

NEMIAH VALLEY LODGE

HOW A FIRST NATION LAUNCHED A SUCCESSFUL TOURISM BUSINESS

Located on the traditional territories of the Xeni Gwet'in First Nation, in the Chilcotin region of Central British Columbia, Nemiah Valley Lodge—owned by the Xeni Gwet'in Peoples—is renowned for practicing sustainable tourism and celebrating Indigenous heritage. The journey to reaching its current success required patience, commitment, and a vision of building capacity within the community.

PROJECT CONSIDERATIONS

The Xeni Gwet'in purchased the lodge (formerly called Elkin Creek Guest Ranch) in 2019, and spent several years renovating, rebranding, and developing engaging tourism experiences. To aid with these improvements, the nation also received funding from the Province of B.C.'s Community Economic Recovery Infrastructure Program in 2021. This process came with several key considerations as the First Nation required a strategic, thoughtful approach to designing authentic experiences that respected cultural and environmental values. Additionally, these experiences wanted to appeal to a diverse global audience and the project involved multiple components that required time and patience.



NEMIAH VALLEY | Photo: Michael Bednar



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PROJECT APPROACH

The Xeni Gwet'in People recognized the value and opportunity in creating a cultural tourism destination and helping visitors learn about the stories of their history on the land, traditions, and culture. They made a commitment to do so authentically, in a way that would benefit their local economy and community.

Renovations focused on cultivating an inviting, comfortable space that elevated Indigenous art, craft, and culture, and allotted appropriate time to get it right the first time. The lodge team hired and trained members of the Xeni Gwet'in First Nation to fill vacant jobs; they also worked with First Nation members to develop experiences at the lodge and in the surrounding area, focusing on cultural and outdoor offerings such as fishing, mountain biking, visiting a traditional village, and more.

Finally, with an eye towards integrating Xeni Gwet'in culture into every aspect of the lodge experience, the team created an Indigenous-inspired menu featuring traditional and local items including freshly caught fish, roasted root vegetables, and fire-cooked bannock.





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PROJECT RESULTS

Nemiah Valley Lodge reopened in June 2022, as the first Indigenous-led tourism venture on T̓silhqot̓'in title lands, and has already seen an influx of return visitors. It has hosted a number of notable guests, including the Sámi delegation from Sweden, the Premier of British Columbia, and ministers from various governments. It has also received interest from corporate groups, First Nations groups, and organizers of health retreats.

Local and international interest in the lodge has inspired the team to expand its offerings—including a new meeting facility accommodating up to 60 people, which will debut in 2024.

The success of the Nemiah Valley Lodge rebranding and renovations demonstrates the value and opportunity for Indigenous-owned and run tourism experiences. Not only does such an endeavour benefit the community and wider region both financially and culturally, it can also align with the Xeni Gwet̓'in First Nation's cultural and environmental values.



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