



# Building Aboriginal Economies

## Redwood Meadows Golf and Country Club

# Excellence Par for the Course

by Richard Landis

**R**edwood Meadows Golf and Country Club has Tsuu T'ina First Nation seeing green — or greens that is.

Just a 20-minute ride from Alberta's Stampede city, Tsuu T'ina First Nation's world-class links have much to lure golf-crazy Calgarians. Opened more than 25 years ago, the golf course has become a major source of revenue for the First Nation.

The origins of that revenue date back to a 1940 brush fire that destroyed most of the area now known as Redwood Meadows. Following that fateful fire, Tsuu T'ina Nation Elders noticed that the regrowth of the poplar and spruce trees had a reddish colour to them. The Elders then called this area "Redwood Yard" and used the area for recreational purposes — primarily hunting and camping.

In the years that followed, the Tsuu T'ina Nation set out to improve its economic and social fortunes. By the early 1970s, they had started on an economic development project — an 18 hole championship golf course. They hired



Redwood Meadows has become a major source of revenue for the Tsuu T'ina First Nation.

respected golf course designers **Bill Newis** and **Stan Leonard**, and construction of the course began in 1973. The front nine holes of the course were completed in 1976; the back nine was opened for play two years later.

Over the past 26 years, Redwood Meadows has matured into a world-class golf course. Many great golfers have taken on the challenging par 72, 7000-yard course. All who've played here have been humbled by its natural beauty. When **Lee Trevino** played here in 1985, he suggested that Redwood Meadows was good enough to be included on the pro tour.

Today, the course — rated among the top five in Western Canada by both the Canadian and Alberta golf associations — continues to attract champions and recreational players alike. When weather permits, the course can accommodate up to 450 golfers over the course of a day. Revenue from membership fees, day players, the club's restaurant and banquet facilities now exceeds \$1 million yearly.

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## Tourism

Tourism is a rapidly developing sector of the economy — and Aboriginal entrepreneurs are drawing many visitors. With its obvious potential, industry analysts expect Aboriginal tourism to grow by leaps and bounds over the next decade.

Visit our Aboriginal success stories database at [www.ainc-inac.gc.ca](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca) (Click on "News Room").

# Business Grows to Meet Demand

by Diane Koven

**W**ith Yukon's growing tourism industry comes improved services for visitors.

Montana Services, located in Carcross at the junction of Tagish and Bennett Lakes, has just expanded and improved its RV park. The business, operated by the Carcross/Tagish First Nation Development Corporation, includes a convenience store, gas bar, restaurant and laundromat — making it a comfortable spot to stay. The park is fully enclosed and features a tenting area as well.

Thanks to a \$47,500 grant from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada — which the First Nation added to its own contribution of \$52,500 — and investment funds of \$90,000, the park has been expanded and updated just in time for this summer's tourist season. The previous 25 gravel stalls had only a small power source. The park now boasts 40 fully serviced RV stalls including water, sewer and electrical hook-ups of both 30 and 50 amps.

According to **Bill Forsythe**, General Manager of Carcross/Tagish Development Corporation, which owns Montana Services, the location is ideal. "We are located one hour south of Whitehorse and within an hour of several other locations," he said, "so we are looking for



Carcross/Tagish First Nation's Montana Services is luring visitors with their newly-improved facilities.

people to base themselves here and do short trips...this is a great place to come. It has water, mountains — it's a beautiful country."

**Ann-Marie McDonald** is the assistant manager of Montana Services. Originally from Watson Lake, and a member of the Liard First Nation, Ann-Marie is the company's first Aboriginal manager and it is her goal to train others to follow in her footsteps. "As a First Nation person, I like to show that we can run our own businesses and I am working hard at it." In the meantime, she is the "Jill of all Trades,"

living upstairs over the restaurant in order to be on call at all hours for problems with the furnace, the dryer or even the computer.

"We cater to both locals and tourists and we try to accommodate the needs of all. If we don't have something on the menu, we'll try to get it. In our store, we have a little bit of everything. We listen to what the tourists want and do our best to bring things in for them, things such as maps," said Ann-Marie.

Bill and Ann-Marie are both optimistic that the newly expanded and updated facilities will attract more tourists to Carcross. "We will be advertising in travel magazines in the North for next season," said Bill. "We see the market there and we see great things happening. Once we have a year under our belt, we will be looking at expanding, which will also enable us to add staff in the restaurant and convenience store."

To contact Montana Services, call 1-867-821-3216. ✨

## "Redwood Meadows Golf and Country Club"

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Redwood Meadows employs about 30 First Nation members and some of the club's profits are funneled back into the community for things like housing construction and social programs. The club has proved to be a boon to local golfers and First Nation members alike — so much so that the Tsuu T'ina have opened a second, nine-hole golf course, Buffalo Run.

