Impact Assessment of COVID-19 on Ontario's Indigenous Tourism Industry

November 30, 2021

November 30, 2021, Aundeck Omni Kaning First Nation, ON – New data revealing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Indigenous tourism industry in Ontario was released today by Indigenous Tourism Ontario (ITO). It paints a clearer picture of the expected recovery timeline to return to pre-pandemic economic numbers and describes the impact COVID-19 has had on jobs and the sector's contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The comprehensive *Impact Assessment of COVID-19 on Ontario's Indigenous Tourism Industry*, commissioned by ITO, projects Indigenous tourism in the province will only partially recover in 2022 and will not return to 2019 GDP and employment levels until 2023.

"In 2019, Ontario was home to Canada's largest Indigenous tourism industry," says Kevin Eshkawkogan, President and CEO of Indigenous Tourism Ontario. "We employed about 13,000 people and contributed more than $650 million to the GDP. This Impact Assessment confirms our earlier projections about the pandemic's influence. The industry here in Ontario has lost 4,000 jobs and real GDP has fallen by almost half to $332 million".

Although the impact of the pandemic has been significant, the Indigenous tourism sector in Ontario remains optimistic about recovery and resilience, with 87% of operators saying they are confident about operating through a short-term crisis. The Impact Assessment, conducted by MDB Insight, also identified access to capital and availability of government supports among tourism operators' top priorities for business resilience. MDB Insight's Chris Bandak headed the research team and sees the importance of those needs being met. "Even with projections showing a likely return to pre-pandemic levels in 2023, tourism operators will need those supports to remain resilient and regain lost ground" he said. "This new data tells a compelling story about the state of the sector and what it will take to help operators get through this".

Kevin Eshkawkogan agrees, pointing out that ITO was able to act quickly and continues to support the sector but will be advocating for more government investment. "This new data will be useful across Turtle Island and we are happy to share what we're learning", he said. "But the real issue is that the sector in Ontario will need $2.5 million a year to get through this. Yes, it's dire. But we have a plan (ITO's Strategic and Covid-19 Recovery Plan *Continuing Our Journey*) and our entire tourism family will

work together. Operators are resilient and we will continue to support them through collaboration and careful management".

With the release of the Impact Assessment, Indigenous Tourism Ontario reaffirms its commitment to collaboration and partnerships in support of the Indigenous tourism sector and its operators throughout the province. Key partners include Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC), Destination Canada, the Government of Canada, Chiefs of Ontario, Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, Destination Ontario, Ontario Tourism Education Corporation (OTEC), IndigenousExperienceOntario.ca, regional tourism organizations, the Government of Ontario, and members of ITO's Indigenous Business Advisors (IBA) Program.

"Miigwetch to all our strategic partners and valued supporters for helping us stay on the path," said Kevin Eshkawkogan. "We will remain consistent with implementing our plans, strategies, and serving our members. As our learning becomes more sophisticated, we will continue to share our knowledge. In this way, we will stay resilient together and emerge from this strong and prosperous".

About Indigenous Tourism Ontario

Indigenous Tourism Ontario (ITO) is the province's first and only dedicated Indigenous tourism organization that focuses on uniting communities, Indigenous organizations and industry leaders to support the growth of Indigenous tourism in Ontario. Through product development and marketing of authentic Indigenous experiences, ITO establishes a platform for Indigenous cultural expression and preservation through tourism. For more information, visit indigenoustourismontario.ca.

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