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Never Done. Never *Outdone.*

Choose Chicago campaign tells the city's story with bold and timely, rallying cry

By BOB MOWAT

When Kristen Reynolds stepped into the CEO job at Choose Chicago at the beginning of May, she arrived at a time when the city's Destination Management Organization (DMO) was preparing to host IPW 2025 and to launch its new marketing campaign "Never Done. Never Outdone." It was also at a time when Canada and the U.S. were locked in the middle of a trade war that was having (and continues to have) a significant impact on Canadian arrivals to the U.S. Oh, and she was also plotting

Choose Chicago's path forward to future successes.

That's quite the 'To Do' list, but Reynolds was quick to point out that Chicago had already hosted the James Beard Awards just before IPW 2025 and following it, welcomed the NASCAR Street Race and the Destinations International conference in early July. Plus, there are upcoming events that include the Premier League Series at the end of July and Lollapalooza Chicago at the beginning of August.

Our Heritage Knows No Borders



The American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association emphasizes self-determination amid uncertain times

By Eilish Vicencio-Heap

The American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA), advocates for American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian tourism suppliers, and its CEO, Sherry Rupert, has a message for Canadians who may be hesitant to visit the United States.

"I encourage travellers to remember that as Indigenous people of North America, we are all Indigenous and our heritage knows no borders. Indigenous tourism experiences in the United States are developed and operated by sovereign tribal nations or Indigenous-owned businesses," she told Canadian Travel Press exclusively. Rupert continued, "By choosing to visit, you are directly supporting self-determination, economic empowerment and the continuation of Indigenous cultures, irrespective of broader political currents. The lands we invite you to visit are the ancestral homelands of diverse Indigenous

Nations, whose cultures have thrived for millennia. While political landscapes may shift, the deep-rooted traditions, spiritual connections to the land and vibrant living cultures of Indigenous peoples remain steadfast. Your visit is not an endorsement of any particular government or political stance, but rather an engagement with the rich tapestry of humanity."

GIVING TOURISTS A PLACE TO STAY

Indigenous tourism in the United States is a \$15.7 billion industry, according to the Economic Impact of U.S. Indigenous Tourism Businesses 2024 report published by AIANTA. The report also reveals that accommodation and food service businesses make up the smallest number of Indigenous-owned hospitality enterprises, although they account for the most jobs.

The Navajo Nation Division of Economic Development is responsible for strengthening Navajo business development and workforce opportunities, including through tourism. Bobby Martin, manager of the tourism department, shared insight on the need for more accommodation services, telling Canadian Travel Press, "In 2024, 4.2 million people visited just the western side of Navajo Nation. We need to ramp that up by giving tourists a place to stay." Executive director Tony Skrelunas added, "We are working on several new hotels in strategic locations including major resorts and a marina," while Shaunya Manus, senior economic development specialist, said, "Right now we are also pushing the Airbnb initiative as we have very few hotels on the reservation." The Hopi Tribe, neighbours to the Navajo Nation, recently added new lodging with the July 2024 opening of Taawaki Inn in Clarkdale, Arizona.





The property is the first Hopi hotel located outside of the Hopi reservation, noted DeAnnethea Long, director of operations at Moenkopi Developers Corporation, which owns and operates another Hopi hotel, the Moenkopi Legacy Inn & Suites. She added, "We have noticed that the Canadian market has grown. Canada has been really good to us."

Throughout Native America, entrepreneurs are working to capture tourism dollars by setting up new accommodation options. For example, said Martin, "There is a young gentleman starting a business where you helicopter into the top of a mesa and you can go glamping on top. Agrotourism is also ramping up, where you can stay on a farm and learn the farming process."

Added Manus, "One of our biggest focuses is on cultural tourism and having people experience the Navajo way of life. It is rejuvenating, because we teach people how they can live a sustainable life."

"CONSCIOUS TOURISM HELPS SAVE OUR CULTURE"

When it comes to implementing new Indigenous tourism initiatives, Rupert shared that many communities have only recently considered inviting visitors.

"Our histories don't appear in written form because most of our stories were verbal, so it's only now that many of our Native Nations are willing to open up and share their stories. Visitors are increasingly recognizing the profound value

of hearing authentic stories — rooted in thousands of years of tradition and passed down through generations — especially when shared by Indigenous people from the very communities they represent," she said.