"Players from around the world have been attracted to Redwood Meadows by word-of-mouth and by the natural beauty and tranquility of the course. We're very proud of what we've accomplished here and the lesson it has provided — that First Nations can compete successfully in a variety of enterprises," says **John Whitney**, Redwood Meadow's general manager.

For more information, visit the club's website at [www.redwoodmeadows.com](http://www.redwoodmeadows.com) ✨

# Cultural Encounters in Urban Oasis

by Tara Lee Wittchen

**I**n a few short years, the Turtle Island Tourism Company has made a name for itself.

It was named the *Best New Tourism Company/Product* at the 1999 Ottawa Tourism Awards and, in 2001, it received the *Best New Attraction* and *Best Developed Outdoor Site* awards for Ontario at the Attractions Canada Awards.

“What’s most rewarding,” shares **Trina Mather**, the president of the four-year old, Ottawa-based company, “is that we have a real opportunity to educate the general public a little bit about our culture, whether they are Canadians or international guests. We really hope people leave with a little bit of an understanding of our culture and traditions, and an appreciation for the fact that it’s a very rich and diverse history and it’s an evolving and growing culture.”

The name of the company was chosen to reflect the creation legend of Turtle Island, which tells of the turtle rising from the water with land on its back, to form what is now called North America.

“We chose Turtle Island as our name because, being from Ottawa, we have people from various Nations across Canada,” explains Trina. Staff at the company represent Algonquin, Ojibway, Cree and Mi’kmaq Nations, and they are hiring an Inuit throatsinger this summer. “We wanted something that represented all of our people from North America.”

The company was formed in partnership with the Odawa Native Friendship Centre, which provides office space, planning assistance and support. Turtle Island, in turn, helps the Centre meet some of its outreach and public education objectives.

“It’s been an excellent partnership on both ends. That was very important from the beginning to me, to ensure that

In the heart of the National Capital, the Turtle Island Tourism Company is introducing tourists to Aboriginal culture and history.



the business was community-based and supported, and that it gave back to the community. We started off by bringing together our cultural resources and taking them to external events like [Ottawa’s] Tulip Festival, Winterlude and the museums.”

In addition to outreach programs, Turtle Island offers a unique urban tourism experience with its *Aboriginal Experiences* site, a vibrant Aboriginal village. It’s located on Victoria Island — a traditional gathering place for First Nations people for thousands of years.

Tour packages offer guided tours of the village, a buffet of traditional First Nations fare, dance demonstrations, and much more. Custom packages — such as a guided medicine walk in the Gatineau

Hills, overnight tipi stays and combination deals with the Canadian Museum of Civilization — are also available.

But what’s more important than Turtle Island’s awards is the feedback the company gets from its visitors.

Trina reads a message she’s just received from a school group. “It says, ‘The highlight of their trip. Thank you for providing such a great experience. The students learned more than they ever did in the classroom.’ And we get those every day.”

For more information, call 1-877-811-3233 or visit [www.aboriginalexperiences.com](http://www.aboriginalexperiences.com) \*

**Tara Lee Wittchen is a writer and editor of Ojibway and European heritage.**



# Haida Gwaii Offers Memorable Stay

by Raymond Lawrence

Imagine the thrill of paddling a traditional Haida canoe across the waters of a picturesque bay at Haida Gwaii — Queen Charlotte Islands, B.C. — with its towering cedars and rugged, misty shorelines.

Further colour the experience with grey whale, orca, porpoise, and bald eagles, just to name a few wildlife species that make for an exceptional adventure. On Haida Gwaii, the northernmost rainforest on earth, tourism is developing steadily but with care — and Haida Gwaii Eco Tours and Lodging is one of the earliest Aboriginal-owned eco tourism and lodging businesses on the Island.

In 1982, local motel and hotel operators noted that business people often had a long wait for their ferry and suggested that **Louis Waters** put his boat to use in tourism. “I try to help connect people to the environment and teach people to be observant of the world around them,” he says. “I do this for the love of it because this place is something special I can share with other people. The islands are magical and this is one of the most beautiful places in the world. People come for the cultural and environmental connection and to just relax.”



Louis, who is Métis, has strong ties to the Haida community. Haida hereditary Chief Skedans, now 89 years old and very active in the community, adopted Louis’ wife Joy and their children at a traditional adoption potlatch in 1994.

