



## **Cree Tourism Strategy 2020-2025**



2020-2025 Eeyou Istchee  
Tourism Strategy  
Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association  
Eeyou Istchee Tourism

# Important note

**This document** presents the global strategy, specific goals and orientations, and activities undertaken with various stakeholders and experts during spring, summer, and autumn 2019.

**Two documents** were produced as part of the 5-Year Eeyou Istchee Tourism Strategy mandate.

**The first document** encompasses the global strategy, including vision and strategic and operational goals.

**The second document** is the action plan that presents orientations, operational objectives, and specific activities required for implementation.

## BESIDE

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# Glossary of Acronyms

AEQ	Aventure Écotourisme Québec	MFFO	Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs
AITQ	Alliance de l'industrie touristique du Québec	MEI	Ministère de l'Économie et de l'Innovation
ARBJ	Administration régionale Baie-James	MELCC	Ministère de l'Environnement et de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques
ARF	Agences réceptives et forfaitistes du Québec	MERN	Ministère de l'Énergie et des Ressources naturelles
CBHSS	Cree Board of Health and Social Services	MESS	Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur
CCCC	Chambre de commerce Chibougamau-Chapais	MTO	Ministère du Tourisme du Québec
CDC	Corporation de développement économique de Chapais	MTQ	Ministère des Transports du Québec
CECC	Centre d'Études collégiales à Chibougamau	RISQ	Réseau d'investissement social du Québec
CED	Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions	RTPA	Regional Tourism Partnership Agreement
CFPBJ	Centre de formation professionnelle de la Baie-James	SAA	Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones
CNACA	Cree Native Arts and Crafts Association	SDBJ	Société de développement de la Baie-James
COTA	Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association	TAQ	Tourisme Autochtone Québec
CNYC	Cree Nation Youth Council	TBJ	Tourisme Baie-James
CLD	Centre local de développement	TQ	Tourisme Québec
CLE	Centre local d'emploi	UQAC	Université du Québec à Chicoutimi
CNG	Cree Nation Government	UQAT	Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue
CQRHT	Conseil québécois des ressources humaines en tourisme	WTSC	Wiinipaakw Tours Solidarity Cooperative
CSB	Cree School Board		
CTA	Cree Trappers Association		
EC	Eeyou Conservation		
EIT-TEI	Eeyou Istchee Tourism		
EIBJT	Eeyou Istchee Baie-James Travel		
EQ	Emploi Québec		
FPQ	Fédération des pourvoiries du Québec		
GREIBJ	Eeyou Istchee James Bay Regional Government		
IQ	Investissement Québec		
ITAC	Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada		
ITHQ	Institut du tourisme et d'hôtellerie du Québec		
LERPA	Laboratoire d'expertise et de recherche en plein air		
MAMH	Ministère des Affaires municipales et de l'Habitation (FARR: Fonds d'appui au rayonnement des régions)		

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# Message from the President ,

The Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association (COTA) and Eeyou Istchee Tourism (EIT) are pleased to share our new Cree Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2025. We would like to thank all of the community members, businesses and organizations who contributed to the planning process. Our community workshops and key informant interviews helped shape the strategy and, in the future, they will be used to enhance the implementation phase and our overall global positioning. We hope that you will be pleased with the final product and I am confident that it will guide our work of creating a sustainable tourism destination in Eeyou Istchee that will benefit our communities and the generations to come.

As you know, the organizations have different and yet complementary mandates that result in more benefits and services for our members.

COTA's mission is to develop and implement a collective vision for a world-class sustainable tourism industry in Eeyou Istchee that is in harmony with Cree culture and values and that involves a partnership with Cree communities, institutions, and businesses. The organization plays a vital role in structuring global Cree tourism development and works to implement Sections 28.4 and 28.6 of the JBNQA to:

- Provide marketing, booking, and promotion services, where necessary, for Cree outfitting operations.
- Provide business, management, accounting and professional services, where necessary, for Cree outfitters and tourist businesses.
- Conduct feasibility studies related to the establishment of individual outfitting or tourism facilities or a network of outfitting or tourism facilities.

