Introduction

The Indigenous Food Tourism Standards & Best Practices Checklist was developed in response to “FEAST: Growing Indigenous Food Tourism in Ontario” by Indigenous Tourism Ontario (ITO), and with support from the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) and Destination Northern Ontario.

This tool is a self-assessment checklist for Indigenous food tourism businesses, including but not limited to accommodations; attractions; beverage producers; cooking schools; growers, producers, and harvesters; festivals and events; markets; restaurants; retailers; and tour operators.

At the foundation of this tool is ITAC’s National Guidelines for Developing Indigenous Experiences in Canada. This means that businesses should also explore the protocols and expectations connected to market readiness as set out in the national guidelines before using this Indigenous Food Tourism Standards & Best Practices Checklist. In acknowledgment of community sovereignty, and in accordance with the ITAC guidelines, this checklist recognizes “the authority of each community to determine their own cultural protocols and boundaries, and recognizes all of the diverse values and beliefs of our First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.”

Indigenous Food Tourism Standards & Best Practices Checklist is divided into three (3) parts:

1) Delivering community-based experiences,
2) Providing transformational experiences, and
3) Growing Indigenous food tourism.

Its purpose is to provoke thinking around the expectations and standards of quality food tourism experiences and assist businesses in self-assessing their readiness for delivering genuine food tourism experiences and welcoming food tourists.
Indigenous Food Tourism in Canada

Memorable eating and drinking experiences are essential parts of the visitor experience, and demand for genuine cultural food experiences is on the rise. As a subset of cultural tourism, food tourism lets visitors get to know a place and its peoples in a meaningful way through multi-sensory experiences. Food tourism includes tourism experiences where people learn about, appreciate, or consume foods and beverages that reflect local heritage, cuisines, and cultures.

Indigenous food tourism is both growing and changing in Canada. It is a dynamic movement towards revitalization—mixing pre-contact ingredients and practices with contemporary innovations. Food tourism has the potential to act as a catalyst for celebrating the diversity of Indigenous peoples, cultures, and foods; while recognizing the existence of several shared attributes and priorities, including that Indigenous food is often seasonal, connected to nature, sustainably sourced, communal, cultural, and tied to stories. Visitor education through food tourism can also help to counteract misperceptions held by some visitors that Indigenous cultures are separate from the modern world.

A growing number of travellers prioritize one-on-one interactions where they can learn about cultures, traditions, arts, food, and storytelling through active participation. Indigenous businesses can use food tourism as an opportunity to deliver intimate exchanges and cultural learning, while being ambassadors for their communities.
Glossary + Notes about Language

In this tool, the word Indigenous refers broadly to First Nation, Inuit, and Métis groups and individuals. We acknowledge that internationally, the term Indigenous extends beyond this, so we recognize the United Nations definition where the term Indigenous represents diverse peoples, each with a distinct “identity, way of life, and (...) right to traditional lands, territories and natural resources”.3 We also recognize the distinction-based protocols of different Indigenous groups in Canada and abroad.

FOOD TOURISM is the pursuit of meaningful eating and drinking experiences that connect visitors to the foodways of a place.

FOODWAYS shed light on the physical, social, cultural, economic, and spiritual factors that inform the experience of food in a place. In other words, foodways address the “who, what, where, when, why, and how” around food becoming part of the fabric of a community.

TASTES OF PLACE include memorable eating and drinking experiences that bring to life the story behind the foodways of a region or area. Tastes of place are about more than local food. Intangible community assets, such as hospitality and local character also provide tastes of place.

A FOOD TOURISM EXPERIENCE allows a person to learn about, appreciate, or consume food and beverages that reflect the history, heritage, and culture of a place and its communities.

INDIGENOUS TOURISM features tourism businesses that are majority owned, operated and/or controlled by First Nations, Métis or Inuit peoples and which demonstrate a connection and responsibility to the local Indigenous community and traditional territory where the operation is based.4
INDIGENOUS CULTURAL TOURISM meets the Indigenous tourism definition (above) and in addition, a significant portion of the experience features a distinct Indigenous culture in a manner that is appropriate, respectful, and true. Authenticity lies in the active involvement of Indigenous people in the development and delivery of the experience.

Although there are tourism businesses that are not majority owned or operated by Indigenous people that offer ‘Indigenous tourism experiences’, genuine Indigenous cultural tourism is always developed by Indigenous peoples, not about Indigenous peoples.5

GENUINE INDIGENOUS FOOD TOURISM EXPERIENCES are only offered by Indigenous tourism businesses. Sometimes they feature traditional ingredients, food sourcing, and preparation methods. Other times, they reflect a dynamic and contemporary movement towards revitalization, balancing pre-contact ingredients and practices with contemporary additions, interpretations, and innovations.

By providing that meaningful connection to place that today’s travellers seek, Indigenous food and beverage can be used as a tool to increase dialogue and cultural education, while also contributing economically to Indigenous-owned businesses and supporting community development.

A SUSTAINABLE FOOD TOURISM EXPERIENCE raises visitor awareness around the need to care for the environment by taking only what we need. These experiences respond to seasonal supply constraints and respect nature’s limited capacity to regenerate. Sustainable food tourism experiences also protect the abilities of current and future generations to access culturally significant food and beverages.
We have engaged community leaders, Elders, and members about how our food tourism experience could affect the community and have applied these insights to developing the experience that we offer. (Examples include sourcing ingredients sustainably, determining the volume of visitors that the community can accommodate, following community-based cultural protocols, etc.)

We make our food tourism experience available to people in our community and we always prioritize community access to the ingredients that we source locally.

Our out-of-town customers come from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

We know our customers. We understand and meet their culturally-influenced needs, including their dietary restrictions and food preferences.

