

sustainability and the environment. Particular Canadian priorities are strengthening the Arctic Council, a forum that includes six Indigenous organizations and the eight Arctic states, and establishing a University of the Arctic.

### A growing awareness

Aboriginal culture, languages and artistic expression play a central role in Canada's vibrant society—and in putting this country on the map in many areas of endeavour. Aboriginal artists who have garnered acclaim far afield include musicians Robbie Robertson and Susan Aglukark, conductor and composer John Kim Bell, painter Norval Morrisseau and sculptor Susan Point, whose carving *The Beaver and the Mink* has been donated by Canada to the Smithsonian Institution's new National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. (see p. 20).

Among Aboriginal youth, no one can top Jordin Tootoo, the first Inuk athlete to be drafted into the National Hockey League. A member of the league's Nashville Predators, he is the biggest sports star ever to come out of the Canadian North.

A great deal of effort is going toward strengthening the cultures, languages and traditional ways of Aboriginal people with a view to fostering pride, identity and stronger communities. In 1999, for example, the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network became the world's first nationally televised network to offer programming for, by and about Indigenous people. It is currently available to nine million Canadian households.



photo: courtesy of INAC

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Throughout the UN Decade, Canada has celebrated the International Day of the World's Indigenous People every year on August 9 and National Aboriginal Day on June 21, with themes and activities that promote greater international understanding of Indigenous issues and the contributions made by Aboriginal people to Canadian society. Each spring the National Aboriginal Achievement Awards recognize the career achievements of Aboriginal professionals in a gala show designed to build self-esteem among the Aboriginal community and provide role models for youth. There are also similar regional events, such as the Manitoba Aboriginal Youth Achievement Awards.

### Looking forward

One route to improving economic sustainability is tourism, which is proving increasingly attractive as Aboriginal people look for new commercial and job-creation opportunities. There is especially potential for Aboriginal "cultural" tourism, through which Aboriginal people can share various aspects of their customs, traditions and arts as well as their relationship to the land.

"There is significant market demand for cultural tourism, and this can be translated into real business opportunities for Aboriginal people in Canada and Indigenous people around the world," says Barry Parker, the national tourism advisor for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and a member of the Okanagan First Nation.

"At the same time, it is a platform from which people can enhance, sustain, strengthen and protect their cultures," he says, as long as Aboriginal tourism is developed "with dignity and respect for cultures, communities and the environment."

Much is needed for tourism to fully emerge as a sustainable component of the Aboriginal economy. Aboriginal Tourism Canada, a national organization, is working with provincial counterparts, federal, provincial and territorial departments and the balance of the tourism industry, as well as Aboriginal groups, to develop a business plan to ensure growth for the benefit of future generations.

There is much to learn from Canada's Aboriginal history, by taking part in traditional activities, witnessing great art and learning the stories and legends that have been passed down through generations. Perhaps nowhere is this feeling of past and present, of hope and struggle, and of powerful connections with the land more intense than on the cliffs of Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump.

There, the winds seem to carry the haunting voices of a civilization that continues to call out today for understanding, support and recognition and speaks of the need to work—both at home and around the world—to fulfill the promise of a better future for those who came before. ♣

## Global Connections

Aboriginal people in Canada are increasingly using technology to connect with each other—and the world. There are myriad programs, resources, Web sites and other high-tech tools that provide information, educational resources and trade links for and about Aboriginal people in Canada and abroad.

First Nations students in small or remote communities can connect to a world of learning opportunities through First Nations SchoolNet ([www.schoolnet.ca/aboriginal](http://www.schoolnet.ca/aboriginal)), an Industry Canada program delivered to schools by First Nations organizations. Students can use the Internet to do research and develop computer skills, while schools with high-speed connections can offer additional learning tools such as video conferencing and on-line courses.

"Distance learning helps give people in these small, remote communities the same kind of chances that a person in the city might have," says Randy Johns, manager of the Keewatin Career Development Corporation, which provides the service to schools in Saskatchewan and Alberta.

The Aboriginal Canada Portal ([www.aboriginal-autochtones.gc.ca](http://www.aboriginal-autochtones.gc.ca)), a partnership between the Government of Canada and six national Aboriginal organizations, is a "single window" for on-line resources, contacts, programs and services such as culture, education and health. It includes Aboriginal associations, businesses, bands, community groups and news, as well as nine federal government departments with Aboriginal mandates, provincial governments and organizations, and Indigenous organizations all over the world.

"This is more than technology, it's bringing people together," says portal manager France Beauvais, adding that the Canadian site is being looked at as a model by other countries with Indigenous populations including Brazil, Chile and Mexico. "It would be good to have a global portal where all countries can link together, share ideas and best practices."

International news is especially the focus of Aboriginal Planet ([www.international.gc.ca/aboriginalplanet](http://www.international.gc.ca/aboriginalplanet)), a monthly on-line publication offered by Foreign Affairs Canada that includes stories on Canadian Aboriginal activities around the world and international Aboriginal events in Canada.

For those in international business, the Virtual Aboriginal Trade Show or VATS ([www.vats.ca](http://www.vats.ca)) is a Web site designed to promote export-ready Aboriginal products and services across Canada and around the world. VATS showcases Aboriginal firms operating in arts and culture, agriculture and agri-food, environment and natural resources and other sectors. Aboriginal businesses in Canada can register on the site, which is offered in a number of languages for international audiences.



photo: CP (Mark Humphrey)

Star in the North: (left to right) Victor Tootoo and Tara Tootoo of Rankin Inlet, Nunavut, watch their cousin, Jordin Tootoo, warm up before a game with the NHL's Nashville Predators last season.