EIT is the Regional Tourism Association (RTA) for Eeyou Istchee and serves the Cree tourism businesses and organizations. EIT's role focuses on marketing the region and the tourism operators,

supporting the development of the tourism offering, improving the availability of tourism information, and coordinating with other RTAs to help shape and optimize the province's tourism policy.

This new strategy proposes an inclusive approach that involves land users, local communities and regional stakeholders. Innovation, distinction and the highlighting of our vibrant Cree culture are the key elements used to develop the 2020-2025 action plan.

Thank you and we are looking forward to work with you in the months to come,  
Meegwetch,

Titus Shecapio



President COTA and EIT





# Context and Main Objectives

According to a recent Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada study, the country's Aboriginal tourism sector is growing quickly. From 2014 to 2017, its GDP rose from \$1.4 billion to \$1.7 billion, a 23.2% increase<sup>1</sup>. Eeyou Istchee Baie-James (EIBJ) is certainly well-positioned to benefit from this promising trend.

Into the North, a web series launched in 2018, has already provided potential visitors with a privileged and appealing view of the region's vibrant Cree communities and its exceptionally diverse landscapes.

The region has its own dedicated travel agency, Eeyou Istchee Baie-James Travel (EIBJT), which operates in partnership with multiple tourism industry players. There is a great opportunity to position EIBJ as Quebec's most accessible Nordic region. The allure of authentic Aboriginal experiences combined with a one-of-a-kind natural surroundings has already enabled the development of distinctive flagship products such as Creetopia and Wiinipaakw Tours. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the whole Eeyou Istchee territory was closed to visitors.

The reopening of borders is expected between 2022 and 2023, which limits international travel. There will be an opportunity to test world-class tourism products and packages by targeting tourism customers in Quebec and the rest of Canada. Accordingly, these products will be ready for launch on international markets whenever overseas travel resumes.

New travel trends, including slow travel, learning tourism, and sustainable tourism, are compatible with Cree values and traditions. We must now create welcoming reception services and related infrastructure<sup>2</sup> to ensure that visitors to Eeyou Istchee enjoy unforgettable experiences.

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1 <https://indigenoustourism.ca/corporate/conference-board-of-canada-research/>

2 <https://indigenoustourism.ca/corporate/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ITAC-Insignia-Research-Report-Executive-Summary-EN.pdf>



# Context and Main Objectives

The mandate entrusted to the BESIDE team was to provide support in developing a 5-year tourism strategy & action plan, for the period from 2020 to 2025. We worked in close collaboration with COTA and EIT to propose a distinctive tourism strategy and positioning designed to ensure sustainable development in all 9 Cree communities and the region's production system as a whole.

Eeyou Istchee is a vast and ancient land alive with vibrant Cree traditions, culture, and language. It is a region largely accessible by road. It was a privilege to participate in drafting a plan for its tourism offer and economic development.

## **The initiative's two chief objectives are:**

- The sustainable development and management of the region to ensure its longevity and benefits to the members of the community as well as the development of a distinctive Cree tourism destination. Participation by and mobilization of the region's major players was a key component of our approach.
- Pilot-project and implementation support. An action plan was drafted to develop fieldwork management skills among community members whose work will include tourism operations and maintenance as well as infrastructure and region-wide safety.





# An Inclusive and Participatory Approach

## Meetings with main stakeholders Spring and summer 2019 on the road

Full-day workshops with all nine communities, COTA board and CNYC board

Participation at COTA's AGM and Creetopia launch in Chisasibi

Many work sessions with industry partners and stakeholders:  
Tourisme Baie-James, Huttoopia, Wiinipaakw Tours Solidarity Cooperative, Nibiischii Corporation, EIBJT, Cree Trappers Association, Centre d'Études collégiales à Chibougamau, ARF, AEQ, FPQ, and TAQ