We offer one or more tastes of place as part of our experience. In other words, our food tourism experience helps visitors to better understand our community and culture.

We respect community protocols when sourcing ingredients for our food tourism experience and give priority to Indigenous suppliers who source sustainably.

Our food experience is brought to life in our online marketing through high-quality photos and/or videos, along with information about our ingredients and who supplies them.

Indigenous Food Tourism Standards & Best Practices Checklist

The purpose of this checklist is to provoke thinking around the expectations and standards of quality food tourism experiences and assist businesses in self-assessing their readiness for delivering genuine food tourism experiences and welcoming food tourists.

1. DELIVERING COMMUNITY-BASED EXPERIENCES

- We have engaged community leaders, Elders, and members about how our food tourism experience could affect the community and have applied these insights to developing the experience that we offer. (Examples include sourcing ingredients sustainably, determining the volume of visitors that the community can accommodate, following community-based cultural protocols, etc.)

- We make our food tourism experience available to people in our community and we always prioritize community access to the ingredients that we source locally.

- Our out-of-town customers come from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

- We know our customers. We understand and meet their culturally-influenced needs, including their dietary restrictions and food preferences.

- We offer one or more tastes of place as part of our experience. In other words, our food tourism experience helps visitors to better understand our community and culture.

- We respect community protocols when sourcing ingredients for our food tourism experience and give priority to Indigenous suppliers who source sustainably.

- Our food experience is brought to life in our online marketing through high-quality photos and/or videos, along with information about our ingredients and who supplies them.
2. PROVIDING TRANSFORMATIONAL EXPERIENCES

- We clearly communicate which aspects of our food tourism experience are based on traditional parts of our culture, contemporary parts of our culture, or borrowed from other cultures.

- We foster community by encouraging visitors to tag and share their personal stories around our food experience, when appropriate. (Examples include displaying social media handles on-site and online along with calls to action, integrating culturally appropriate user-generated content into our online channels)

- Through our food tourism experience, we share stories of Indigenous foods, families, and foodways from our Indigenous perspective. In other words, we tell our stories on our terms.

- We empower our staff to share stories about our food tourism experience with visitors in a meaningful way. (For example, we encourage our staff to taste and learn about our food products and experience so that they can provide a first-hand perspective)

- We promote where our ingredients and products are sourced. (For example, we call-out specific food providers and suppliers that we work with)

- We promote our participation and partnerships within the local community. (For example, events we participate in, such as pow wows, summer festivals, winter carnivals, product collaborations, etc.)

- We share at least one (1) word or saying in our language with our guests as part of their food experience. (Examples include sharing expressions like the Ojibwe “Wiisinadaa”, meaning “let’s eat,” or integrating our language into product and experience descriptions)

- We offer hands-on activities as part of our food experience. (For example, cooking workshops, dining experiences, guided tastings, etc.)

- We offer visitors different ways to take home a piece of our food tourism experience. (For example, we have a retail section and/or identify businesses within the area that carry related products)
We work with local businesses to package our food tourism experience with complementary products. (For example, canoeing trip paired with dining experience)

We facilitate generational learning and cultural exchange around foodways by engaging both Elders and youth in our business.

Our food tourism experience responds to seasonal changes and we raise visitor awareness around the need to respect our environment by only taking what we need.

We take active measures to reduce the environmental impact of our food tourism experience. (For example, through reusable containers, waste reduction, water conservation, sustainable harvesting practices, etc.)

We listen to customer feedback around our food tourism experience and we use this to make decisions about what to change (or not change).

We look to provide learning and employment opportunities to our community members, including skills training, to ensure genuine food tourism experiences.

3. GROWING INDIGENOUS FOOD TOURISM

We provide guests with information on what to expect from their food tourism experience prior to arrival. (For example, we outline acceptable behaviour and protocols to promote cultural exchange and mutual respect).

We share payment options with our customers before their arrival. (In other words, we explain whether we accept cash, e-transfer, credit or debit, barter, etc.)
Next Steps

Now that you have reflected on the expectations and standards of quality food tourism experiences, you may wish to take action towards delivering genuine food tourism experiences and welcoming food tourists!

Start by looking over your completed checklist and ask yourself: Are there key gaps? What missing checklist items are achievable right away? Identifying areas of need and quick wins are useful for planning your follow-up actions. Below, you’ll find some ideas on how to start.

DELIVERING COMMUNITY-BASED EXPERIENCES

If you left a lot of the checkboxes blank in “Delivering Community-Based Experiences,” we recommend thinking about how you can address some of the gaps identified. Can you create stronger connections with the local Indigenous communities and knowledge keepers? Do you need to identify and learn more about your key visitor segments and their culturally-based needs?

PROVIDING TRANSFORMATIONAL EXPERIENCES

If you want to build up the transformational potential of your food tourism experience, an important step is to think about the educational elements that you currently offer and new learnings that you want visitors to take away.

Storytelling is a key aspect of transformational tourism and it’s useful to think of yourself and your staff as ambassadors for your business, your cultures, communities, and region. Think about how you currently tell stories and identify new ways to share genuine stories that are accessible to visitors and in keeping with cultural protocols.

Key stories to share with visitors on-site include: your partnerships with local producers, growers, and harvesters; your community connections; information about other things to do in the area (celebrate your neighbours!); and links between local traditions and your business.

GROWING INDIGENOUS FOOD TOURISM

To learn more about growing Indigenous food tourism in Ontario, read ITO’s Position Paper on Growing Indigenous Food Tourism in Northern Ontario; stay tuned for the upcoming pan-provincial strategy ‘FEAST’ and access other resources at:

www.indigenoustourismontario.ca/about-ito/resources
NOTES


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