

The Potential for Aboriginal Ecotourism in Ontario

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Aboriginal ecotourism is a relatively new concept to the Ontario tourism industry. Very few studies have been conducted to determine the current state and potential of Aboriginal ecotourism in Ontario. In order to provide further insight into this potentially sustainable form of tourism development, a study was conducted to assess the current Aboriginal ecotourism practices in Ontario. This study, conducted through eighteen in-depth interviews with various stakeholders involved in Aboriginal tourism in Ontario and abroad, was executed to determine the benefits and barriers to this kind of tourism development. Challenges, as determined by this study, include product development, marketing, lack of education, lack of resources, bureaucracy, and resistance of Aboriginal peoples to sharing their culture. The benefits, however, are pertinent, including improved economic well-being, employment opportunities, and the ability to build community capacity. This study provides a closer evaluation of the factors that have impeded Aboriginal ecotourism development in Ontario, and thus provides insight on the potential for future development.

Keywords: Ontario, Aboriginal, ecotourism, community capacity, partnerships.

Tourism is commonly recognized as one of the world's largest industries which continue to expand at a rapid rate (UNWTO, 2006). In many cases, tourism development has been a profitable economic sector, making it an attractive industry of economic development in many countries and regions around the world. The magnitude of this industry is demonstrated by World Tourism Organization statistics (WTO) that indicates international tourist arrivals will surpass more than one billion by 2010 (Bruner et al., 1999). In 2006, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) projected that direct and indirect impacts of tourism were expected to contribute 10.3 % of the global Gross Domestic Product and create nearly 10 million new jobs for the world economy for a total of 234.3 million jobs (WTTC, 2006). Despite the potential for incorrect and inflated data, these figures illustrate the global importance of tourism.

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Notwithstanding the potential contribution of tourism to the social and economic development of Aboriginal people, Aboriginal ecotourism is the least developed form of tourism and is vaguely regarded by tourists, tourism marketing agencies, federal and provincial governments and Aboriginal communities. Since the mid-1990's, the term 'indigenous ecotourism' has been used to describe "community ecotourism projects developed on indigenous lands and territories in Latin America, Australia and Canada," (Zeppel, 2006, 11).

The concept of Aboriginal ecotourism is relatively new in Ontario. Therefore, there is disagreement on the definition, scope and purpose of this form of tourism development. While different types of Aboriginal tourism exist in Ontario, most are not generally considered as ecotourism. Aboriginal ecotourism in principle fosters, promotes and preserves Aboriginal culture and traditions. Nationally, within the Province of British Columbia and internationally in Australia and New Zealand, Aboriginal ecotourism has been successfully developed and promoted. In the Province of Ontario, however, there is no comprehensive strategy for developing Aboriginal tourism despite the enormous market potential and benefits that exist in these communities. This paper examines the state of Aboriginal ecotourism in Ontario and explores the barriers that hinder the development of this form of tourism.

According to Notzke (2004), Aboriginal tourism development in Canada falls short of its potential. Based on the 2006 Canadian census, 3.8 per cent of the Canadian population is Aboriginal, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis (Statistics Canada, 2006). First Nations are an organized Aboriginal group or community that is officially recognized by the Canadian government. The Inuit inhabit the Arctic of Canada and Métis are off springs of Aboriginal Canadians and Europeans. These people have maintained unique cultural practices over the years. The census also identified that eight in every ten Aboriginal people live in Ontario and the western provinces (Statistics Canada, 2006). If the share of Aboriginal people's contribution to the world's fastest growing industry is in proportion to their population, Aboriginal tourism would be a \$1.6 billion industry, providing 30,000–40,000 jobs in Canada (Notzke, 2004). In reality, the Aboriginal tourism industry in Canada is currently estimated at \$270 million, employing only 14,000–16,000 people - less than half of one per cent of the Canadian industry (Notzke, 2004; Rostum, 2002). Based on national tourism indicators from Statistics Canada and the Canadian Tourism Commission, it is estimated that Aboriginal tourism represents 0.5 % of Canadian tourism revenue as a whole, but still possesses great opportunity for future growth (Rostum, 2002).