Multiple work sessions with COTA





# SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p>Friendly and welcoming people who have a genuine sense of hospitality</p> <p>Powerful and authentic Aboriginal experiences, including Cree way of life, traditional activities, games, and more</p> <p>Elders are spellbinding story-tellers who bring to life a rich history</p> <p>One-of-a-kind geology and landscapes</p> <p>Dazzling arts and crafts</p> <p>Plentiful snow for winter activities</p> <p>Sea life and boat tours in James Bay</p> <p>Increased market demand for Indigenous tourism<sup>1</sup></p> <p>Accessible by road</p> <p>Safe, uncrowded, natural environment</p>	<p>Lack of reception services and infrastructure (required to create unforgettable visitor experiences)</p> <p>Limited road signage and roadside services</p> <p>Lack of signage in communities</p> <p>Not enough camping sites</p> <p>Insufficient market-ready flagship products and turnkey packages</p> <p>Lack of diversity in food services</p> <p>Limited entrepreneurship</p> <p>Some security issues, such as loose dogs in the communities</p> <p>Air strips too short to accommodate larger planes</p> <p>Lack of French signage in the communities (Quebec and France are major markets)</p> <p>Too few trained tourism guides</p> <p>Many roads in the region are not paved</p>

# SWOT Analysis

## OPPORTUNITIES

### External:

Increased market demand for Indigenous tourism <sup>1</sup>

COVID-19 disruption has created an

**unprecedented, industry-wide opportunity** for Indigenous tourism and cultural experiences

Visitors seeking slow tourism and sustainable destinations

Increasing environmental-footprint concerns among travellers

### Internal:

Enhancing our green path and sustainability as a destination

Implementation of carbon-offset cost activities

Implementation of flagship products such as Creetopia micro-sites and boat tours around cultural heritage interpretation

Development of distinctive cross-cultural turnkey packages involving Cree, Inuit, and Jamesian communities

Extensive arts and crafts production and traditional activities (workshops and events)

Development of winter tourism potential

Development of a Cree culinary showcase

Extension and possible paving of runways to accommodate larger aircraft

Communications and promotions to bolster new offers

Fam tours for international outreach

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<sup>1</sup> <https://indigenoustourism.ca/corporate/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ITAC-Insignia-Research-Report-Executive-Summary-EN.pdf>

## THREATS

Every flight's high environmental footprint

High cost of air fare

Short tourism seasons

Bugs and poor weather

COVID-19 in the short term

# Strategic Goals and Vision

- 1 Create three tourism hubs – Inland, Southern Coastal, and Northern Coastal – to facilitate mobility throughout the region, help promote distinctive offers, and entice visitors to return for repeat visits.
- 2 Foster Cree and Jamesian collaboration by implementing a global strategy for tourism experiences and lodging in EIBJ, including inciting the Cree Nation and Jamesian communities to co-develop a UNESCO Network Global Geopark.
- 3 Position Creetopia sites and Wiinipaakw boat tours as flagship products.
- 4 Promote tourism services and activities revolving around traditional way of life and arts and crafts.
- 5 Create a master plan to improve access to the region and between communities.

