

GUIDELINES FOR GOOD VISITOR ETIQUETTE IN U.S. INDIGENOUS
COMMUNITIES

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NORTH  DAKOTA
NATIVE
TOURISM
ALLIANCE

Representing the five tribes of North Dakota. Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Nation, Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, Spirit Lake Nation, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa

GUIDELINES FOR GOOD VISITOR ETIQUETTE

1. GUIDELINE 1: ACCESS TO TRIBAL LANDS

1.1 Access

Tribes have the authority to Tribal sovereignty dictates that each tribe can determine who can visit tribal lands and how to enter. It is important to be aware of these regulations and any information that may impact accessibility.

- 1.1.1 Prior to your trip, look on the official tribal website for any information on entry requirements.
- 1.1.2 Remember you are a guest on sovereign land; so be attentive to signage and obey any tribal laws and regulations.

1.2 Privacy

Ownership of tribal lands can be complex; visitors may need permission to access areas of the community.

- 1.2.1 Respect the privacy and customs of residential communities; please enter land and homes by invitation only.
- 1.2.2 Observe quiet hours for the benefit of the local residents.

1.3 Stay on tracks provided

Many roads and trails on tribal lands are not paved and may not be well marked.

- 1.3.1 Avoid getting lost or eroding the infrastructure by staying on established routes when walking, riding or driving, unless accompanied by a locally sanctioned guide.
- 1.3.2 Do not rock climb, off-trail hike, go off-road or camp unless otherwise stated.

1.4 Off-limit locations

There may be local regulations in place restricting visitor access to culturally or ecologically sensitive areas on tribal lands.

- 1.4.1 Do not enter any areas that are marked off-limits, or that you have been told are off-limits. If in doubt, ask a representative of the tribal government.
- 1.4.2 Do not map out tribal lands using geographic data you've collected; this includes plotting points of interest to online maps

1.5 Sacred sites and artifacts

Certain behavior is expected at cultural sites to respect their sacred nature and preserve the history.

- 1.5.1 Respect our traditions by not entering burial grounds, offering sites or sacred ceremonies that are not open to the public.
- 1.5.2 Do not mark or deface any rock art or sacred sites.

2 GUIDELINE 2: PERSONAL BEHAVIOR

2.1 Photography, recording, filming and sketching

Regulations around reproductions may be in place to avoid cultural and commercial exploitation of tribal members and their traditions.

- 2.1.1 Ask permission before photographing, videotaping, sketching or audiotape recording an individual, an event, an artwork or activity.
- 2.1.2 Do not take photographs inside sacred places, including churches, unless permission has been explicitly granted
- 2.1.3 Do not use photographs for commercial purposes unless permission has been explicitly granted by tribal officials.

2.2 Appropriate dress

While being cognizant of weather and environment, also be advised that some tribal communities and/or cultural activities may call for modest dress as a sign of respect.

- 2.2.1 Dress modestly: do not wear short shorts or skirts, or other revealing clothing as this could be considered offensive.
- 2.2.2 Dress comfortably and casually unless advised otherwise.

2.3 Natural resources

Mother earth is sacred across tribal cultures, care for natural resources has environmental but also spiritual importance.

- 2.3.1 Do not litter on tribal land; nature is considered sacred.
- 2.3.2 Reduce your water and energy use whenever possible.

2.4 Behavior at cultural activities

Ceremonies and cultural events are usually dictated by traditional ways, some of which may be private. If you are invited to attend a cultural event, it is important to approach these activities with humility and respect following the protocol demonstrated by the community members in attendance.

- 2.4.1 Check if visitors are welcome before attending an event or dance as not all ceremonies are open to the public.
- 2.4.2 Do not join a tribal dance unless invited to do so as some tribal dances are considered religious ceremonies.

2.5 Social structure

Most tribes have social protocols when elders, veterans, elected officials and other community leaders are present given their highly respected status.

- 2.5.1 Be polite and attentive when speaking to elders, veterans, and elected officials.
- 2.5.2 Give Elders the right of way and preferred seating
- 2.5.3 Serve Elders first at meal times

2.6 Eye contact and gestures

Some tribes have particular etiquette about eye contact, gestures, and personal space that defines respectful interactions.

