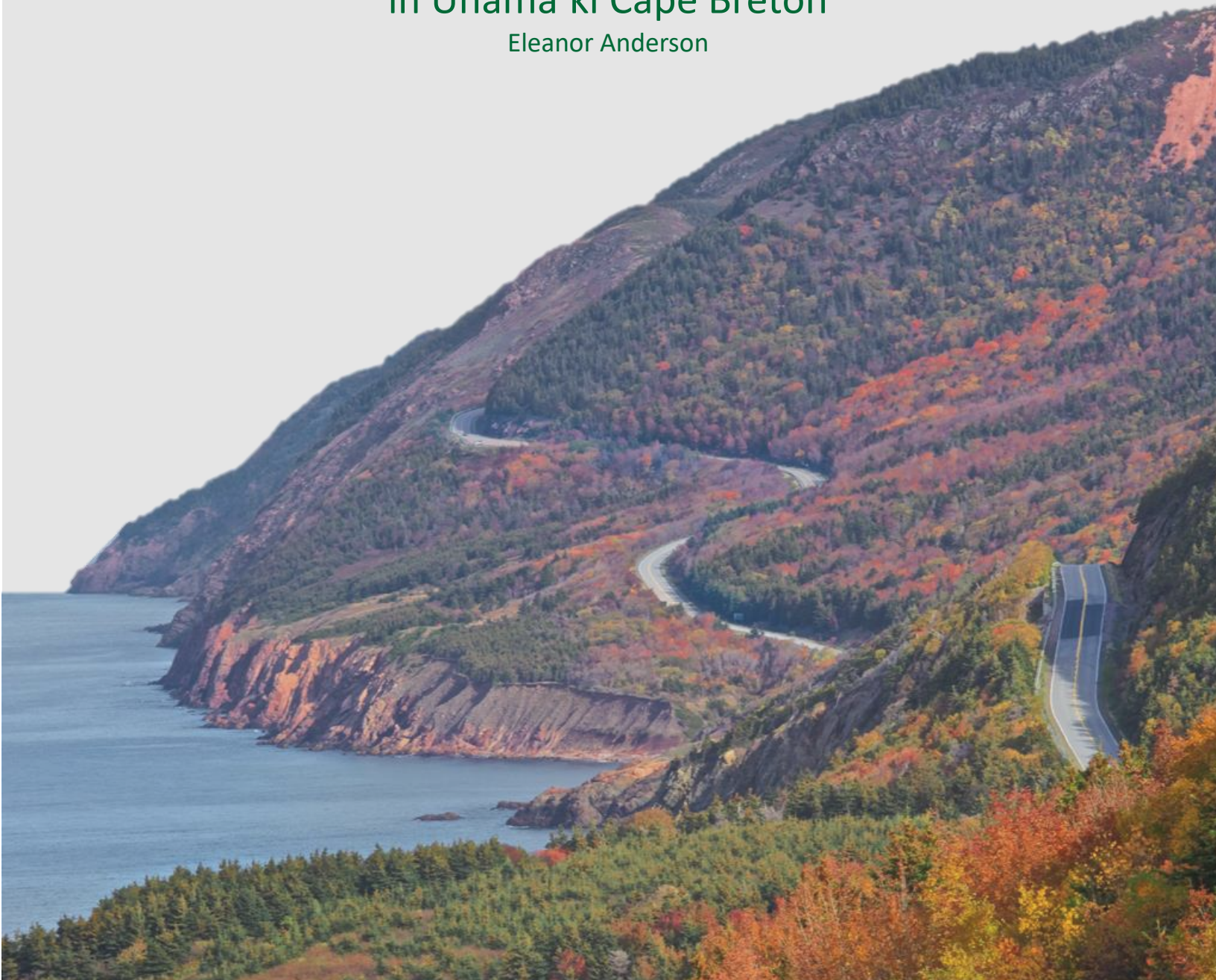




Unama'ki - Cape Breton Island Tourism Case Studies

Mi'kmaw Cultural Tourism in Unama'ki Cape Breton

Eleanor Anderson



Cape Breton Island has long been lauded as one of the most beautiful Islands in the world. Cape Breton University has delivered well-established tourism and hospitality training for decades and is a leader in the field of such undergraduate training in Canada. The World Tourism Institute (WTI) at CBU is perfectly positioned and timed to leverage, support, and enhance, a growing tourism industry at home and globally.