Louis specializes in instructional tours where people reconnect to the environment and learn more about the First Nations people and how they live in harmony with the land. “In a canoe you get away from motors and noise, and it doesn’t harm the environment. Out on the water, it’s just you and the paddles cutting into the water,” says Louis, who uses two 5.5-metre Haida canoes that were constructed by master Haida carver **Christian White**, of Massett, B.C. The quiet allows guests to see more wildlife than they would in a powerboat.

Five years after launching his business, Louis and Joy opened a lodge with five large bedrooms, four baths, a Jacuzzi, full kitchen facilities, and spacious living quarters. “We take care of guests from the moment they arrive, treating them like a part of our family,” he says. That includes bringing people to his island home for meals of smoked salmon, halibut, venison, bannock, edible seaweed, and potatoes. In this home-like atmosphere, guests become fast friends.

To assure their guests of a safe and enjoyable visit, Louis and his guide **Patrick Provost** have many provincial and federal certificates. They are Coast Guard approved, have safety and first aid training, and are registered professional guides. Tourism British Columbia has also recognized Haida Gwaii Eco Tours and Lodgings as an *Approved Accommodation* and has named it a *SuperHost Business*.

To book your own life-affirming experience, call 1-877-559-8333 or visit [www.gwaiiecotours.com](http://www.gwaiiecotours.com) \*

*Raymond Lawrence is a freelance writer of Ojibway and European ancestry.*



Louis Waters and Haida Gwaii Eco Tours guide guests through the haunting beauty of the Queen Charlotte Islands.



Photo credit: Joy Waters

# Visitors Guided into Natural World

**S**urrounded by the Canadian sub-Arctic, in a community steeped in Aboriginal culture, the Cree Village EcoLodge offers visitors a unique escape.

Located at Moose Factory, Ont., an island community between the shores of Moose River, the lodge employs 29 people — all but one of whom are First Nations people. While a large number of groups invested in building the facility, the MoCreebec Council of the Cree Nation contributed its own equity and managed the development of the \$7-million lodge.

“The people around here are very proud of their accomplishments,” said **Randy Kapashesit**, Chief of the MoCreebec Council of the Cree Nation and the Chief Executive Officer for the Cree EcoLodge. “To see people’s ideas come together in a way that leads to success has been a positive experience for the Cree people.”

Resort activities include bird watching, summer and winter camping, whale sighting, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, star gazing, nature tours, river tours, kayaking, canoeing and cultural tours.

The EcoLodge’s design and furnishings reflect traditional Cree values. Chairs, couches, tables — even the window blinds — are made of natural woods. Carpeting and blankets are 100 percent organic wool, while wall treatments, mattresses, pillows, and linens are 100 percent organic cotton. Organic vegetable-based soaps, shampoos and conditioners are found in every room. Four of the rooms feature composting toilets which use no water, produce no odours and require no chemical treatments. Even the paint, sparingly used, is a special low-gas emission formula. Guests with allergies and chemical sensitivities will love this place.

The soaring Shabotowan Great Hall, designed after a traditional Cree dwelling, provides dining for 66 and

serves seasonally available Aboriginal food such as wild rice, berries and maple syrup.

For professionals looking for the inspiration of a very special setting, the EcoLodge provides meeting facilities for business retreats. Audio-visual equipment and in-room modem connections are all available.

Tidewater Provincial Park is less than a mile away. The saltwater of James Bay, where seals and beluga whales are common, is a short boat ride from the lodge. Local river systems abound with fish and wildlife including moose, otter, beaver and caribou, pike and trout, geese, eagles, and many other birds. Bird watchers love the internationally recognized Shipsand Island Bird Sanctuary, located nearby.

Canoes and kayaks make for quiet travel in the summer. Skis and snowshoes are enjoyable modes of travel in the winter. For deep-bush adventures, the EcoLodge can customize trips that include Cree guides, motorized freighter canoes, snow machines, helicopters or float planes. A year-round path circles most of the island. Bicycles are an easy way to tour Moose Factory. Historic buildings, artifacts and a museum of the fur trade — established here in 1673 by Hudson Bay Company — are a short walk from the EcoLodge.

For more information, contact the Cree Village EcoLodge toll free at 1-888-Creeway. ✨



Cree Village EcoLodge is designed for people who love and respect nature. Pictured from top are: a waterfront view of the EcoLodge; the dining room; and EcoLodge CEO Randy Kapashesit.

## Jackfish Lodge

# Resort gets into the Swing of Things

**A**ctors, politicians and professional athletes are just some of the guests who've been hooked by Jackfish Lodge Golf and Conference Centre.

The full-service hotel, owned by the Battlefords Tribal Council (BTC) and its seven member First Nations, is located in the scenic Battlefords Provincial Park, along Jackfish Lake, in Saskatchewan.

