

## **Finding a Balance Between Awareness and Intrusion: Indigenous Cultures and Tourism**

By Roshan Beaven

Recently, the ideas of sustainability and “green living” have become more of a trend than an actual mindset. This can also be traced back to the tourism industry, which has a lot of pressure put on it by consumers. Consumers do this because they have the need to feel better about the choices they make that probably do have a negative impact.

This causes the tourism industry to rush into multiple promises and proposals that are very unattainable in order to try to please their customers. For instance, the company which recently bought Whistler Blackcomb, Vail, has made multiple “epic” promises to become more environmentally friendly and aware. During my project, I was skimming through their website, and found that one of their pages stated that their “product” was the outdoors. This is an example of a violation of the indigenous views on relationships we have with the environment, who believe that we do not, in any way, own the environment or the world. We are a part of it, we are one. And this is no way to go about becoming more environmentally aware. Indigenous peoples understand the interconnection that sustains our lives and believe that humans are stewards, protectors and visitors of the land.

I will now move on to the positives of tourism. In my opinion, the positives outnumber the negatives both in amount, and in importance. As humans, we can learn compassion through experience. Travelling can open one’s eyes to the depth of a place, or the people who have inhabited it. Hearing about a place or a person can provide some form of knowledge, however, actually experiencing it for oneself has a much more powerful impact. Judgement and anxiety can be avoided when compassion is gained. Through the engaging, welcoming and respectful platform of cultural tourism, non judgemental education can be achieved.

When you become involved in a place at a cultural and personal level, you are automatically more engaged. The ability to expand perspectives can be beneficial when attempting to repair relationships and form new ones. Reconciliation has become a very important topic in Canada in the past few years, and finally, a more accurate version of the history of our country has come to light. Now, the unacceptability of the mistreatment and abuse of indigenous peoples is recognized by many.

Unfortunately, a few people and ideas still remain in virtually every community in Canada that completely dismiss the importance of recognising past mistakes in order to move forward in our relationships more positively. Being a non-indigenous ally is becoming increasingly important in modern day Canada. It is a lot harder to judge, disrespect and participate in stigmatizing a group of people when you become more involved with them, weather it be through just spending more time talking with them, or learning more about their culture through something like tourism.

During the time of residential schools, the last one of which closed in 1996, children in these school were forbidden to practice any cultural activities, aside from for one purpose. Tourists found art done by the indigenous peoples to be incredibly beautiful, so some schools allowed the children to produce art for the school’s and the church’s financial gain. While this may seem like an exploitation of their culture, without this one way on holding on to their traditional arts, their culture would have been even more destroyed by this genocide.