

# First impressions

You can't come to Canada without exploring its Indigenous culture, finds Nikki Bayley

Indigenous communities in Canada have shared their culture with visitors to their traditional territories since time immemorial. Things may have moved on from hosting other nations along well-worn trade routes, but that warm welcome remains the same.

Today's tourists would also benefit from taking some time to understand that the country's history and culture stretch far back beyond its European settlers, so add an authentic Indigenous tourism element – one done by Indigenous Peoples, not about them – to enrich your client's Canadian adventure.

## BEST FOR...CULTURE

The Indigenous Peoples of Canada include Inuit, Métis and some 634 First Nations, each with a distinct traditional knowledge, culture and heritage.

Encourage clients to learn more at one of the excellent cultural sites across the country. The Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre explores the traditions,

art and culture of the Squamish and Lil'wat people, just a stone's throw from the heart of Whistler.

Visits start with a welcoming song from a cultural ambassador and an educational film, followed by a tour of the artefacts and a chance to learn a traditional craft. Alternatively, join a guided forest walk to learn about the region's medicinal herbs and plants, before enjoying tea and bannock (a round bread loaf).

**Or try:** New Brunswick's Metepenagiag Heritage Park showcases Mi'gmau culture at the 'village of 30 centuries'. Hear campfire stories, explore the interpretation centre with a guide and enjoy fresh fish or summer game with fragrant cedar-tips tea.

## BEST FOR...OVERNIGHT STAYS

From teepees to glamorous casinos and luxury suites, Indigenous-owned accommodation comes in many forms. Just 25 minutes' drive from Quebec City, the Hotel-Musée Premières Nations offers guests a chance to ➤



# DESTINATIONS

## CANADA | INDIGENOUS EXPERIENCES



### CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

Arctic tundra; Hotel-Musée Premières Nations; northern lights above Torngat Mountains National Park; Kermode bear at Spirit Bear Lodge

PICTURES: Tundra North Tours/Sherry Ott; Canadian Tourism Commission; Chris Sampson; Doug Neasloss

### BOOK IT

**Travel 2** offers a Spirit Bear Lodge, Grizzly and Spirit Bear Viewing package from £1,199. The price includes flights from Vancouver to Bella Bella, a water taxi to Klemtu, three nights' full-board at Spirit Bear Lodge, and activities such as kayaking and cultural tours.

[travel2.com](http://travel2.com)

**Do Something Different** offers entry to Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre in Whistler from £12 for adults and £4 for under-18s. [dosomethingdifferent.com](http://dosomethingdifferent.com)

immerse themselves in Huron-Wendat culture. Feast on Indigenous fine dining at La Traite, with treats such as garlic-flower bannock or charcoal-smoked boar; visit the authentic Ekionkiestha' Longhouse for stories and songs around the campfire; take a tour of the museum or enjoy a workshop learning traditional crafts. Spend the night in the Longhouse or wrapped up snugly in the stylish hotel, with soothing river and forest views and a dreamcatcher above your bed.

**Or try:** Explore Canada's equivalent of the Galápagos Islands with a stay at Haida House's rustic lodge or oceanfront cabins. Discover cultural sites and ancient villages, and marvel at bears foraging in the rainforest or whales flipping their tails in the ocean.

### BEST FOR...NATURE

Canada is famous for the breathtaking diversity of its nature and wildlife, so who better to explore and explain these marvels than the traditional guardians of the land?

Fly from Vancouver to Bella

“Guests can marvel at the dancing lights from their teepee village, set around a frozen lake in the forest

Bella before speeding by water taxi to Spirit Bear Lodge in the heart of British Columbia's Great Bear Rainforest. Situated in the largest intact temperate rainforest in the world, Spirit Bear Lodge offers guests the chance to view whales, coastal wolves and three kinds of bear – including the rare white 'spirit' bear – hike through towering old-growth forests, and be immersed in the storied Kitasoo Xai'xais First Nations culture.

**Or try:** Look to the skies in Yellowknife, just south of the Arctic Circle in the Northwest Territories. At Aurora Village, guests can marvel at the magic of dancing lights in

the sky from the warm glow of their teepee village, set around a frozen lake in the forest.

### BEST FOR...DAY TRIPS

Already on a schedule? You don't need to take days or weeks to experience Indigenous tourism, as there are plenty of half-day activities you can recommend. In Vancouver, Talaysay Tours offers authentic cultural tourism activities in the heart of the city in Stanley Park. Take its signature Talking Trees tour (£37, 90 minutes) to learn about the Coast Salish Peoples' scientific and traditional knowledge of the plants and trees that helped them live in harmonious balance for centuries, or try an interactive three-hour Forest Therapy walk with traditional tea and snacks.

**Or try:** From 90-minute mini-tours to multi-day adventures, explore the Yukon with Whitehorse's Who What Where Tours. Take a scenic drive beyond the city limits, soak in the natural hot springs at Takhini, meet the cute sled dogs and learn about mushing, or enjoy a campfire with

bison and elk sausages, storytelling and a stunning view over a lake.

### BEST FOR...IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

As the world's second-largest country, Canada offers endless opportunities to get off the grid with Indigenous-run tourism outfitters that offer once-in-a-lifetime experiences in unspoiled wilderness.

Experience a part of the world few get to see in the company of Labrador Inuit guides at base camp in the Torngat Mountains National Park, where narwhals and whales swim in icy waters and the night skies dance with the aurora borealis.

**Or try:** Sleep in an igloo bathed in shimmering northern lights in the Northwest Territories town of Inuvik, accompanied by Indigenous guides from Tundra North Tours (which pays commission via inbound DMCs). Clients can take a multi-day snowmobile adventure to join reindeer herders on the Arctic tundra or drive the famous Aklavik ice road, while learning more about thriving Inuit culture. **TW**