



# EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES: THE ROLE OF NATIVE TOURISM IN MONTANA'S ECONOMY

*SUBMITTED BY: MONTANA INDIGENOUS TOURISM ALLIANCE (MITA)*

## RESEARCH PURPOSE & FUNDING SOURCE

Montana's vibrant Indigenous cultures, rich histories, and unique experiences continue to attract visitors from across the country and around the world. However, the true economic impact of Native American tourism within the state remains unmeasured. To address this gap, the Montana Indigenous Tourism Alliance submitted a proposal during the Fall 2025 annual project call, requesting the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) to lead a comprehensive study, **funded through Montana's Lodging Tax**, to better understand and quantify the value of Native tourism in Montana.

**COST TO TRIBES: \$0**

**INVESTMENT OF TRIBES: TIME AND INPUT**

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: TRIBAL MEETING INVITES TO SHARE RESEARCH AND GAIN FEEDBACK**

## PROJECT GOALS

This research aims to measure the economic impact of Native tourism in Montana by focusing on visitor spending at 4 to 5 unique Native-hosted events across the state. These events will be selected through input from key stakeholders and tribal partners. The primary goal is to generate meaningful data that highlights the value Native tourism brings to the state's economy and provides insights into visitor behavior, who attends, why they come, how much they spend, and what they value in these cultural experiences.

## HOW THE STUDY IS CONDUCTED

The study will be led by the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) and follows a standardized, proven survey method. Each selected event will have an on-site visitor survey, designed with a consistent five-section format that includes:

### 1. VISITOR ORIGIN & TRIP PURPOSE

Identifies where visitors come from, why they are attending, and the length of their stay.

### 2. SPENDING PATTERNS

Captures how much non-local visitors spend in the host community, covering categories like lodging, food, fuel, and shopping.

### 3. DEMOGRAPHICS

Gathers information on age, gender, income, and other basic characteristics of event attendees.

### 4. TRIP PLANNING & SATISFACTION

Explores how visitors learned about the event, what influenced their decision to attend, and their satisfaction with various aspects of the experience.

### 5. OPEN-ENDED FEEDBACK

Provides space for visitors to share comments and suggestions in their own words.

## DELIVERABLES

After data collection, ITRR will analyze the results and produce a report for each event. The final outcomes will offer valuable insights for tribal leaders, community planners, and policymakers to support and grow Native tourism in a sustainable, culturally respectful way.

### TIMELINE

Phase	Duration	Target Dates
Literature Review & Planning	1 month	July 2025
Stakeholder Engagement & IRB	4 months	Aug-Nov 2025
Data Collection	12 months	Dec 2025-Aug 2026
Data Analysis	1.5 months	September 2026
Report Drafting & Review	1 month	October 2026
Final Report Submission	—	December 2026

**Who is ITRR?** We are the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, otherwise known as ITRR. Established in 1987 at the University of Montana's W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation, serving as Montana's trusted research arm for the tourism and recreation industries. Our mission is to conduct rigorous and impartial research that empowers the tourism and recreation industries in Montana to make informed decisions in planning, marketing, policy, and management.

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