It's a full-service facility with 58 rooms, satellite television, four meeting rooms, licensed dining, a lounge and a championship golf course.

**Corinne Bernier**, BTC's Public Relations Advisor, says the lodge can accommodate as many as 300 guests, making it a popular place for everything from meetings and retreats to family reunions and weddings.

But she advises tourists to book early if they're planning on visiting during peak season — June to September — because rooms fill up fast.

"I tried to book my wedding here in August and that was three months ago, and I couldn't get in," jokes Corinne.

In addition, Jackfish Lodge has an 18-hole golf course, which is popular not only with tourists, but wildlife as well.

"We have deer on the golf course just about every day and beavers in the dam by hole 12," says **Kevin Poock**, BTC's Manager of Corporate and Economic Development.

In fact, the wildlife are contributing to the success of the lodge by making it a popular destination for outfitters and American hunters.

Kevin adds there are plenty of other activities including hiking or cycling. Visitors come from all over North America, but some of the biggest customers are Saskatchewan First Nations, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, and various tribal councils. Kevin says Alberta tourists are quickly becoming key players in Jackfish Lodge's success.

"We get a lot of tour buses out of Alberta where they do a 'golf, stay and play,'" he says.

Kevin notes that of all its successes, the most important is that the lodge provides jobs for First Nations people. They employ about 75 people at peak season, including front desk clerks, housekeepers, cooks, food and beverage servers, dishwashers and equipment operators. With a payroll of between \$500,000 to \$600,000, BTC is proud that 50 to 60 percent of Jackfish Lodge's jobs are filled by First Nations members.

"BTC's holdings are getting more diverse all the time. We're into tourism; we've got commercial properties; we have a construction company; we're into oil and gas. Really, it all comes down to job creation for First Nations people," says Kevin. ★

*(This article is excerpted from Seeds of Success, a publication produced by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations in partnership with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Saskatchewan Region.)*



Jackfish Lodge offers golfing, hiking, cycling and more.





# High-Arctic Adventure, Hassle Free

by Raymond Lawrence

**W**hen you arrive at your Arctic destination, the last thing you want to do is run around looking for services or equipment.

Unwinding and getting away from the noise and confusion of the city may be one of your reasons for going North, however, considering the costs alone, your time is precious. Organization is critical to a successful adventure and South Camp Inn — situated in Resolute among Nunavut's northern reaches — is there to ensure that your stay is everything you wanted it to be and more.

Husband and wife, **Aziz Kheraj** and **Aleesuk Idlout** — who is Inuit and the majority shareholder — guarantee their guests' visits meet all expectations.

The Inn, built by the couple's own construction company, came about in response to a business necessity — approved accommodations were required to access government construction opportunities.

From the moment your plane lands, South Camp Inn aims to be a one-stop destination. "We cater to all your needs from start to finish. If you want something then we'll get it for you," says Aziz. South Camp Inn and its outfitting service have 12 ATVs, 15 snowmobiles, two compressors for the diving enthusiast, dog sleds, trucks, and a variety of outdoor gear. The use of an ATV or snowmobile is included in their accommodation package. And if a client wants a service or tour not offered by the Inn, they will arrange with other local outfitters to meet the need.



South Camp Inn aims to be a one-stop destination for its clients, a gateway to the High Arctic.



The Inn has 25 rooms and three equipped suites — all come with high-speed Internet access. "We've learned how to improve and build on our services," says Aziz of their four years in the highly-competitive market. "In the hotel industry you have to be very people-oriented so we cater to whatever you as a guest want to do. Ultimately, we want every client to leave with good feelings and memories of the North. People realize how pristine and clean our environment is and they go back home with a feeling of life in the open country."

With two professional chefs, the Inn is able to offer first-class dining with Canadian cooking, and, of course traditional foods. They'll also tailor their menu to suit the tastes of different tour groups.

Their clientele includes people on government business, mining and exploration, or tour and adventure excursions. Tourists tend toward sight-seeing and day

adventures that allow them a chance to savour the spectacular surroundings — icebergs, glaciers, and abundant wildlife. Adventurers, on the other hand, strap on scuba gear and dive beneath the ice, travel for days on dog-sleds, and scale ice-capped mountains. "When our guests go out on the land, they're cut off from other people except for emergency communications," Aziz says. And while the Arctic redefines "getting away from it all," the Inn provides the equipment and knowledge that allows guests to maximize the experience.

