

# INDIGENOUS TOURISM ALBERTA STYLE GUIDE

**Twelve Ways to better choose our words when we  
write about Indigenous Peoples**





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# STYLE GUIDE

This guide is not intended to be a deep dive into the correct language and terms to use when writing about Indigenous Peoples; the authority on that is [Elements of Indigenous Style, by Gregory Younging, published by Brush Education.](#)

However, this short guide should hopefully help writers to make better choices, and to equip them with a basic understanding on how not to repeat historic inaccurate terms, break Indigenous Protocols, or use offensive language.

The process of de-colonization is long and on-going. Language is one of the many ways that has been used to oppress Indigenous Peoples. By being aware of the ways in which implied colonialism lives in language you can re-frame the narrative and de-colonize your words.

Indigenous Peoples are not a historical phenomenon; they have not been assimilated into Canadian culture; they have not lost their own rich, distinct cultures.

Indigenous Peoples are diverse, authentic, empowered and current.

Avoid ‘they practiced ceremonies...’ instead use the present tense: ‘they practice Ceremonies...’.

## 1. Avoid using the past tense when you write about Indigenous Peoples.



## 2. Don't use language which props up the colonial idea that Indigenous Peoples are incapable of taking care of things themselves.

This manifests itself in language which implies that Indigenous Peoples had no agency.

E.G: 'Numbered treaties gave Canada's First Nations reserves, education and health care'.

More accurate would be to write that 'First Nations in Canada negotiated the numbered treaties to secure reserves, education and health care.'



## 3. Don't use the possessive when talking about the Indigenous Peoples who live in a country:

EG: 'Canada's First Nations...'

Canada doesn't 'own' the First Nations, Métis or Inuit Peoples who live in what is now called Canada.

Instead: Indigenous People in Canada.

or

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples in Canada.





## 4. Don't whitewash Indigenous Peoples out of history.

EG: After a hike around Jasper, check out the Miette Hot Springs which have been around since the early 1900s.'

Instead, acknowledge that the hot springs had been an important site for the Indigenous Peoples of the area for thousands of years. To place your work in context, look at this text which acknowledges the history of the Indigenous Peoples in the area, and the colonial practice of removing them from their land.

'The aquacourt at the Miette Hot Springs and road access were built in the 1930's, however, prior to this, the springs were used by Indigenous Peoples as a source of healing and spirituality, and the land was an abundant area for hunting and gathering food. Nations including the Stoney First Nation and Keeseekoowenin Ojibwa were ousted from the area in the late 1880's



## 5. Think about Indigenous Knowledge as holding its own copyright.

Give Oral Traditions and Traditional Knowledge the same weight and respect as printed texts. Therefore, you need to ask for permission to 'reprint' exactly as you would with written texts.

## 6. Be prepared for consultation to take time.

Be aware that no one person is able to give permission; if 'copyright' is held by a Nation, then there needs to be a proper consultation practice about sharing.



## 7. Collaborate and seek permission when writing about Traditional Knowledge.

If you're writing about Indigenous People then contact them and discuss what you'd like to do. Be aware that Indigenous Protocols—which are more formal than 'customs'—need to be adhered to, and often it may not be appropriate to write about matters which have sacred significance, or perhaps contain stories which may only be told by women, or by men, or at a particular time of the year.

## 8. Don't repeat inaccurate, offensive material.

Check your source material; if you're quoting or using books written by non-Indigenous People as a reference point, it's possible that you will be repeating inaccurate, possibly offensive accounts. It's also possible that stories and Traditional Knowledge in these books were printed without permission.



## 9. Respect Elders.

Be aware of the important role of Elders within Indigenous societies and their role as holders of Traditional Knowledge and community advisors.



## 10. Always choose Indigenous Style over CP style.

For instance, capitalizations:

Gregory Younging describes this as a “...deliberate decision that redresses mainstream society’s history of regarding Indigenous Peoples as having no legitimate national identities; government, social, spiritual or religious institutions; or collective rights.” So instead of using CP style, use Indigenous style:

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Aboriginal  
 First Nations  
 Indigenous  
 Elder  
 Longhouse (but longhouses)  
 Clan  
 Protocols  
 Traditional Knowledge  
 Indigenous Right  
 Treaty Right




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## 11. Recognize and respect distinct and diverse Indigenous Peoples.

The Indigenous population in Canada is made up of Inuit, Métis, and some 634 different First Nations. Each has their own distinct Traditional Knowledge, culture and heritage. Avoid writing about ‘First Nations’ as though they are a homogenous group. Clearly they are not. Be specific, ask for people’s preferred self-declaration. If no self-declaration has been made, then try to identify the name of their community or nation first, and if still not known, then use Indigenous group names will be used (First Nation, Métis or Inuit).

## 12. Understand Indigenous Cultures do not need to be static to be authentic.

Indigenous Peoples are currently engaged in a period of cultural reclamation and rejuvenation. Just because someone doesn’t live in a teepee, doesn’t mean that they are not an authentic Indigenous person. Indigenous cultures are dynamic and undergo natural change and adaptation, just like other cultures.

