



Secret Beach Marina



Chief Anne Mack,
Toquaht Nation



Anacla-Bamfield Trail



Caycuse Recreation Site

TRENDS WE'RE SEEING: INDIGENOUS TOURISM HUBS

Vancouver Island has experienced unprecedented tourism growth in recent years. While much of this impact has been felt in high profile destinations such as Tofino, Ucluelet and Parksville, coastal indigenous experiences are the fastest growing segment of the market.

Indigenous communities across Vancouver Island - and in particular, those in small, remote communities - are developing tourism infrastructure and complementary strategic ventures that leverage the growing Indigenous tourism market, keep visitors in the region longer, and create new economic opportunities as visitors travel further afield.

“Our strategic plan emphasizes tourism dispersion both geographically and in time of the year, and Indigenous tourism fits perfectly into both of those categories,” explained Calum Matthews, Director of Destination Development for Tourism Vancouver Island. “Investments in Indigenous communities are allowing them

to develop and market their own unique brand of tourism, fueling growth and meeting market demand.”

Championing this trend are the Huu-ay-aht First Nation, who in recent years, expanded their business portfolio to include a motel, café, market, pub, fishing lodge and tour guiding businesses, as well as a marina and airstrip to build out their tourism economy.

These acquisitions execute upon the Huu-ay-aht’s cultural tourism plan, inked in 2016, which aspires to transform the remote village into a thriving tourism hub.

In 2018, with ICET support, the Nation established a walking trail which facilitates movement between Anacla and Bamfield, and provides access to the ancient village site Kiix?in. There, visitors can learn about the Nation’s history and cultural importance of the archeological site through interpretive panels, or guided tours.

Together with the auxiliary businesses, the **Anacla-Bamfield Trail** is an integral piece of the cultural tourism strategy – the development of a centerpiece cultural experience with traditional meals, historical storytelling, and other cultural entertainment in a natural setting.

As the Huu-ay-aht expand their tourism offering, another ICET supported project will provide enterprise level connectivity to Huu-ay-aht owned businesses, placing them on a level playing field within the global tourism marketplace.

“We are focused on attracting international tourism and competing in a modern economy,” explains Chief Councillor Robert J. Dennis Sr. “High-speed internet will connect us to people and communities beyond our territory, and it will put Huu-ay-aht and Bamfield on the map.”

Near Ucluelet, the Toquaht Nation own and operate a number of forestry-related

businesses, however increasing tourism activity around marine recreation is opening new doors. In 2019, the Toquaht Nation constructed a new **marina development** at Secret Beach with funding support from ICET.

A prized location by sea kayakers for its access to the Broken Group Islands, the marina is the first phase of the Toquaht Nation’s development of a tourism hub, that will eventually include a common building, café and giftshop, kayak comfort station and other tourism infrastructure to complement the marina and campground.

The Toquaht - like other Indigenous communities looking to tourism as an adjunct to their economies - are using the opportunity to share their culture and history with visitors.

“We are a small nation, and a small community,” explains Noah Plonka, Business Development Manager for the Toquaht First

Nation. “We are developing rental cabins, and have dreams for other businesses down the road, but the marina really is the first step”

At Nitinaht Lake – actually a saltwater fjord – the Ditidaht First Nation are seeking to unleash the tourism potential of a kiteboarding destination known for its steady, reliable winds. The site is also a new, formalized entrance to the West Coast Trail.

The Ditidaht aim to leverage these recognized tourism assets to develop new tourism amenities and attract new visitor markets.

In 2018, the Nation secured a license to operate the existing campground at Nitinaht Lake. As the primary source of accommodation in the area, financial support from ICET will help expand the campground into a fully realized **recreation site**, with additional campsites, RV sites, beach access and a trail to the Looper Creek Canyon.

The canyon – a spectacular scenic gorge made of limestone karsts – is just one of the

new recreation amenities that the Nation hopes will draw broader, family-based visitor markets to the region.

“We are already on the radar of a very niche group of outdoor enthusiasts,” explained Brian Cofksy, Executive Director of the Ditidaht Development Corporation. “But there is potential to tap into greater tourism markets that will reveal our true potential as a destination.”

While the Looper Creek Trail, and access to the West Coast Trail, are anticipated to drive new tourism markets, it is the campground which will enable the Ditidaht to capture that growth in the coming years. This, in turn, creates new opportunities for new complementary services such as watersport rentals, guided hikes and canoe trips as well as the development of new tourism amenities, transforming the region into a new tourism destination.