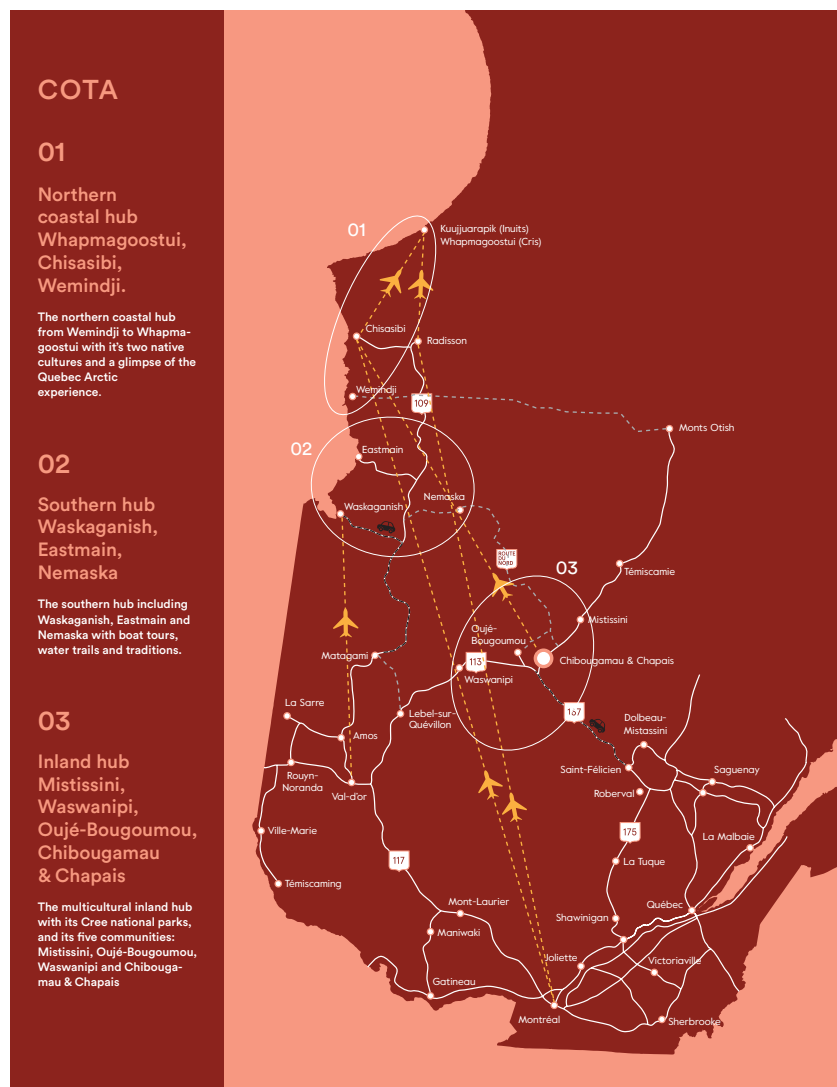


# 01. Three Tourism Hubs

Dividing the region of EIBJ into three distinct tourism hubs allows us to position the destination more effectively, with each hub featuring its specific set of tourism experiences, including attractions, history, and diverse communities and cultures.

The goal is to enable tourists to distinguish between the hubs and incite them to return to the region to discover a new hub. As a result, repeat visitors gain a much fuller appreciation of the various communities' cultural, historical, and geographical attributes and their warmth and hospitality.

In addition, it is much easier and more pleasant for visitors to make travel arrangements in EIBJ on the basis of “manageable” tourism hubs than to view the destination as a long – and possibly too long – road trip.





## 02. Cree and Jamesian collaboration by implementing a global strategy for tourism experiences and accommodations in EIBJ through the creation of a UNESCO Network Global Geopark

Regional collaborative work involving Tourisme Baie-James, Eeyou Istchee Tourism, and industry stakeholders is required to ensure that product, package, and lodging development be undertaken in a sound manner and will target a high level of quality, thereby providing visitors with a great welcome and a great experience that will WOW them.

Providing support to a comprehensive regional strategy to obtain accreditation as part of the global UNESCO Geoparks network would result in outstanding international visibility and benefit the region by showcasing its two distinct populations, its unique geomorphological characteristics, and its stunningly beautiful natural environment.

A geo-site would be developed in proximity to each community, with each site featuring its specific properties of scientific interest, its distinctive history, and the community elders' body of knowledge.

These geo-sites would be linked by a geo-route whose architectural signature would bring out the best lookouts (offering dazzling sunrises and sunsets), singular locations, and more.

Earth science and environmental science graduate and post-graduate students would be invited to conduct end-of-study internships at the various geo-sites and initiate partnerships with community elders.

As a result, the two future Assinica and Nibiischii Cree National Parks will be able to enhance their geo-science offers and geo-sites as part of efforts to join the future geo-route.



