

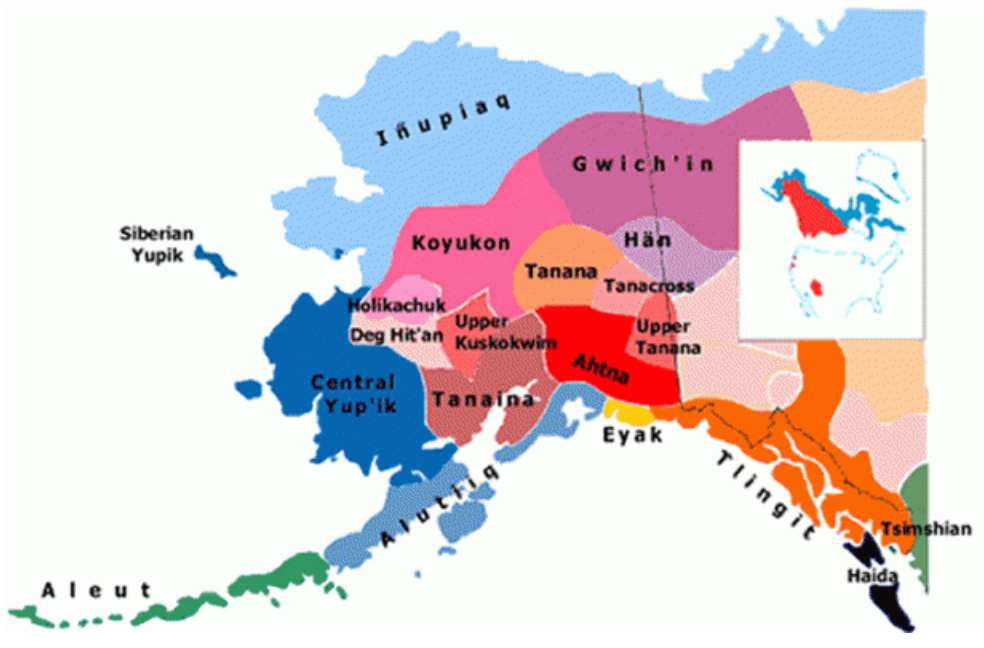
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## Alaska Natives Capitalizing on Tourism Opportunities

By [ICTMN Staff](#) April 6, 2011

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*The Associated Press* reports that Alaska Natives, such as the Tlingit and the Sitka, are establishing solid foundations in the state's tourism industry. While much of Alaska's tourism industry has historically been found at cruise ship ports, the large cities and the places along the rugged state's spread out and sparse road system, experts now say more and more travelers are seeking out Native villages for a chance to experience life with the continent's first descendants. This trend will be studied in a summer survey by the Alaska Travel Industry Association.

Association president Ron Peck told the *AP* that travelers come for the beauty of Alaska, but are also seeking something "more experiential." There's a genuine desire in many of today's travelers to learn about Native cultures.

One significant marker of this recent boom in Native tourism can be seen in Hoonah, a Tlingit community of 765 people that had struggled for years following the closing of a cannery in the 1950s and the subsequent decline of the fishing and logging industries. Things looked bleak until

Huna Totem Corp., the village Native corporation, decided to transform the old buildings of the cannery, which are a mile and a half from the village, into a cruise ship port.

Icy Strait Point, the name of the tourism complex the Tlingit built, opened in 2004. He has since brought in “hundreds of thousands of visitors, including 123,000 people last year,” the AP reported. The site has created 130 seasonal and permanent jobs, most of which have gone to Hoonah residents, which make Huna Totem Corp. the largest local employer. Last year, Icy Strait Point brought in \$3.6 million to the local economy, which represented 60 percent of the local sales tax revenue. Icy Straits also funnels some profits into scholarships awarded to Hoonah teens.

Icy Strait Point has restaurants, nearby tram rides, Tlingit heritage performances, fishing excursions, whale watching tours, and for the adventurous, a mile-long zipline with a 1,300-foot vertical drop.

The *Bristol Bay Times* reported on the 5th annual Heritage and Cultural Tourism Conference, which kicked off yesterday in Sitka and is looking to capitalize on what the state sees as growing trend in interest in Alaska Native cultures. The conferences, which goes until April 7, includes “presentations on marketing, business plan writing, technical resources, grant writing and more.”

Camile Ferguson of the Sitka Tribe of Alaska told the *Bay Times*, “Heritage and cultural tourism is one of our state’s fastest-growing and best economic assets for the future,” said Ferguson, the Alaska representative on the American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association Board. “We are going to help Alaskans learn how to build or expand their businesses using the unique experiences that Alaska offers our visitors.”

Travelers heading to Alaska are going out of their way to find off-road villages that lack the cushier accommodations that were once thought of as necessary to all but the most extreme, hard core travelers. As more and more people seek out Native cultures to immerse themselves in, messages are being sent to both the tourism industry and the Native kids in these villages who are being reminded that their culture and traditions are valuable and important. A recent conference overseas, the *ITB Berlin*, reinforced the widespread interest in indigenous American cultures. Germans in particular are fascinated by what Ferguson calls “the real American Indian.”

The amazing wildlife and stunning vistas of Alaska, long a pull on travelers from all over the world, are but one component of what inspires interest and awe from travelers. As more and more tourists, and their dollars, pour into the Native communities, it becomes more evident that the world sees the Alaska Native community as something worthy of traveling long distances across rugged terrain to experience

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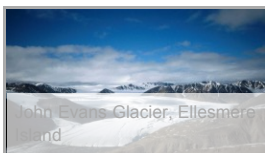
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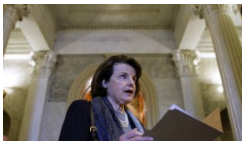


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