Rupert continued, "At the same time, Indigenous storytellers are also deepening their own understanding and strengthening their cultural identity through the act of teaching and connecting with visitors. This powerful exchange not only fosters mutual respect and understanding but also plays a vital role in preserving and revitalizing Indigenous cultures. By choosing Indigenous-owned and governed tourism ventures, travellers directly support Indigenous self-determination."

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David McClung, President dmcclung@baxter.net
Wendy McClung, Executive VP wmccclung@baxter.net
Robert Mowat, Executive Editor bobmowat@baxter.net
Ann Ruppenstein, Managing Editor aruppenstein@baxter.net
Ian Stalker, Senior Writer istalker@baxter.net
Ted Davis, Western Editor teddavis@baxter.net
Dee Ristic, Subscription Inquiries dristic@baxter.net

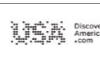
Mitchell McClung, Publisher mmcclung@baxter.net
Earl Lince, Director of International Marketing elince@baxter.net
Greg Ohman, Account Director gregohman@baxter.net
Vicki Zeppa, Account Executive vzeppa@baxter.net
Patti Freedman, Hawaii patti@holoholoconsulting.com
Wayne Labourn, Production Manager wlabourn@baxter.net
Zephann McMillan, Marketing Manager zmcmillan@baxter.net

HEAD OFFICE

672 Dupont St., Suite 401, Toronto, Ont., M6G 1Z6 | Tel: 416.968.7252 | Editorial ctp@baxter.net | Advertising sales@baxter.net

Founders: W.H. Baxter, Edith Baxter

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In addition to self-determination and cross-cultural understanding, mindful tourism has the potential to contribute to cultural preservation through the sharing of stories, traditions and values. Skrelunas, who is also a founder of the Arizona Indian Tourism Association, explained, “Visitors can stay in a hogan [traditional Navajo dwelling] and learn about our stories and our food. Food is healing. That is a big opportunity as long as it’s done carefully in a managed way.”

Added Chef Jerald Tso, “Finding appreciation in who we are as a people and our land — for me, that evolves into food.”

Skrelunas continued, “A lot of our communities can be resistant to tourism because people take. But in my role with the Arizona Indian Tourism Association, I got to help tribes and communities develop tourism plans. There are tools to assess impact and determine carrying capacity. Conscious tourism helps save our culture.” AIANTA also provides business owners with tools and education to build protocols for their tourism products, helping them cultivate a mindful clientele.

Noted Rupert, “Additionally, AIANTA is dedicated to educating travellers on best practices and protocols for respectfully visiting Indigenous

communities in the U.S. We’ve created educational guides including, 15 Cultural Protocols to Know Before You Visit Native Homelands in the U.S., and a recently-debuted educational guide with Leave No Trace, How to Responsibly Visit Tribal Nations and Alaska Native Villages: An Education Entry Point for Non-Indigenous Guests — all of which can be found on AIANTA.org.”

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

AIANTA fosters strategic partnerships to further support its mission: “To define, introduce, grow and sustain American Indigenous tourism that honours traditions and values.” One such partnership is with Brand USA, which collaborates with AIANTA on initiatives like the American Indian Tourism Conference and hosting FAM tours like the May 2025 Roots of Route 66 FAM. Additionally, the Destination Original Indigenous Tourism (DO-IT) partnership was recently established between AIANTA, the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada and New Zealand Māori Tourism. Said Rupert, “Destination Original Indigenous Tourism formalized its partnership in February 2025 to create a global marketing collective that supports the growth of Indigenous tourism through advocacy, support networks, research and through adoption of a global mark of excellence and quality standards. In the next year, DO-IT will begin the work of unifying the collective voice for Indigenous tourism worldwide.” She continued, “The mission of Destination Original Indigenous Tourism aligns well with AIANTA’s mission, so it’s a natural fit for us to join our colleagues in the establishment of this vital organization. As the leader in Indigenous tourism in the U.S., AIANTA is thrilled to join this global community of Indigenous leaders to amplify our commitment to sharing authentic Indigenous experiences and ensuring they are represented with integrity and respect.”