DEFINITION OF ABORIGINAL ECOTOURISM

There is no consensus on the definition of Aboriginal ecotourism (Aboriginal Tourism Canada (ATC), 2006). However, there are several general elements that

are integral to Aboriginal ecotourism: a focus on environmental sustainability, education, and promotion and sharing of Aboriginal culture by the host communities. According to Hipwell (2007), ecotourism, which consists of educational visits to areas of particular natural beauty, significant ecological process or unique plant and animal communities, has grown in importance within the tourism industry. Indigenous ecotourism, according to Zeppel (2003), is “nature-based attractions or tours owned by Indigenous people, and also Indigenous interpretation of the natural and cultural environment including wildlife,” (Zeppel, 2003, 56). Ecotourism can also be defined as responsible travel to natural areas with the aim to preserve the environment and improve the well-being of the local people (ATC, 2006).

Ryan and Huyton (2002) emphasize the importance of the cultural aspect of Aboriginal tourism in the Australian context, and define its products as Aboriginal people; Aboriginal spirituality or dreaming; Aboriginal bush craft skills; Aboriginal cultural practices; and Aboriginal artifacts. A more literal definition of Aboriginal ecotourism is community-based tourism where guests staying in Aboriginal lodging facilities are able to take away a unique experience, but also give back to the community they have visited (Blangy, 2010). One objective of this study is to determine a cohesive definition of Aboriginal ecotourism amongst key experts in the field. Up to this point, the literature has indicated there are components of various forms of tourism that contribute to the definition of Aboriginal ecotourism, but an explicitly agreed-upon, consolidated definition does not exist.

MARKET POTENTIAL FOR ABORIGINAL ECOTOURISM

Based on estimates of the tourism industry in Canada, interest in Aboriginal products implies great potential for the successful development of such products. In the Canadian outdoor/culture market segment, Canadians represent 74 % of overnight visitors, Americans account for 20 % and all other countries account for just over 6 % (Rostum, 2002). The Aboriginal Tourism Development Strategic Plan for Northern Ontario (Economic Growth Solutions, 2002) indicates a strong European market potential, where approximately 2.7 million tourists from United Kingdom, 2.5 million from Germany, and 3.1 million from Italy indicated they would like to visit Canada and expressed interest in Aboriginal tourism products. In response to a growing market interest for these Aboriginal products, numerous reports suggest there is a wide range of tourism products and services either being created or planned for development by Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal business owners in Canada. These products consist of traditional villages, wildlife viewing, canoeing, traditional healing/experience retreat, dog sledding and other cultural and adventure tourism products (BearingPoint LP Goss Gilroy Inc. and Associates, 2003; Economic Growth Solutions, 2002).

There are some Aboriginal tourism activities that currently exist in various parts of Ontario. These activities include lodges that focus on hunting but are not eco-

based. Despite the potential for Aboriginal ecotourism development, there is no cohesive plan to identify and increase the benefits and reduce the barriers associated with this type of tourism.

BENEFITS AND BARRIERS OF ABORIGINAL ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT

There are several potential benefits to Aboriginal ecotourism development in Canada. This form of tourism aims to increase community capacity by focusing on ways to improve and sustain the well-being of the host community (Chaskin et al., 2001). Community capacity utilizes human capital, resources, and social capital within the community to leverage and solve collective problems (Chaskin et al., 2001). It is through community capacity building that several benefits can be achieved, such as preservation of Aboriginal natural and cultural heritage, increased education and training, knowledge of tourism development, and financial stability. Aboriginal ecotourism development is not just viewed by academics and practitioners as an economic strategy, but also as a means to preserve and promote Aboriginal culture and traditions, as well as providing the ability for Aboriginals to play a role in regional and national politics and economies. Through education, training and skills development on how to establish and run this form of tourism, Aboriginal communities would greatly benefit and be able to protect resources that are capable of sustaining them.

Despite the benefits associated with Aboriginal ecotourism development, several barriers are identified in the literature that hinder the initiation and progress of this sector. One major barrier is competition with other tourism products in the province. In Ontario, Aboriginal ecotourism is disadvantaged because its potentials are not fully exploited; it is competing with other provinces, such as British Columbia and Quebec, which already have capitalized on promoting various Aboriginal tourism activities. Due to competition from surrounding markets, emerging Aboriginal ecotourism industry in Ontario needs provincial marketing support in order to foster a successful growth (Economic Growth Solutions, 2002).

Other barriers to Aboriginal ecotourism include insufficient funding, education and training for Aboriginal communities to develop their tourism products. Seasonal variations in demand also result in under-utilization of facilities which leads to employment problems, since seasonal employment is not ideal for Aboriginal communities. In addition, without proper marketing and support from provincial and federal governments it may be difficult to attract tourists to Aboriginal tourism destinations.

