

Aboriginal Peoples' Images in Tourism

W I N T E R , 2 0 0 8

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Whose Image?

It is common to find images of Aboriginal people or Aboriginal culture on tourism promotions. Often these are developed and used without the knowledge or consent of aboriginal people. Such misrepresentation have created stereotypes that have shaped today's perception of aboriginal people. When questioning such images, we can begin to repair the damaged relationships and increase our understanding of real aboriginal culture. This issue raises a number of questions for future use of aboriginal tourism images:

- How has the current development of images of aboriginal people for tourism been effected by misrepresentation?
- In the next decade, will aboriginal people have the force to take control of their image?



Image 1

Just your average aboriginal: Stereotypes

Generated stereotypes make people feel superior to those being stereotyped. They usually ignore the uniqueness of individual by painting all members of the group with the same brush. For tourism purposes, aboriginal people tended to hold similar images. Such images can be either positive or negative. Some common stereotypical images included:

- Exotic
- Primitive



Image 2



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Example: The Native American Image

Prior to settlement of the United States, the aboriginal tribes were all different and unique. After settlement however, there was a political movement to make all the Native Americans similar in both behavior and image. This effort shaped the Plains Indians to be representative of all Native American Tribes. To this day, the Plain Indians are still the dominate image seen!

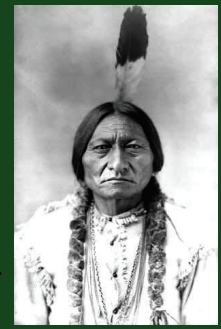


Image 3



Significance of Images



Image 4

Images of Aboriginal people are used all the time for promotion of tourism. The benefit of a well chosen image is its ability to represent a strong Aboriginal identity. The appeal of positive images allows the aboriginal people to take pride in their history. In turn, this works to both build and support their identity. Some of these factors have lead aboriginal people to want to take a greater control of their image. In the future they may chose to present themselves differently.

Current Issues

With aboriginals images being presented by others in the past a number of issues arose:

- Tourist expected aboriginals to look like their presented image, generally in traditional festive wear.
- However, aboriginals generally wear causal clothes, just like the tourists.

“‘Real’ and ‘authentic’ lifestyle is not possible for the average tourist, or for a majority of the [aboriginal] population to be experienced anymore, and that is why stages realities are becoming better than the real thing”¹

- If they look similar to themselves. It takes away for them seeming different and exotic.
- Causes disappointment when the tourist sees something different from their expectations.



Future for Brand Image

As aboriginal people gain control over their culture, they may want to recreate an image that is closer to their culture. This control will give them the power to distinguish themselves. Images produced for tourists, will have to be representative of the truth if they expect to succeed in the tourism industry. The image will also need to motivate tourist to travel.



Image 5

“Perceptions of places are almost never fair; they’re composed of clichés, half-truths, outdated commonplaces, prejudice and

Strength through Heritage

Future tourism images of aboriginal people will be focused on their heritage. Their heritage will allow them to distinguish themselves through:

- Customs
- Arts
- Other social practices

These factors will appeal to the changing demands of tourists; from goods and services to cul-

Whose image will you see?

Now that you know who created the images of aboriginals in the past, it will be interesting to see how those images change in the future. Aboriginal peoples image is important to them, both in terms of their future tourism success and their identity. Aboriginal people will need to overcome the difficulties created from past representation, by presenting an image that tourist expect to see and will see.



Image 6

Image 7

Image 8

In the future ask yourself:

- Who is creating the image of aboriginal people? Do they have permission?
- How is this image different from that of the past?

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- 2 Anholt, S. (2004). Editor's foreword to the first issue. *Place Branding*. 1 (1), 4-11. (pg. 3)

Images

- 1 <http://sbwanderer.blogspot.com/2006/06/find-out.html>
- 2 <http://www.umc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=IwL4KnN1LtH&b=2433457&ct=3631895>
- 3 <http://www.sandomenico.org/page.cfm?p=432>
- 4 <http://www.aboriginalbc.com/>
- 5 <http://mattplumlee.org/>
- 6 <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/pac/envrep/envrep01/index.html>
- 7 <http://www.jupiterimages.com/popup2.aspx?navigationSubType=itemdetails&itemID=22774216>

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