Editorial: UN International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples: Indigenous tourism and cultural revitalization: impacts, opportunities and collaborative approaches

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Editorial on the Research Topic
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As we approach the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples (9 August 2025), this Research Topic enables reflections on Indigenous Peoples' experiences when participating in tourism and related activities. Cultural revitalization and the return of Indigenous lands or recognition of Indigenous peoples' relationships to the natural world has unfolded in diverse ways depending on location, history and contemporary political context. Many Indigenous tourism activities occur in communities whose geographical regions have difficult and unsettling colonial legacies. Globally there is a repetitive history of tourism facilitating displacement and cultural repression but more recently enabling livelihoods, cultural empowerment and revitalization (Butler and Hinch, 1996, 2007). Despite colonial pasts, many communities internationally continue to invest their time, people and resources in Indigenous tourism products and businesses to achieve diverse objectives. Tourism development has traditionally focused on economic gains to improve livelihoods, often serving as a pathway to Westernized development, modernization, and improved (Westernized) lifestyles (neglecting traditional ways). Indigenous conceptualizations and cultural practices such as the connection between the natural world and personal wellbeing, and the importance of collective livelihoods, have been neglected in dominant development narratives. This Research Topic explores these cultural nuances, complementing and extending previous books and other journals' Research Topics showcasing Indigenous tourism research contributions from around the world (Butler and Carr, 2025; Graburn and Bunten, 2018; Viken and Müller, 2017).

In this small, but impactful, Research Topic there are several trends worth highlighting. There continues to be a notable expansion of research by and with Indigenous peoples that examines the experiences of Indigenous communities beyond settler colonial nations. Historically, research tended to romanticize the opportunities in Indigenous tourism at localized levels and deemphasize the risks that are faced by communities who choose to engage with tourism related activities or economies. While a high percentage of Indigenous

tourism research still originates in Canada, the United States, Australia, and Aotearoa/New Zealand, studies are regularly profiling communities from other locations. In this Research Topic alone, there are novel contributions from Vietnam exploring intergenerational perspectives around traditional weaving and authenticity (Thi Nguyen et al.) and the Pacific, specifically Rarotonga (Teaurere and De Waegh) which complement articles from Aotearoa/New Zealand and Canada. The paper by Teaurere and De Waegh explores the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Rarotonga, where the collapse of tourism activities revitalized traditional socio-economies and strengthened community ties. Traversing beyond economic considerations, their research on tourism disruption highlights the importance of non-economic dimensions of Indigenous wellbeing, to challenge dominant economic narratives. Their findings reveal that wellbeing in Indigenous communities is not solely tied to tourism's economic contributions, but it is also shaped by cultural resilience and environmental stewardship.

The significance of Indigenous knowledge, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), and Indigenous-led governance in aligning tourism development with cultural and environmental sustainability is another theme in this Research Topic (Elmahdy et al.; Thi Nguyen et al.). Elmahdy et al. underscore the importance of Māori principles such as kaitiakitanga (guardianship) and taonga tuku iho (intergenerational responsibility) in marine mammal tourism (MMT) in Aotearoa/New Zealand. They emphasize that collaborative governance and the integration of TEK into policy frameworks are crucial to ensure that tourism practices respect marine species as taonga (treasures) while supporting conservation. These articles collectively illustrate that Indigenous-led governance can foster environmental sustainability and cultural continuity, provided that long-term commitments from governments and stakeholders are upheld.

Tourism-induced cultural degradation has been a recurring theme in previous Indigenous tourism literature around tourist arts and crafts, but this can be positively framed too. Thi Nguyen et al. examine how the Ta Oi people in Vietnam have revitalized Dzeng weaving, traditional architecture, cuisine, and performance arts through tourism initiatives. However, tensions persist between authenticity and commercialization, particularly concerning sacred rituals. This underscores the critical role of Indigenous communities in determining how culture is shared, so that tourism serves as a tool for cultural preservation rather than an instrument for cultural exploitation. Similarly, Vandermale and Mason discuss Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) in Canada, where tourism facilitates intergenerational knowledge transfer and supports cultural practices such as moose hide tanning and traditional food preparation.

Another recurring theme is the importance of collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous tourism organizations, governance structures, and scholars to enhance tourism experiences. This is being addressed through training programmes, education, research and networks that empower Indigenous peoples to participate in and economically and culturally benefit from tourism development. Such collaboration can simultaneously improve Indigenous livelihoods, environmental and cultural sustainability, and when the focus of academic

research ensuring Indigenous voice enhances understandings. Koe and Loukes capture the voices of Indigenous guides and tourism operators whose people have been historically excluded from the benefits of adventure tourism. The significance of cultural landscapes and the Indigenous communities living in such places, have historically been marginalized by the predominantly "western" adventure tourism sector. Koe and Lukes give voice to Indigenous adventure guides and tourism operators living and operating within "wilderness" settings that are traditional homes. Similarly, Teaurere and De Waegh emphasize the importance of culturally responsive research where respect, reciprocity, and collaborations with Indigenous researchers is needed to gain unique insights deep within the community. Mutual learning and respect are fundamental to ensure that tourism and tourism research does not perpetuate colonial dynamics but instead fosters shared benefits and reconciliation through collaborations that center Indigenous worldviews support cultural authenticity, environmental stewardship, and community wellbeing.

Importantly, this Research Topic presents papers that include diverse and longitudinal engagement by Indigenous scholars with practitioners in Indigenous tourism and with community members. This has led to a distinct shift in approach to a focus on problem identification and solutions from within and alongside Indigenous communities/community members through research partnerships that center Indigenous perspectives (from this Research Topic, see Vandermale and Mason; Koe and Loukes). There is still research led by non-Indigenous peoples who are experts in research areas lacking in Indigenous scholars' or voices but where these advocates call for recognition of Indigenous knowledge—Elmahdy et al. interrogate the need for Indigenous perspectives in the management and regulation of marine mammal tourism. Historical perspectives through analysis of how Indigenous knowledge and cultural values are integrated into tourism policies, research, and operations are also featured in this Research Topic (Lemelin et al.).

In the troubled world that we currently live in, one that is rife with divisive leadership and a devaluing of humanity in preference of flourishing economies, Indigenous tourism scholarship needs to embrace grassroots approaches that constantly question the governance, alongside environmental, socio-economic, and cultural sustainability, of tourism and related activities. Long-term planning and vision are imperative for decision makers in Indigenous tourism settings as they are navigating dynamic geo-political contexts and the pressing environmental concerns presented by climate change and global warming. Even more so ensuring Indigenous voice and ownership of tourism developments in their communities and on their lands needs to be considered by decision makers (who ideally would cede the decisions to the people). Indigenous-led tourism and recreation, including future scenarios are increasingly the norm (Vandermale and Mason). There may also be a desire to disengage from tourism activities altogether. Nevertheless, there will be an evolving need from Indigenous peoples for advice and empowerment within future research collaborations between researchers and the researched communities.

There are research issues that are yet to emerge (yet unknown) related to Indigenous tourism, for instance the potential (or not) of AI when developing Indigenous tourism experiences and marketing. Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers can contribute positively to the Indigenous tourism sector and its communities by undertaking academic and practical work that supports tourism futures, minimizes risks to local ecosystems, revitalizes culture and improves the livelihoods of local peoples. In conclusion, this Research Topic's articles represent and provide insights into some of the complex, some would say "wicked," problems that Indigenous communities encounter in their efforts to manage tourism activities within their traditional landscapes. This includes opportunities to engage with tourism, leisure and recreation to build livelihoods that are environmentally sustainable, less dependent on neo-liberal capitalist markets and more aligned with community values.

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