The World Tourism Institute (WTI) was founded at Cape Breton University (CBU) in 2018 with a strong foundation rooted in the depth and diversity of the Cape Breton Island Tourism Sector, the long history of Tourism and Hospitality programming at CBU and the established industry and community relationships.

In 2022, the WTI secured \$2.24 million, 3 year project running February 2022 to 2025, for training and research funding from the Canadian government to stimulate post-pandemic recovery, build capacity and grow opportunities for Cape Breton Island's Tourism Sector. This project is called the **Cape Breton Island Tourism Training Network (CBITTN)**.

CBITTN Objectives:

- Ensure inclusivity in all development activities.
- Work with Mi'kmaw partners to explore, design and implement community-based credit programs in Indigenous tourism.
- Develop a foundation of accessible, timely and credible research which will support decision-making by the industry and act as a catalyst in innovation and entrepreneurialism in tourism.
- Identify training gaps and needs associated with labour shortages.
- Promote education and professional certifications for the tourism industry, including the development of micro-credentials and customized training programs.

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Please note that the accuracy of these case studies is subject to change since the publication date. The individuals interviewed may no longer be affiliated with the respective tourism operations or businesses. Changes in business practices, ownership, and other relevant details may have occurred since the time of writing.



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BACKGROUND

The Indigenous peoples of Cape Breton Island, the Mi'kmaw, have lived in the region for at least 12,000 years, and call the Island Unama'ki, which translates to 'land of fog'. The Mi'kmaw are separated into five Indigenous communities on Unama'ki Cape Breton. They are Eskasoni, Membertou, Wagmatcook, We'koqma'q, and Potlotek and have a combined population of approximately 8500 people. Each Indigenous community has their own leadership and pursues their own strategies for investment, improvement, and integration.

Eskasoni, with 4,000 people, is the largest Mi'kmaw community in the world and it is developing at an ambitious rate. Their website outlines its mission: With a dedication to improving the lives of its future generation, the Eskasoni community strives to be culturally rich and respectful of its ecosystem based on concepts of shared responsibility. The Chief and Council of Eskasoni encourage and support business creation and expansion and are committed to creating opportunities for the betterment of the community. They are leaders in mental health supports, fish and wildlife conservation, treaty advocacy and tourism product development.

The second largest of the Mi'kmaw communities is Membertou with a population of about 1,700. Membertou is an urban progressive community which has ambitiously pursued economic development and building a vibrant community through innovative collaborations with government and private sector partners. In 2002, Membertou became the first Indigenous organization in the world to receive an ISO 9001 certification. The ISO 9001 certification is an internationally recognized quality management system that documents the processes, procedures, and responsibilities for achieving quality policies and objectives. It is awarded after successful completion of an audit against the certification's standards. This certification improves Membertou's ability to attract investors and partners as it demonstrates a commitment to consistent process-orientated decision-making practices.

While the Mi'kmaw people have been welcoming visitors and immigrants to Cape Breton Island for centuries, the product development and promotion of Indigenous tourism has been slow to grow despite the existence of some high-quality and popular Indigenous tourism offerings. Experiences such as the Eskasoni Cultural Journeys and the Membertou Heritage Park are promoted by the Island's tourism sector destination marketing organization (DMO) – Destination Cape Breton (DCB). DCB takes its role of Indigenous allyship seriously ensuring Indigenous representation on its volunteer Board of Directors and working collaboratively with the Nova Scotia Indigenous Tourism Enterprise Network (NSITEN) in its capacity- building efforts supporting Indigenous tourism entrepreneurship and nurturing and promoting cultural tourism.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION IN TOURISM

Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in 2008 as the result of a class action settlement between survivors of the Indian residential schools, the Canadian federal government, and church organizations. The extensive work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada has been reinforced in the public domain and has highlighted the responsibility of each Canadian to do better – to learn and become aware of the true history of Canada's churches, governments, schools, and communities. Following six years of testimony from survivors of the Canadian Residential Schools System, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission completed its report in 2015. It published a historically significant report containing a summary of the work of the Commission. Included with this report are 10 principles that form a foundation for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and 94 Calls to Action, which offer meaningful, specific ways in which all Canadians can work together toward a future of shared priorities and mutual respect. The report and the Calls to Action provide a guide for Indigenous partnerships and policies that acknowledge past transgressions and allow for future growth. As the Indigenous tourism industry begins to develop, the Calls to Action help guide the growth in a responsible and equitable manner.