Another barrier in the development of Aboriginal ecotourism is that many of the tourism products are located in remote locations, potentially leading to high operating costs (Tisdell, 1996). Lastly, acquiring funding to finance these tourism products

is often difficult because of negative perceptions and stereotypes stakeholders have towards Aboriginal culture. Some also view Aboriginal culture as lacking business skills and personnel capable of holding management positions (Colchester, 2003). It is due to these aforementioned potential barriers that Aboriginal ecotourism has been slow to grow in Ontario. By examining the potential barriers to Aboriginal ecotourism development, strategies and incentives to overcome these barriers can be implemented.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative approach to research. Qualitative research relies on interpretive social science methods which are usually related to case studies (Sommer and Sommer, 2002). Overall, eighteen semi-structured, key informant interviews were conducted with various stakeholders from January to May 2008 to collect data for this study. The key informants included academicians, Aboriginal Chiefs, representatives of provincial and federal government agencies, Aboriginal associations and tourism operators. The goal is to determine the present state and benefits of and barriers to Aboriginal ecotourism in Ontario. The interviews provided a means of exploring complex feelings and attitudes among interviewees.

Table 1: Key Informant Interviews

Interviewee #	Title and Organization
1, 6, 14, 15	Tourism Consultant
2, 4, 7, 8, 9	Aboriginal Tourism Business Representative
3, 10	Aboriginal Tourism Association
5, 13, 16	Academic
11	Aboriginal Cultural Centre Representative
12	Provincial Government Representative
17, 18	Federal Government Representative

The key informants for the study were chosen through a snowball sampling method. This technique is used in social science research for developing a research sample where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. The benefit of this methodology is that the sample represents the social network of the issue in question. The disadvantages of this approach are that it may create a bias as everyone in the sample is connected and therefore may share the same views on certain issues. In terms of research on perceptions to tourism development, this technique works well as a breadth of key stakeholders can be identified. The key informants were asked a number of semi-structured questions relating to their Aboriginal ecotourism experiences and their views and perceptions on benefits, barriers and incentives of this kind of development. The interviews were then

analyzed using a coding method. This method identified emerging themes related to benefits, barriers, strategies and recommendations for increasing Aboriginal ecotourism (Sommer and Sommer, 1991). Even though a total of 40 key informants were identified because of time constraints and the willingness of the informants to participate, only 18 individuals were interviewed. Table 1 identifies the key informants by their title and organization.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Benefits to Aboriginal Ecotourism

There are several benefits associated with Aboriginal ecotourism development. As indicated in the literature review and by a number of the key informants in this study, sustainable tourism development has the potential of benefitting Aboriginal communities in Ontario by increasing economic development, reducing reliance on government assistance, increasing community capacity through knowledge, skills and training; and preserving culture, heritage and natural environments. It also leads to educating tourists and fellow Canadians about Aboriginal culture (Interviewee # 1, 2, 6, 9, 10, 11, 14). As one interviewee indicated, “some cultures are at the brink of extinction and if they have some hope, they can be saved through tourism” (Interviewee #2). This study has identified economic benefits such as financial gain and employment as the greatest potential benefits of Aboriginal ecotourism development. This is expected since the main objective of developing Aboriginal ecotourism is to generate income and employment. This objective is followed by the preservation of local and traditional culture and education of tourists on Aboriginal culture. Table 2 identifies favorable responses to the benefits of Aboriginal ecotourism in Ontario.

Table 2: Benefits of Aboriginal ecotourism.

Benefits of Aboriginal Ecotourism	Favorable Response
Economic	11
Employment	10
Local culture and tradition preservation	8
Education of Aboriginal culture	7
Environment	5
Reduction of Aboriginal Stereotypes	5
Aboriginal Pride and Success	4

N=18

With these numerous benefits of Aboriginal ecotourism, it is important to initiate policies of developing this sector. These benefits are not only associated with

Aboriginal communities but also can be realized nationally and provincially because of the potential of this unique tourism product to attract more visitors to Canada. Several factors currently hinder the development of this sector. By identifying these barriers and working with stakeholders, policies towards the development of Aboriginal ecotourism can be implemented successfully.