### **03. Position Creetopia sites and related high-end accommodations as flagship products and facilitate the development of exclusive packages and authentic experiences for international customers and Quebec tourists who seek exotic journeys and wish to explore Aboriginal cultures. Eeyou Istchee is the gateway to Northern Quebec and is a destination that inspires fascination among potential visitors.**

Each site would have specific spaces for cooking, sharing meals, storytelling, sharing knowledge, and a broad variety of workshops. Experience-generating features would be identical from one site to another to ensure the high quality required by visitors. Site selection and development as well as the products on offer would help create distinctive experiences for visitors.

Wiinipaakw boat tours may be yet another flagship product to be showcased in tourist packages. The islands, their history, their marine fauna and flora, and the accompanying cultural interpretation activities focusing on artefacts would all add up to a fascinating experience for visitors from abroad. A boat excursion on James Bay is a spectacular experience. Boat captains would work closely with sea-kayak rental operators and with guides to ensure safe and appealing excursions. In addition, they would optimize their tourism offer by providing visitors with access to certain facilities on the islands.





## 04. Promote tourism services and activities revolving around traditional way of life and arts and crafts.

Tourists want to enjoy culture. They want to listen, learn, share, and take part. Cree arts and culture have a great deal to offer. The objective is to facilitate access to traditional activities through a broad range of workshops and tours that are exclusively focused on traditions.

A calendar of traditional activities will be posted on the [Escapelikeneverbefore.com](http://Escapelikeneverbefore.com) web site, on Facebook, and in the tourism office of each community, thereby allowing visitors to plan their days in advance and make appropriate reservations.





## 05. Create a master plan to improve access to the region and between communities.

The Billy Diamond Memorial Highway tourism route project will be presented to Tourisme Québec with due consideration for the geo-route and architectural signature projects. The project is a tribute to a key Native leader and positions the region favourably as a whole along with each community's attractions.

Concurrently, there is work to be done to improve signage and geo-referencing and to add services along the main roadway. Tourisme Québec's blue road panels are part of this optimization effort.

Feasibility studies will be launched with the aim of improving certain runways and thereby improve air transport. Talks with Air Creebec and La Macaza Airport will be undertaken to find a solution to develop charter flights in connection with tourism packages.

Efforts will also be made to validate the potential and feasibility of developing a water-shuttle between communities.





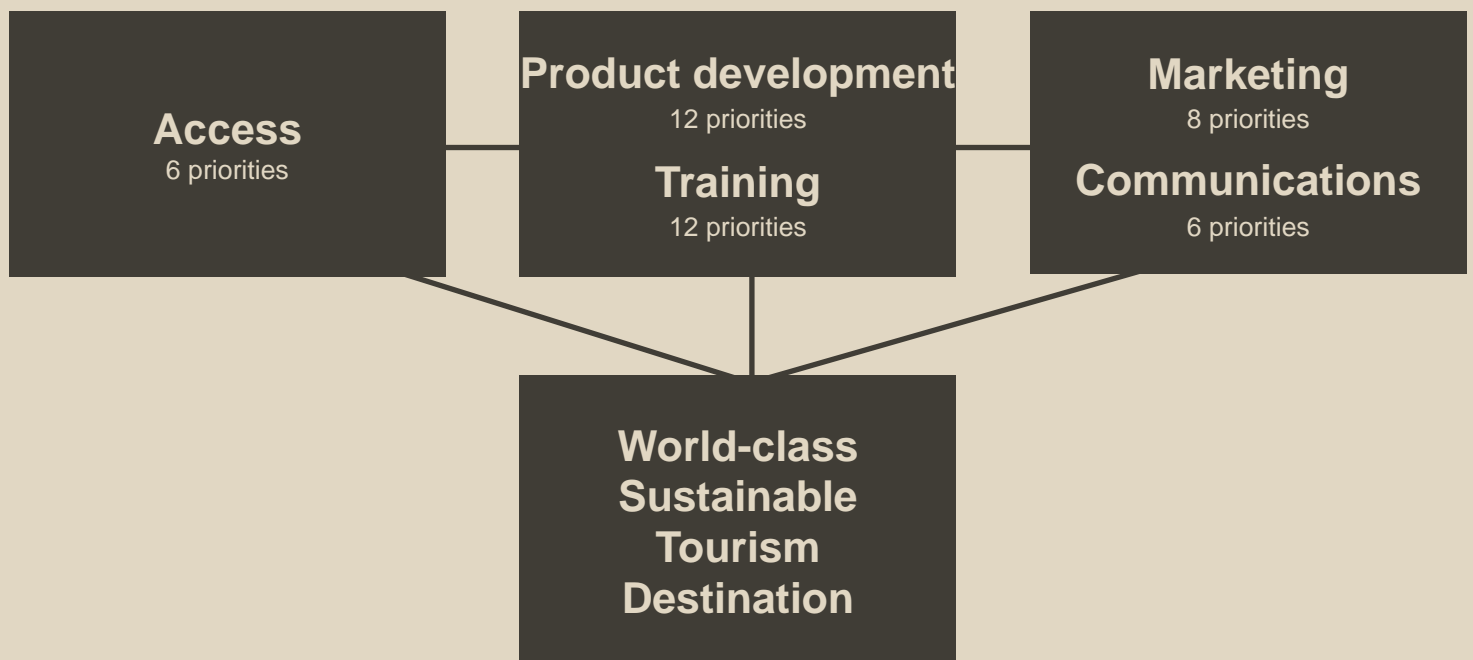
**06. An action plan has been developed on the basis of primary operational objectives to achieve the goals of the five-year strategic plan. Priorities will be determined shortly, and each future activity will have its own coordinator and partners (see representation table).**