Calls to Action 12 through 17 address language and culture. Language is seen as key to cultural connection and understanding. Mi'kmaw was officially recognized through provincial legislation as Nova Scotia's original language. There are more than 5,000 Mi'kmaw speakers and this formality is seen as a step forward to preserve and grow the language, enriching the culture and traditions of the Mi'kmaw (CBC News · Posted: Jul 17, 2022). These Calls to Action have also encouraged the tourism industry to develop and share tourism materials in the Mi'kmaw language.

Cape Breton University, via Unama'ki College, has been a champion for Mi'kmaw language, culture, and education both on campus and in First Nations communities for almost fifty years. The Kji-keptin Alexander Denny L'nui'sultimkeweyo'kuom (Mi'kmaq Language Lab) was opened as an important commitment to language preservation and dissemination at Cape Breton University (CBU). Furthermore, Mi'kmaw Studies courses focus on language, cultural, politics, governance, art, and history. In 2023, CBU's Senate approved the first Mi'kmaw Cultural Tourism Certificate.

Another Call to Action that impacts the Mi'kmaw tourism industry is number 92 which addresses Business and Reconciliation. Specifically, this call outlines the necessity to commit to meaningful consultation, building respectful relationships, and obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples before proceeding with projects that relate to or involve Indigenous communities. The Call to Action specifically identifies economic development projects, which also applies to the merits and objectives of proposed tourism

development projects. This call to action also requires that education be provided for management and staff on the history of Indigenous peoples which is a component in the curricula of CBU's Mi'kmaw Cultural Tourism Certificate.

TOURISM IN UNAMA'KI CAPE BRETON

Tourism is an important contributor to the economy of Unama'ki - Cape Breton Island and the province of Nova Scotia. The tourism sector on Cape Breton Island is comprised of 740 businesses, mostly small and medium sized operations (Canadian Census, 2016). In 2016, the tourism sector in Cape Breton reported 5,675 employees representing 10.56% of the total employment on the Island which is proportional to the percentage of tourism employees in the total Canadian labour force (Statistics Canada, 2016 Census). The Province of Nova Scotia estimates the annual value of the sector on Cape Breton Island in 2017 as \$330 million (DCBA, 2020). In addition to the economic benefits of the tourism sector, tourism has a role in cultivating and nurturing relationships, sharing culture, and bringing communities together. Tourism is an area of established strength for Cape Breton Island with many opportunities for further expansion and development. These opportunities are especially prevalent in the Indigenous tourism market.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

While the Indigenous tourism market on Unama'ki has potential for rapid and significant expansion, there are numerous challenges to this growth. Some of these challenges include:

- A lack of funding tied specifically to tourism projects. This is pivotal to long term success of key players in the sector including to First Nations communities, provincial and regional organizations.
- A need for more product and market development supports.
- A need for a greater awareness and appreciation for Indigenous storytelling and knowledge keepers by non-Indigenous tourism operators and organizations.
- A need for a greater emphasis placed on cultural preservation and authenticity for long term collaborations and partnerships.
- A lack of tourism data related to Indigenous tourism. As a result, key performance indicators such as Indigenous participation levels in the tourism sector are unknown.

Organizations have begun to address some of the tourism industry related challenges faced by Indigenous communities. The Nova Scotia Indigenous Tourism Enterprise Network is a non-profit organization which works diligently across the province to meet the challenges of, and create opportunities for, Indigenous businesses. The destination marketing organization Destination Cape Breton influences tourism planning of many partners throughout Unama'ki including Indigenous and non-Indigenous operators, educators, community organizations, and all levels of government. DCB supports Indigenous product development across the sector and works to support the work of CBU and NSITEN in education, training, research, and advocacy for enhanced Indigenous tourism initiatives.