Barriers to Aboriginal Ecotourism

From this research, a number of barriers to Aboriginal ecotourism were identified. The main themes that emerged from the interviews were: 1) lack of cohesive definition of Aboriginal ecotourism; 2) lack of resources both financial and human; 3) lack of education and training; 4) poor product development and marketing; 5) resistance to sharing culture with non-community members; and 6) bureaucracy.

Theme one: no cohesive definition of aboriginal ecotourism

One of the major barriers to developing Aboriginal ecotourism in Ontario is the lack of universal and cohesive definition of Aboriginal ecotourism. A common theme identified in the interviews was that stakeholders, that is, Aboriginal groups, government employees, community and employees working in this field do not understand ecotourism. This makes it difficult to create, develop and promote this industry within Aboriginal communities. In addition, through the interviews with key informants it became apparent that due to the ambiguity of defining ecotourism, it is difficult to determine what forms of tourism should best be implemented. Without a consensus on the definition of Aboriginal ecotourism, it is difficult to determine what is necessary to ensure that maximum benefit is gained from the development of the industry.

It was noted from the interviews that several stakeholders do not consider cultural component as part of Aboriginal ecotourism development. However, cultural institutions are integral aspect of Aboriginal tourism development. Some of the informants prefer to refer to this type of tourism as “cultural tourism”, “experimental tourism” or “ethno-tourism”. The development of an Aboriginal ecotourism product cannot be successfully marketed if there is no cohesive, agreed upon definition by industry and the general public. The definitions identified through this study ranged from nature-based (78%); promoting the education and sharing of Aboriginal life (56%); preserving local culture, history and traditions (50%); businesses owned and operated by Aboriginal people (33%); and focusing on the well-being of the community (22%). In some instances, Aboriginal ecotourism included activities such as hunting, which is not considered ecotourism in the literature.

Theme two: inadequate resources

The second barrier identified relates to inadequate resources, such as lack of funding, skilled employees, leadership and expertise. Many Aboriginal people do not see tourism as a lucrative industry and therefore do not invest time or funds into this sector. According to one respondent, “there is a lack of aspiring entrepreneurs” (in

ecotourism) (Interviewee # 17). In addition, because of lack of provincial commitment to Aboriginal tourism in general, there is little governmental investment and development of this industry. Without financial resources from the government and personal sources, this form of tourism will remain undeveloped.

Theme three: lack of education/ training

A significant barrier identified by several of the respondents hindering the development of Aboriginal ecotourism in Ontario is the lack of education and training related to this development. According to a respondent who consults on several Aboriginal issues “without proper training and education, Aboriginal people cannot recognize the opportunities which Aboriginal ecotourism can bring to their families and communities” (Interviewee #15).

Several respondents also identified their needs as training and education in business skill development, such as writing business plans, proposal development, marketing strategies and maintenance of financial records. In addition, in order for a tourism business to be successful, there needs to be extensive customer service training. The tourism industry is a service-based industry and in many communities, there is not much social interaction with outside visitors. Individuals that wish to focus on tourism require education to increase customer service skills as this is not intrinsic to the population, based on their lack of experience and knowledge of tourist needs.

Theme four: poor product development/ marketing

According to one respondent, “to ensure the success of Aboriginal ecotourism an Aboriginal face and voice must represent the product, the solution is not to throw money at it,” (Interviewee # 17). Aboriginal ecotourism is, at best, in the development stages compared to other tourism products in Ontario. This is due to the poor product development and marketing associated with Aboriginal ecotourism products. As one respondent identified, “there is a need for strong support within the community in order to retain the authenticity of the product. Maintaining the authenticity of the product is necessary, as many tourists expect this to be culture-based tourism” (Interviewee #17).

In addition, there is lack of market-ready products in Ontario. Several Aboriginal tourism products, like lodges and cultural centers, are not up to the service standards required for tourism and therefore will not receive funding or marketing support from government or private sources. This is a double-edged sword because if all funds are allotted only to the tourism products that are already developed, there is no chance for groups interested in developing new ecotourism products to succeed. As one respondent indicated; “The Canadian Tourism Commission and Aboriginal Tourism Canada are going to focus on 25 Aboriginal tourism businesses in Canada that are market ready rather than dumping money into each provincial organization” (Interviewee # 9).