# 2020-2025

## Vision, Strategic goals and action plan

1. Create three tourism hubs: Inland, Southern, and Northern Coastal to improve mobility throughout the region, facilitate distinctive promotional offers, and entice visitors to come back.
2. Foster Cree and Jamesian collaboration toward implementing a global strategy for tourism experiences and accommodations in EIBJ
3. Involve the Cree Nation and non-Native communities in the development of a UNESCO Network Global Geopark
4. Position Creetopia sites and Wiinipaakw boats tours as flagship products
5. Position tourism services centred on traditional way of life and art and crafts
6. Create a master plan for regional access



Eeyou Istchee  
Land & Ancestors  
Cree traditions  
People, history, wildlife and geological appeal

*Escape like never before*

# Access

## Specific goals for access

1. Billy Diamond Memorial Highway including a Geo Route.
2. Better signage: visual display for accommodations, and tourism attractions, sites of interest, and more.
3. Establish tourist charters with Air Creebec
4. Recognition of EIBJ as an outstanding snowmobiling destination. Completion of snowmobile trails from Lac-St-Jean and Abitibi and between southern communities connected to the Federated trail network.
5. Feasibility study for e-snowmobile charging stations.
6. Feasibility study for water shuttle between coastal communities.
7. Feasibility study for airstrip upgrades in some communities.





# Product development

## Specific goals for product development

1. UNESCO accreditation, development of specific Geo sites and Geo Route.
2. Geo science experiences in future Cree National Parks and other protected areas.
3. Creation of three one-week winter packages and three one-week summer packages for every tourism hub.
4. Journeys based on traditional way of life for employees of School Boards and Cree Board of Health (Off season).
5. Creetopia 5-year strategy.
6. Regional cuisine (boil-in-a-bag) with ITHQ and regional chefs.
7. Traditional visitor experiences in each community.
8. Inventory of Non-Timber-Forest-Products (NTFPs/PNFL) and implementation of picking activities.
9. Économusée implementation
10. Implementation of outdoor adventure activities.
11. Involve EIBJ Travel agency in developing packages.
12. Maintain and secure funding for a product development specialist.