Supporting these organizations are positive changes to the Indigenous data landscape. From a tourism industry perspective, there is more Indigenous research, advocacy and project work being done than ever before. In 2023, The Atlantic Indigenous Tourism Research Report was released by the Atlantic Policy Congress of the First Nations Chiefs Secretariate complete with stakeholder consultation and recommendations designed to grow the sector. The Nova Scotia Indigenous Tourism Enterprise Network embarked on an ambitious and wide-reaching research project which saw them host research sessions throughout Nova Scotia to garner input from communities, businesses and individuals focused on capacity building. The World Tourism Institute at Cape Breton University has applied secondary research practices to develop an educational module on the topic of Truth and Reconciliation and the launch of a new course and new Certificate in Mi'kmaw Cultural Tourism and, more broadly, Indigenous Cultural Tourism.

CONCLUSION

There are many benefits of tourism sector participation for First Nations communities including economic, social, and cultural. An increase in reliable and relevant Indigenous related tourism data is encouraging both internal and external investment into developing Indigenous attractions and activities. These investments improve the economic health of not only the First Nation's community but also the entire region. Additionally, this data is helping to encourage established tourism organizations to incorporate supporting Indigenous culture and traditions into their organization's vision and mission statement. Partnerships between established tourism related organizations and Indigenous operators, organizations, and communities strengthen the tourism sector on Unama'ki Cape Breton. Groups such as Destination Cape Breton are supporting Indigenous tourism initiatives in Unama'ki Cape Breton through open communication, empathetic understanding, and equitable partnerships. They are pursuing a vision for Unama'ki Cape Breton based on support, enhancement, and sustainability.

The role of Indigenous culture is paramount to DCB's long-term planning. These partnerships, along with agreements and policies that encourage Indigenous participation in the tourism sector, will help establish a robust and diverse tourism ecosystem.

INSTRUCTOR GUIDE: STUDY CASE QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

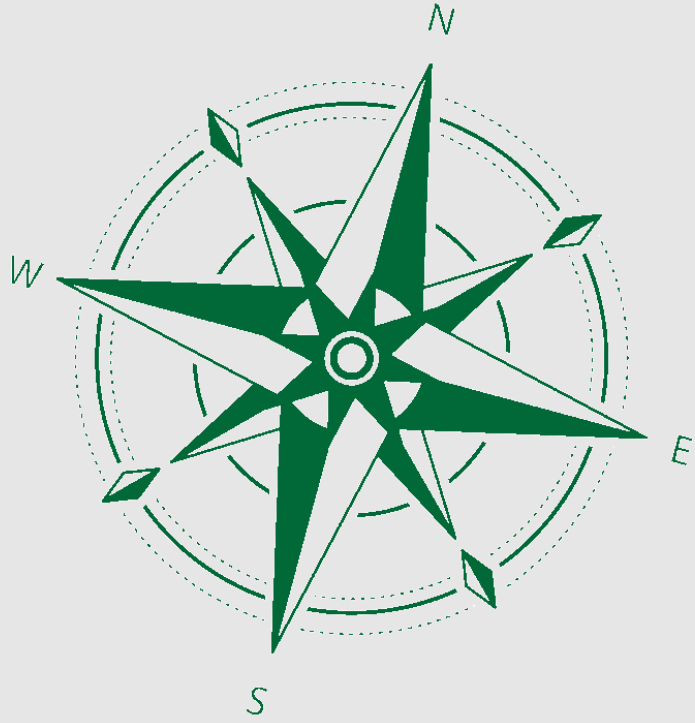
1. How can we strengthen visitor understanding of Mi'kmaw Cultural Tourism?
2. Can you identify some opportunities for the growth of Mi'kmaw Cultural Tourism in Unama'ki and throughout Mi'kma'ki?
3. How can tourism sector planners work to overcome the challenges facing the growth of Mi'kmaw Cultural Tourism in Unama'ki and throughout Mi'kma'ki?
4. Which of the listed challenges to the expansion of the Indigenous tourism market on Cape Breton Island do you feel is this most significant to address? Why? How would you address that challenge?

REFERENCES

www.eskasoni.ca

www.membertou.ca

<https://novascotia.ca/abor/aboriginal-people/demographics/>



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