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Indigenous Tourism Ontario is Moving Forward with Three Exciting Initiatives

Press release

Monday, October 23, 2017 — Indigenous Tourism Ontario (ITO) is moving forward with the implementation of 3 exciting and innovative initiatives. The Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport has supported ITO’s programming to continue grow by funding ITO’s Rebrand and Marketing Strategy, Capacity Building Programs and Services, and the Authentic Indigenous Moments Program. Mr. Eshkawkogan said “We are very thankful to our partners and communities that helped us continue to move forward with ITO’s programs and services. Our vision is to develop, market and grow Ontario’s Indigenous tourism industry with values and integrity, ensuring growth adheres to responsible tourism guidelines that promote sustainability, environmental stewardship, innovation, and technology.”

ITO’s strategic goals include:
- Developing Operational Sustainability and Brand Integrity;
- Building Capacity and Increasing Economic Opportunities;
- Marketing and Branding Authentic Products and Services; and
- Providing Support for Communities and Entrepreneurs.

The three current initiatives that ITO is working on will provide an opportunity for ITO to grow and create more brand exposure. ITO will be rolling out an Indigenous digital technology platform to connect Indigenous cultural tourism products and tourists which will be showcased on their upcoming new website. ITO’s online presence will be paired with a bold brand as they transition from Aboriginal Tourism Ontario to Indigenous Tourism Ontario. This will include updating their logo, website, social media sites, and setting clear goals and budgets for internal and external marketing strategies.

ITO is also investing in capacity building programs and services, which includes their Cultural Authenticity Program. ITO strives to ensure a triple bottom line approach to tourism development, which addresses authenticity and cultural preservation, environmental responsibility, and financial sustainability. Authentic Indigenous cultural tourism is an industry sector that a growing number of tourists are interested in. It is
important for the Indigenous communities within Ontario to take control of their culture and ensure it is properly represented. ITO will support and promote businesses offering culturally authentic experiences, and recognize them for contributing to their Indigenous heritage. In addition, ITO will recognize, support and promote businesses, communities, organizations, corporations, governments, and associations that support ITO’s mandate.

The Cultural Authenticity Program (CAP), introduced in ITO’s 2020 Tourism Strategy, supports, recognizes and rewards businesses that offer ‘culturally authentic’ tourism products. CAP’s main objective is to recognize Indigenous cultural entrepreneurs, while increasing awareness among visitors to understand more about the local businesses and what they have to offer in the region. This non-regulating approach recognizes and celebrates Indigenous tourism businesses in all tourism sub-sectors as well as creates awareness of environmental and cultural diversity while supporting the growth of authentic cultural tourism.

Lastly, ITO is now implementing their Authentic Indigenous Moments (AIM) program. The AIM model digitally creates opportunity for local entrepreneurs to offer unique authentic experiences to visitors using technology. This model attracts passionate cultural entrepreneurs to share their culture with visitors marketing under an innovative digital platform.

Mr. Eshkawkogan says, “the AIM program will be a revenue generating tool for ITO but will also provide a turn-key solution with a centralized consumer rated web platform, or sharing economy, for local entrepreneurs and tourism businesses to share a cultural experience with travellers allowing people to spend time doing what they love as opposed to business administration and high start-up costs. ITO has a goal to develop 50 experiences this Fall to be uploaded onto their new website.”

When AIM is up and running, it will be the first ever, Provincially dedicated grassroots Indigenous tourism initiative that connects “authentic cultural entrepreneurs” directly with visitors through an interactive web platform! AIM sets the standard for Indigenous tourism development in Ontario; which will make a difference in preserving our culture and helping us share our story with the world.

ITO continues to want to work together with industry, communities and partners to build an independent and sustainable entity that will support and increase indigenous tourism in Ontario and Canada.

See attached.
ITO - 2020 Strategic Plan Background:

Indigenous Tourism Ontario 2020 is based on making our province an authentic tourism destination that will attract visitors from within Canada and abroad based on a brand of market ready indigenous tourism products and services. It’s time to make Indigenous tourism a priority in Ontario by launching and supporting an independent organization that is completely dedicated to positively reshaping our province’s future for indigenous tourism. The time is now!

Our 2020 Strategic Goals are:

- Developing Operational Sustainability & Brand Integrity
- Building Capacity & Increasing Economic Opportunities
- Marketing & Branding Authentic Products & Services
- Providing Support for Communities & Entrepreneurs

Our 2020 Vision is built on stakeholders who have overwhelmingly supported a single organization dedicated to building Indigenous tourism in Ontario. Our collective vision supports an organization that will ‘responsibly develop, market and grow Ontario’s indigenous tourism industry with values and integrity.’ We will ensure our growth adheres to responsible tourism guidelines that promote sustainability, environmental stewardship, innovation and technology.

Our Mission is to assist indigenous communities and entrepreneurs with programs that build capacity to produce high quality products and services. Our success will be guided by the positive impact on our people, the environment and the economy. For our welcomed visitors and tourists we will ensure that our products and services provide a meaningful and memorable indigenous experience.

Our guiding Principles assist us in gaining organizational sustainability; in utilizing an innovative grassroots approach; in attracting investment & develop partnerships; and implementing ITO 2020 key initiatives.

ITO’s 5 Key Initiatives:

- Transition and Launch of ITO Operation
- Focus on ITO Rebrand & New Marketing Efforts
- Promote and Deliver Capacity Building Programs and Services
- Implement and Develop the Authentic Indigenous Moments Program (AIM)
- Develop Regional and Provincial Partnerships