This same respondent indicated that in order to bring any tourism product to the Canadian market, the interested party would have to attend a trade show for three years with a consistent tourism product to gain recognition and trust. This respondent speculated that for an Aboriginal ecotourism product, this process would take approximately six years (Interviewee #9). This statement does not provide much hope or support to Aboriginals (independently or in communities) to develop a tourism product. Without support to help develop these products in a market-ready manner, the majority of Aboriginal communities are at a loss, as most are unable to dedicate resources for six years to develop a product. In addition, if it is predetermined that only the top 25 Aboriginal tourism products will receive assistance and publicity, there is little motivation for a community to commit to pursuing tourism.

In addition, Aboriginal ecotourism is typically situated in more remote locations, resulting in limited accessibility to the product. Marketing is integral to the success of Aboriginal ecotourism in Ontario, as tourists require information to visit and transport themselves to these sites. A national strategy that focuses on promoting Aboriginal ecotourism across Canada, including regional strategies that promote the unique differences amongst Aboriginal groups that are often not identified is required (Interviewee #2). As identified by one respondent, “We need the support from local Canadians to believe in our heritage and have a passion for our country and market all of Canada’s activities and beauty. Not just specific cities like Toronto and Montreal should be marketed. The Canadian government also has to recognize the opportunities Aboriginal ecotourism has for the Canadian economy and well-being of Aboriginal communities. We need more travel agents to market our products and services and even have Tourism Toronto emphasize our capabilities as tourist activity operators” (Interviewee #2). However, as consistently identified with several respondents, in order for the necessary market-ready products to be developed, support is needed for training and development for these businesses. As one respondent identified, “There is not sufficient enough movement in the area of ecotourism, lots of talk but no action. The challenge is that it is voluntary, unorganized and consequently very sporadic” (Interviewee #15). Support in product development and subsequently marketing the product so it is visible to tourists is necessary for success.

Theme five: resistance to sharing culture

Not all Aboriginal communities are willing to share their traditions and philosophies with tourists. There needs to be sensitivity about the sacredness of Aboriginal traditions. As Aboriginal ecotourism ideally should be developed with the input of all affected stakeholders, it is up to the community itself to decide which aspects of its culture it wishes to promote to tourists. For example, some respondents were concerned with the impact of selling spirituality as a tourism product. As one respondent identified, “it compromises the culture when you start to sell the spirituality element. You can’t buy that type of experience in Canada, in the USA they offer

it” (Interviewee #9). The problem of considering culture as a commodity is that it loses its authenticity. An agreement on what is acceptable in terms of sharing culture and heritage must be achieved through consultation with each individual community. According to one respondent “When community consultation is not utilized, the capacity to teach and share can somewhat be limited or may cross the line on what the community perceives as sacred,” (Interviewee #14). The more traditionalist bands, such as the Ojibway, are more resistant compared to the Cree, who are more open to sharing some aspects of their culture (Interviewee # 16). It is through this potential resistance that Aboriginal ecotourism product must be developed with consultation and consensus amongst all stakeholders in order to ensure the protection of sacred rituals.

Theme six: bureaucracy

The level of bureaucracy in developing and managing Aboriginal ecotourism products also hinders progress. Inefficient bureaucracies within the community and with investors and partners such as the provincial and federal governments hinder the development of a tourism product. For example, current legislation indicates that Aboriginal tourism businesses in Canada must be at least 51% Aboriginal owned and managed. Although policies such as these are designed to ensure Aboriginal control, it affects the ability of non-Aboriginal investors to support tourism development, which is sometimes necessary for successful product development.

Bureaucracy also affects the process of receiving funding and approval to launch an Aboriginal business. To start a new business in Canada, Aboriginals require a certificate of possession, approval from the band council and approval from Indian and Native Affairs Canada (INAC). This lengthy process can take from two to five years (Interviewee #14). In addition to the various barriers related to knowledge, education, training and funding, the extra restrictions imposed through the long approval process does not provide much incentive to communities and individuals to invest in developing a tourism product.

In order to encourage strong community growth and development, there should be a focus on sustainable forms of tourism that celebrate and enhance Aboriginal culture. This can be achieved through developing strong partnerships amongst various stakeholders, most notably the community, investors, government and tourism associations (national, provincial, regional and Aboriginal focused). A partnership between stakeholders that have a cohesive vision and promotes dialogue so that common goals and objectives can be achieved is necessary to encourage the realization of the benefits that this kind of tourism can bring.

DICUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of initiatives were identified that would encourage the development of Aboriginal ecotourism in Ontario (Table 3). These initiatives focus primarily on

collaboration amongst several stakeholders.