To book an Arctic experience in Resolute, call 1-867-252-3737 or visit [www.southcampinn.com](http://www.southcampinn.com) \*

## Tin Wis Resort

# Partnership Results in Jobs and Profits

**A**t a cove called Tin Wis, just south of Tofino, B.C., a former residential school has been reborn as a posh resort.

The Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council has converted the site into the Best Western Tin Wis Resort Lodge, one of the most successful First Nations tourism operations in Canada.

The resort — whose name means “calm waters” — overlooks a stretch of the Pacific Ocean where, each spring, there’s a massive northerly migration of Pacific Gray whales. Nuu-chah-nulth whalers once used this spot as a safe haven from the storms that frequently lash this coastline.

Tin Wis is owned and operated by the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation. With the resort’s recent expansion, it is estimated that approximately \$3 million in revenues will be generated this year.

**George Atleo**, who has been the assistant manager since the 1994 opening, believes that “working hand-in-hand with Best Western has been not only good for us, but good for them.”

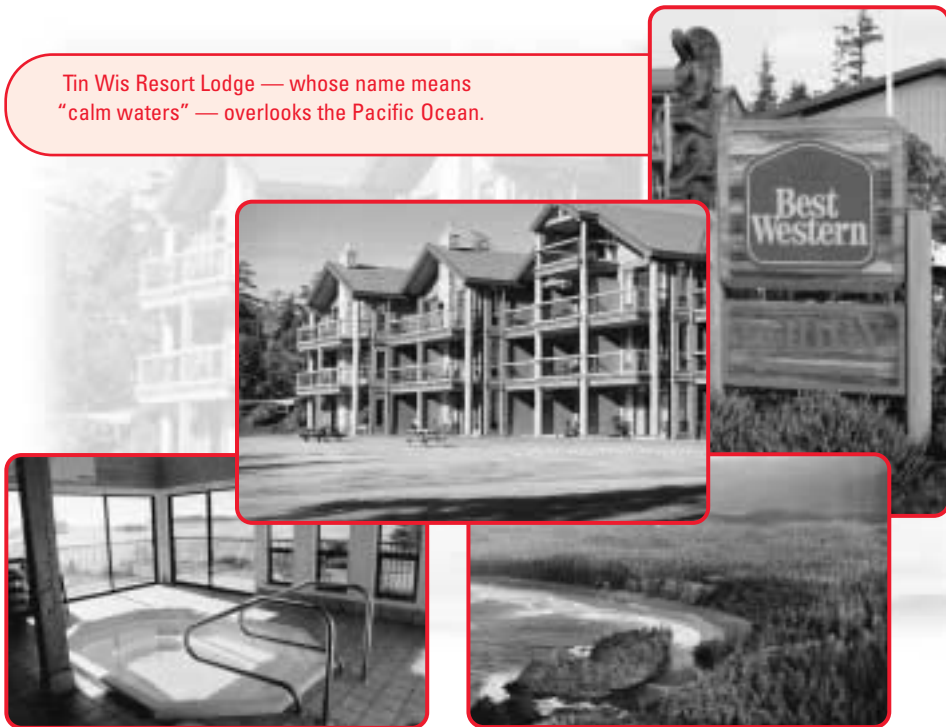
There were those, however, who doubted that such a partnership could have been successful.

The first step in the process was acquiring the necessary capital to build the resort. This was a challenge given that the property, which has had reserve status since 1991, could not be used as collateral.

**Howard Tom**, Chair of the Tin Wis Board of Directors, explains that, “this is Crown land and no bank would touch us for security reasons.”

That’s when the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council, a 14-nation association of which the Tla-o-qui-aht are members, stepped in. The Council’s economic development corporation’s pension fund provided the investment capital, and allowed the partnership with Best Western.

Tin Wis Resort Lodge — whose name means “calm waters” — overlooks the Pacific Ocean.



Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation members point to their strong tribal governance as the key factor for the successful association with the multinational hotel chain. Best Western, in turn, provides the resort with global marketing and operational expertise. This unique partnership embraced the idea of presenting Nuu-chah-nulth storytelling programs, art exhibits, and adding Aboriginal foods to the menu. Most of the visitors to the resort have expressed an interest in experiencing more Nuu-chah-nulth culture.

Not only has the revenue been a boon to this First Nation community, but the jobs and experience the resort provides have been invaluable. Coming out of high school or other training programs, First Nation members have been employed in sales, marketing or front desk work. About 70 per cent of the summer season staff are First Nation members. With the experience they’ve gained, some of them return to school for management training. Those who come strictly for summer work use

their earnings to go back to university or college or to pursue other personal dreams.

Building on the resort’s success, the First Nation’s future development plans include a marine services booking facility and a tree farm.

For more information about the Tin Wis Resort, call 1-800-661-9995 or visit [www.tinwis.com](http://www.tinwis.com) \*

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