



## News



INTERNATIONAL TRADE FORUM



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### Sustainable futures: Indigenous tourism

by Trade Forum Editorial

With growing global interest in cultural and ecotourism, indigenous communities in developing countries are presented with opportunities to position their unique product within a global industry. Through strategic partnerships, capacity building and sustainable practices, indigenous communities can produce a tourism experience that supports both their culture and long-term business potential.

**Q&A with John Morse, Indigenous Tourism Advisor**, Former Managing Director of The Australian Tourist Commission.

Mr. Morse now works almost exclusively with aboriginal people and communities in Australia, helping them to start ecotourism businesses.

**TF:** How do you build a viable indigenous tourism product without sacrificing the environment and culture in which these communities live?

**JM:** Indigenous people have to understand, and this is sometimes culturally difficult, that there is commercial value to their culture. My mantra in relation to indigenous tourism has always been that the best approach is 'high yield, low impact.' In other words, it is important for indigenous communities to attract as few people as possible and paying as much money as feasible for the huge privilege of sharing and learning about the culture and people of these communities.

**TF:** With growing international interest in cultural tourism, how can indigenous communities in developing countries embrace the opportunities presented by the trend?

**JM:** Indigenous communities need to build on the one thing that is common: they have something that the rest of the world wants to discover. Tourism in the 21st century is about people connecting with themselves, connecting with the planet, connecting with culture and having real experiences

not just photographic experiences. There is growing global demand for that type of experience and people really want to learn, discover and connect with rich cultural experiences when they travel. They also have an advantage as the world becomes more globalized and homogenized, in that indigenous cultures are able to maintain a unique tourism product. This increases the potential for indigenous people around the world to create revenue and incomes for their communities and recognize the value in preserving their culture. It also provides direct pull-through value for the sale of cultural products and services and indigenous food stuffs for related businesses.

**TF:** What is the role of partnerships in your approach to indigenous tourism strategy?

**JM:** Indigenous communities have the 'product' but often they don't have the business administration and marketing skills, capital and, most importantly, connections to the mainstream travel industry. By working with partners, the communities can focus on developing and providing the product (experience) while partners can help to build the business potential – this provides a recipe for shared value.

**TF:** Who are the key players in the partnership model?

**JM:** The key players are all part of the distribution channel. They include the people who offer the product and the financial institutions that back them, through to the inbound tour operators, wholesalers and retailers who sell the product to consumers. However, there is another channel, the Internet. As we move forward it is going to play a much more powerful role in tourism development, particularly through the opportunities it offers SMEs to connect directly with consumers. In the future, you will find that people have the ability to seek out indigenous experiences and that is the future of how indigenous communities can engage with the market. This will achieve even greater impact as tourists become more independently minded and Internet-savvy in terms of how they search for and book unique travel experiences. It also presents an immediate capacity building challenge for product owners.

**TF:** What is the role of government in facilitating tourism within indigenous communities?

**JM:** There is no question that for indigenous tourism to be successful, there has to be support from the government. Governments need to start thinking longer term with greater consistency for these communities. Government needs to support a staged approach to developing indigenous tourism and it needs to be slow and focused on the long-term. This provides the best chance of getting it right and reduces the risk that the culture will be compromised.

**TF:** What are the potential pitfalls to watch out for?

**JM:** It is important to watch out for people or organizations that want to use indigenous culture for their own commercial advantage without returning value to the communities. There is also a danger in developing too quickly. It is important that tourism be developed in a way in which the culture is king, and the culture needs be protected. This is about the future of indigenous cultures, and it is about the next generation and the continuation of their tradition.

## 6 Keys To success

1. Aim for high yield, low impact
2. Create rich cultural experiences
3. Build linkages to local suppliers
4. Foster the right partners to help grow the business
5. Build capacity in business to consumer (B2C) technology
6. Maintain the cultural integrity – keep it real.

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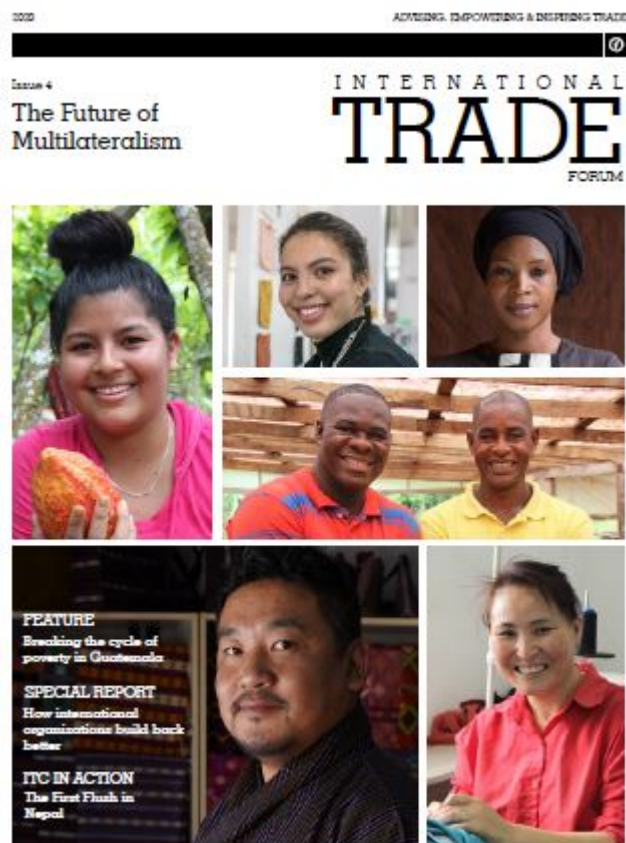


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