One-third of the respondents identified the need for partnership with tourism organizations in Ontario and nationwide to work together to develop and promote Aboriginal tourism opportunities. Working with tourism organizations and governments will promote and enhance Aboriginal tourism in Ontario. It will also attract tourists to this form of tourism, which, in turn, will lead to sufficient infrastructure and support for the destination. This form of partnership which could be led by Aboriginal tourism associations, provincial government and destination marketing organizations in Ontario would greatly benefit Aboriginal ecotourism product.

Over a quarter of the respondents identified that education and training of Aboriginal communities is vital to overcoming the barriers related to working in a service-oriented industry. Education and training can foster an attitude of determination, enthusiasm and ownership amongst inhabitants of the destinations, therefore increasing the level of confidence Aboriginal peoples have in managing tourism based organization. The regional tourism associations in conjunction with the provincial government and destination marketing organizations should lead the organization of training workshops in order to develop the Aboriginal ecotourism product.

Table 3: Initiatives to increase aboriginal ecotourism in Ontario.

Initiatives	Favorable
Partnerships with tourism associations/organizations	6
Education and Training	5
Increased marketing	4
Support and recognition from funding agencies	3
Improved communication between stakeholders	2
Leadership	2
Product creation and packaging	2
Community Consultations	1
Aboriginal face and voice to represent the product	1

N=18

Just under a quarter of the respondents indicated that unique marketing strategies must be developed to attract tourists. These strategies must focus on target markets and identify products, services and resources that are applicable to the development of Aboriginal ecotourism. Therefore, it is essential that national and regional agencies and associations provide Aboriginal communities with the required knowledge and resources to succeed. In addition, a comprehensive and cohesive marketing strategy at the provincial level to promote Aboriginal ecotourism should be developed.

It is also imperative that Aboriginal communities share resources, knowledge and skills with each other, especially in relation to leadership and best practices. Funding

agencies such as INAC can play a leadership role in providing funds for projects and foster the required linkages between stakeholders, as well as sharing of knowledge through best practices and guidance. Presently it takes several years to develop an Aboriginal tourism product, and the majority of marketing resources are focused on already developed and established operations. A report by the Canadian Tourism Commission (2008) titled "Canada's Significant 28 Aboriginal Cultural Tourism Experiences" identifies best practices in Canada that should be the model for development, training and knowledge sharing. Leadership seminars should be instituted by the Provincial government and respective regional tourism associations in order to increase this valuable tourism product.

Collaboration is seen as key to moving the tourism industry towards sustainability. Throughout the literature, partnerships are recommended for their likelihood to result in sustainable development outcomes (Selin, 1999; Bramwell and Alletorp, 2001) and consequently form the basis of the recommendations to increase the development of Aboriginal ecotourism in Ontario. A multi-stakeholder partnership that allows all groups to work together with clear roles and responsibilities is necessary to ensure the success and reap the benefits of this form of tourism product. A partnership incorporating the development and implementation of several initiatives based on a cohesive vision will enable destinations to focus resources, share information, learn from the leaders and ultimately protect and promote the cultural and environmental resources. A multi-stakeholder partnership that would include Aboriginal communities, investors, levels of government, national and regional tourism associations and Aboriginal tourism associations would ensure that numerous incentives could be implemented. The partnership could then provide funding and financial assistance, guidance and training through best practices and knowledge exchanges, training and education through books, workshops, seminars and conferences and support for product and marketing development. By involving all affected stakeholders, the tourism product can be developed to promote, enhance and protect cultural and spiritual resources and be developed in conjunction with the community.

CONCLUSION

Through this study it is evident there are numerous barriers that impede the development of Aboriginal ecotourism in Ontario. Despite the potential benefits of this form of development, such as increased community capacity and protection of cultural and natural resources, there are many roadblocks that have been erected by various stakeholders. There is very little support, training or knowledge-sharing in the development of Aboriginal tourism-based products, despite the potential market of overseas visitors that want to experience this type of tourism. The federal and provincial governments and tourism associations nationally as well as regionally

should realize the great potential of Aboriginal ecotourism. They must also foster relationships with Aboriginal communities in order to spur the development of tourism products. In recognizing this potential, these agencies could assist in the development and implementation of such products, contributing to the economic prosperity, ecological protection and social development of many Aboriginal communities.

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