- 2.6.1 Respect local preference for personal space: do not touch someone you've just met unless they have initiated contact first.
- 2.6.2 Do not force prolonged eye contact as it is not appropriate to do so in many Native communities.

2.7 Food & beverages

Some tribes have particular meal-time etiquette as well as certain prohibitions, like alcohol, that you should be aware of.

- 2.7.1 Wait for a prayer or grace to be spoken before eating a meal
- 2.7.2 Accept food or drink that is offered to you, even if you eat only a little.
- 2.7.3 Respect local restrictions regarding the sales and consumption of alcohol on tribal lands.
- 2.7.4 Serve elders their meal first, or wait for the elders present to be served first

2.8 Regalia

Traditional dress is referred to as regalia and most often worn during ceremonies and celebrations.

- 2.8.1 Do not touch regalia without asking permission as some regalia have deeply sacred or personal meaning or may be fragile.

2.9 Public displays of affection

Public affection may not be appropriate as a matter of respect in some tribal communities or cultural events.

- 2.9.1 Do not engage in public displays of affection unless it is clear that it is appropriate to do so.

3 GUIDELINE 3: OBSERVE TRIBAL LAWS

3.1 Prohibited items

Respecting tribal sovereignty includes following local laws around alcohol, drugs, weapons and other items on tribal lands.

- 3.1.1 Know the local tribal laws around the carry and use of alcohol, drugs and firearms before entering tribal lands
- 3.1.2 Do not leave cremated remains on tribal lands as the land is considered a spiritual entity.

3.2 Tribal permits

Many tribes have their own regulations around outdoor recreation, including a permitting system for hunting, fishing, camping, and other activities.

- 3.2.1 Check in advance if outdoor recreation permits are required and how to obtain them.

3.3 Removing artifacts

There are strong federal laws in place against removing artifacts from tribal or traditional lands to preserve their history, culture, and environment.

- 3.3.1 Do not disturb or remove artifacts, plants, or other objects such as eagle feathers and pottery shards to prevent violating tribal, state, and federal law.

3.4 Driving

Given the rural nature of many tribal lands, it is important to take care while driving and understand where/when a guide may be required to avoid trespassing or getting lost.

- 3.4.1 Observe and obey all traffic and speed limit signs on roadways on tribal lands.

3.5 Safety

Tribal lands may have different police authorities and medical emergency protocols than the surrounding areas due to certain jurisdictional oversights for these services.

- 3.5.1 Report any concerns about safety, security or unsafe behavior to the local police force.

4 GUIDELINE 4: TRANSACTIONS

4.1 Gift-giving

Most tribal cultures are generous and status is often displayed through gift giving.

- 4.1.1 Receive any gift offered by a resident gratefully as this is a sign of great respect.
- 4.1.2 Bring a gift to any gathering as a kind gesture to your hosts; local community members can advise on the appropriateness of money, food, or other contributions.

4.2 Souvenirs

Buying Native-made items in Native communities helps support local economies and artistic traditions.

- 4.2.1 Support the local economy by buying locally-made products and handcrafts.
- 4.2.2 Report misrepresentation of Native-made arts and crafts:
<https://www.doi.gov/iacb/should-i-report-potential-violation>
- 4.2.3 Do not haggle with artists unless it has been advised to do so by community members; this ensures artists are respected and receive a fair price for their work

4.3 Tipping

Gratuities may be advised for visitor services but there are also circumstances at cultural ceremonies or events where it may not be appropriate.

- 4.3.1 Ask local community members about the appropriateness of tipping before doing so.

4.4 Voluntary contributions & solicitation

Voluntary contributions and solicitations can unintentionally exploit visitors and native communities alike, so it is critical to learn how to best provide financial support to a tribal community.

- 4.4.1 At pow wows, it is common to give voluntary donations, however outside of these events be wary of giving gifts of money to people you have just met.
- 4.4.2 Seek the expertise of local tribal organizations to facilitate any voluntary contributions