiences have the power to change perspectives, preserve culture, language and community, and provide our relatives with a platform to be the leading voice in reclaiming our space in history, both ancient and modern. Our association helps indigenous communities, entrepreneurs and businesses tell their own story through tourism. There are so many experiences to try across the country: engage all your senses in the Rocky Mountains of Alberta, on the Mahikan Trail, as you touch, taste, smell and hear stories of traditional plant medicines; travel the path of the Huron-Wendat people in Quebec; or take a tour of a kekul (traditional underground accommodation) at Quaout Lodge in British Columbia. [indigenoustourism.ca](http://indigenoustourism.ca)

→ combined with an overnight ‘glamping’ stay with dinner by the campfire. [paintedwarriors.ca](http://paintedwarriors.ca)

### ▶ BRITISH COLUMBIA AND THE YUKON

**Go wild:** Experience true wilderness living at Shakat Tun Wilderness Camp on the edge of Kluane National Park, and learn more about the traditional ways of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations. Activities range from medicine walks and drum-making workshops to trapline tours and nightly campfire storytelling, all within breathtaking wild Yukon surroundings. [shakattunadventures.com](http://shakattunadventures.com)

**Learn the lifestyle:** Squamish Lil’Wat Cultural Centre is an excellent modern museum and cultural centre in the heart of Whistler, showcasing the Squamish and Lil’Wat nations. Visitors are welcomed with a traditional song, shown a well-made cultural film and taken on a tour, before settling down to make traditional crafts. Stay for an indigenous-inspired lunch or book one of the popular salmon barbecue nights. [slcc.ca](http://slcc.ca)

**Tour totem poles:** Join First Nations guides from Talaysay Tours in Vancouver, Squamish and on the Sunshine Coast for cultural walks, kayak tours and multi-day adventures. Perfect for clients with time restrictions, the 90-minute Spoken Treasures tour in Stanley Park views Vancouver through an indigenous lens. [talaysay.com](http://talaysay.com)

**Eat indigenous:** Dive into delicious First Nations-inspired dishes at one of Vancouver’s most popular restaurants, Salmon n’ Bannock. Try game meatballs, wild boar sausages, birch-glazed wild salmon and, of course, bannock, paired with wine from Canada’s First Nations-owned wineries. [salmonandbannock.net](http://salmonandbannock.net)

**Natural beauty:** Canada’s answer to the Galapagos Islands, the protected rainforest archipelago of Haida Gwaii offers incredible ecotourism opportunities, fishing adventures and wildlife viewing, teamed with cultural tours visiting ancient Haida villages, towering totem poles and learning more about the Haida nation through storytelling and song. Haida Style Expeditions is a 100% Haida-owned and operated cultural ecotourism business. [haidastyle.com](http://haidastyle.com)



PICTURE: ROBERT BARONET/STUDIO DU RUISSEAU, NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR TOURISM

### ▶ ONTARIO

**Follow the trail:** Get an aboriginal perspective on Manitoulin Island, the biggest freshwater lake island in the world, and explore the Sagamok region of northeastern Ontario on the Great Spirit Circle Trail. There’s something for everyone here, whether it’s a kayak tour with an indigenous guide paddling the lake and hearing stories of local legends, taking part in a workshop learning to set up a teepee, or heading out on a medicine walk gathering herbs and plants in the forest. Alternatively, you can

just stay in First Nations-owned accommodation, and dine out at indigenous-inspired restaurants. [circletrail.com](http://circletrail.com)

**Go downtown:** Enjoy an aboriginal cultural adventure in the heart of the nation’s capital on Victoria Island in Ottawa on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg people. From May till October, clients can book guided tours of the village, take part in pow wow dance performances, traditional meals and craft workshops, and paddle a canoe on the Ottawa River. [aboriginalexperiences.com](http://aboriginalexperiences.com)



RIGHT: Squamish Lil’Wat Cultural Centre, Whistler, British Columbia



FAR LEFT: Huron-Wendat storytelling, Wendake, Quebec  
LEFT: Reindeer herding in Inuvik, Northwest Territories  
ABOVE: Torngat Mountains National Park, Labrador

### ▶ ATLANTIC CANADA

**Living culture:** Cape Breton has a proud Mi’kmaq First Nations heritage and clients can immerse themselves in this fascinating living culture at the excellent Eskasoni community on a guided walk around Goat Island. They can take part in a smudging ceremony, learn basket weaving, try traditional dancing and discover more about traditional hunting and fishing. [eskasoniculturaljourneys.ca](http://eskasoniculturaljourneys.ca)

**Beat it to base:** Embark on an adventure few get to make, alongside an Inuit guide, at the Torngat Mountains Base Camp and Research Station in Torngat Mountains National Park at the northernmost tip of Newfoundland and Labrador. Open for only six weeks in the summer, this is a bucket-list destination and chance to see the northern lights, icebergs, polar bears and whales alongside the Inuit who have called this protected land home for centuries. [thetorngats.com](http://thetorngats.com)

### ▶ QUEBEC

**Room for improvement:** Just a short distance from Quebec City, clients can discover the traditional heritage and culture of the Huron-Wendat people in contemporary style at the Hôtel-



Activities range from medicine walks and drum-making workshops to trapline tours and campfire storytelling

Musée Premières Nations in Wendake. Stay overnight in comfy rooms with thoughtful indigenous touches from dream catchers to throws, feast on elevated First Nations-inspired cuisine at La Traite, and head to the traditional longhouse for songs and storytelling over labrador tea, explore the museum and take part in a cultural workshop. [hotelpremieresnations.ca](http://hotelpremieresnations.ca)

**Tap a maple tree:** Experience the beautiful wilderness of the Atikamekw Nation’s community on Lake Manawan. In spring, head to the sugar house to gather maple syrup, and visit the community on the reserve, while summer brings camping in a teepee, nature walks, fishing and a moose dinner around the campfire. In winter, wrap up warm and head out on a snowmobile to explore the reserve and

learn this nation’s survival skills. [voyageamerindiens.com/en](http://voyageamerindiens.com/en)

### ▶ NORTHWEST TERRITORIES AND NUNAVUT

**True north:** Experience the magic of Canada’s far north in Inuvik with Tundra North Tours, on the adventure of a lifetime. In winter, snowmobile out to herd and feed reindeer, build an igloo to sleep in, watch the northern lights dance, tuck into local cuisine and take part in cultural activities at the basecamp lodge. In summer, travel from the Yukon to the Northwest Territories with an Inuit guide, visiting a traditional and active Inuit whaling camp on the Mackenzie Delta and exploring the coastal community of Tuktoyaktuk. [tundranorthtours.com](http://tundranorthtours.com)

**Summer sledding:** Make an expedition by traditional qamutiq sled to the floe edge of Admiralty Inlet – at the north end of Baffin Island in Nunavut – accompanied by Inuit guides, exploring ancient sites and learning about their living culture. Visit in July to experience 24-hour daylight and wild flowers in bloom on the tundra, or visit over the winter solstice and join the community in celebrating the new year. [arcticbayadventures.com](http://arcticbayadventures.com) TW