# Training

## Specific goals for training

1. Training for quality, risk management, and safety.
2. Regional short- and long-term training in accordance with the various sets of expertise to be developed.
3. Promote existing post-secondary training programs for the next generation of adventure guides.
4. Hotel and restaurant training at Centre d'Études collégiales à Chibougamau.
5. Access to CQRHT and other Quebec programs.
6. Fund a position for a training coordinator.
7. Pilot projects involving future guides to work as assistant guides.
8. Ongoing support for Wiiniipaakw & existing organizations and outfitters.
9. Ongoing support for Écoleleader: Program and sustainable practices (FaunENord).
10. Formal agreement with specific programs and universities for co-research involving elders' knowledge and scientific know-how.
11. Partnerships with organizations, colleges, and universities, such as MOU with LERPA.
12. Access to funding programs.



# Marketing

## Specific goals for marketing

1. Architectural signature reflecting the two Nations and all 9 Cree communities through future Geo Route.
2. Calendars of traditional events and range of visitor experiences available on seasonal basis.
3. Update EIBJ web site with more Cree content.
4. Data collection method about visitors and their expectations.
5. Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and scoreboard to follow achievement of goals.
6. Tourism offices and services in each community.
7. Ambassadors' program to welcome tourists.
8. Secure and maintain funding for a marketing agent.





# Communications and sales

## Specific goals for communications

1. Internal communications channel to facilitate regional coordination.
2. Media-relationship strategy.
3. International journalist familiarization winter & summer.
4. Partnerships with specialized travel, culture, and adventure magazines.
5. Follow-up on articles as leverage for promotions.
6. Secure funding for a communications agent.





























# Choices made at the summer 2019 creativity workshop

1. What colours best suit your community
2. What animal best represent the land
3. Three words to describe your community
4. Representation of your land in three words

The results are the symbolic representation of communities and the land. These specific answers will be used to support the development of an architectural signature for Eeyou Istchee.



Name	Colors	Animal	Lan	Community
<b>Cree Nation of Waskaganish</b>			Beautiful Vast Peaceful	Culture Nature History
<b>Cree Nation of Wemindji</b>			Scenic Painted Hills Forest	Beautiful Friendly Rich tradition
<b>Cree Nation of Chisasibi</b>			Beautiful Healing Vast & providing	Friendly Beautiful Growing
<b>Oujé-Bougoumou Cree Nation</b>			Vast Authentic Connected	Beautiful Culture Nature
<b>Cree First Nation Of Waswanipi</b>			Community Land & rivers Nature	Language & Cree way of life Culture & sacred Water
<b>Cree Nation of Whapmagoostui</b>			Beautiful Cultural Pristine	Beautiful Cree culture Friendly

Name	Colors	Animal	Lan	Community
<b>Cree Nation of Nemaska</b>	 		Cree way of life Spiritual Peaceful	Beautiful Home Unity
<b>Cree Nation of Mistissini</b>	 		Vast Peaceful Abundance	Culture Lake Friendly
<b>Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association</b>	  		Culture Authenticity Vast land	Joyful Friendly Authentic
<b>Cree Nation Youth Council</b>	  		Healing Strength Peaceful	Strongly resilient Beautiful scenery Cree culture

# **World-class sustainable tourism destination**

To be recognized as a sustainable destination  
and to receive support from the Écoleader  
program.

**Eeyou Istchee  
Land and Ancestors  
Cree traditions  
Its people, history, wildlife, and  
outstanding  
geological beauty  
Escape like never before!**





# Thank you to our industry partners

**We are grateful to our industry partners for their input and collaboration:**

Members of Eeyou Istchee communities and tourism officers (Creativity workshop)  
COTA Board of Directors  
EIT Board of Directors  
Cree Trappers' Association  
Cree Nation Youth Council  
Cree Native Arts & Crafts Association  
Nibiischii Corporation  
FaunEnord  
Tourisme Baie-James  
Aventure-Écotourisme-Québec  
Fédération des Pourvoiries du Québec  
Tourisme Autochtone Québec

We wish to thank Ministère des Affaires municipales et de l'Habitation for its financial support under the Fonds d'appui au rayonnement des régions.

Québec 