

TOURISM
TROPICAL NORTH
QUEENSLAND

Where rainforest meets the reef

CULTURAL
PROTOCOLS

ENGAGING WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT
ISLAND COMMUNITIES



Introduction

One Size Does Not Fit All

These cultural protocols are a guideline only for engaging with Indigenous Australia. There are over 200 Indigenous nations that have varying protocols. The best approach is to liaise directly with community members as culture protocols may differ from region to region to ensure we are conducting business appropriately and respectfully.

History

The Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act was introduced in Queensland in 1897. This began a period of dispossession of land, removal from families and relocation to mission stations. The act evolved through to 1984 when replaced by a Community Services Acts. During this time, cultural heritage and knowledge was lost. By engaging and practicing Indigenous protocols, we can be part of the reconciliation process and ensure that the local stories and language is preserved and celebrated.

For your local area, please contact council or refer to National Native Title Tribunal resources and tools at <http://www.nntt.gov.au/>

Indigenous Imagery

Art & Law

Under Australian Law, permission from the artist is necessary for reproducing of an artistic work protected by copyright.

Artist consent is required for use of any imagery as the art could represent communally owned knowledge or sensitive topics.

Permission for context and use by artists/cultural groups is best practice and considered culturally appropriate.

Photography and Notes

Any method of recording interactions must first be checked with the individual. It is not appropriate to reproduce any stories or traditional knowledge without permission.

If you are taking photographs, be specific in what you intend to use them for. If you decide to use the photograph for any other use, you must contact the artist and family group featured.

In many areas of Indigenous Australia, reproduction of the names and photographs of deceased people is restricted during a period of mourning. The length of this time varies and is determined by the community.

It is good practice to include a warning phrase on your digital resources to ensure that you are preparing Indigenous Australians if images/voices of deceased could be seen.

WARNING: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewers are warned that the following program may contain images and voices of deceased persons.



Communication

Introduction Period

While relationships are being built, it is important to have the right approach.

- Smile when first meeting someone
- Using the hand to point can sometimes be seen to be disrespectful
- Non-verbal introductions e.g. nod of the head may be the first contact until more familiar
- Do not use confused statements that you may think is funny
- Some people may not make eye contact due to previous strict rules in culture. Not making eye contact is often used to show respect.

Consultation

- Respect the law and customs of the area you are entering.
- Decision making can involve many people, ensure when planning trips or requesting answers that you factor time into your plans.
- Do not assume that one person speaks for all.
- When addressing the group, ask the group how they would like to sit.
- Using the hand to point can sometimes be seen to be disrespectful
- Always begin by thanking the group for allowing you to speak.

Bereavement / Sorry Business

In community, when someone passes it is common for the whole community to be

involved in proceedings. Avoid visiting during this period. If you are already in a community when this occurs, cancel your meetings and leave the community.

Ensure to remove any images of the deceased that you may have. It is up to the family to grant permission to grant use after the mourning period.

Community Engagement

Welcome to Country

Welcome to Country is a cultural practice that was used for people entering another clan/nation's land.

It can only be conducted by the traditional custodians of the land that you are gathered on. Representatives, such as elders, that conduct this welcome should be treated as dignitaries. The Welcome to Country should be the first item on the order of proceedings for the event and may comprise a single speech given by an Elder with or without an accompanying performance, such as playing of the Didgeridoo.

If you are officiating this event, ensure to ask the representative how they would like to be addressed.

In most communities, be prepared to pay a fee for this service.

Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgement of People and Country is a statement of recognition of the traditional



owners of the land. An Acknowledgement of Country can be given by any person – Indigenous or non-Indigenous.

Example of Acknowledgement – mainland:

I would like to acknowledge the _____ people, the traditional custodians of the land that we are gathered on. I pay my respects to elders, past, present and emerging and the Aboriginal and Islander people with us today.

Example of Acknowledgement – islands / saltwater country:

I would like to acknowledge the _____ people, the traditional custodians of the land that we are gathered on. I pay my respects to elders, past, present and emerging and the Aboriginal and Islander people with us today. I give thanks for the land we are on and the sea that surrounds us.

If you are not sure who the local group is, do not assume as this may cause offense. Use ‘traditional custodians’ in place of the clan/group name.

On Country

If you are invited on to traditional lands, ensure to dress appropriately. The exposure of certain parts of the body may be considered offensive.

You can wear:

- Loose-fitting and long styles (below the knee) of the following: shorts, skirts, pants, trousers or dresses;
- Loose shirts or t-shirts with sleeves;

- If you are invited swimming you may swim with your clothes on, or t-shirt and shorts covering your swimming costume;
- You may be invited to sit on the ground, so wear clothes that will not cause embarrassment or discomfort in such a situation;
- Cotton garments, rather than synthetic fibres, are recommended as they allow the skin to breathe.

Please note that certain areas and cultural sites are only for men or women, ensure to respect these sites when you are informed.

Torres Strait Permits

Registrations are required for the outer islands of the Torres Strait. To register your visit, go to

<http://www.tsirc.qld.gov.au/register-your-visit>

You will be required to fill in details about your visit, mode of transport, intention and who you are visiting. This will take a few days to approve, you can not visit without it.

Meetings

- Ensure to leave enough time for meetings, let the community members set the pace of the meeting
- Ensure the local councillor and PBCs are involved in the meeting planning.
- Where possible, organise catering from a local provider
- For community meetings in the Torres Strait, ensure that the meeting can be opened in



prayer and that someone is available to bless the food.

- In the Northern Peninsula and Torres Strait region, ensure to address people with their correct titles – Mr, Mrs, Fr, etc.
- After the meeting, provide written confirmation/minutes of the agreed points.

If meeting with an individual, do not appear to be talking in secrecy or be over familiar with each other. This could have negative perceptions and could impact future engagement with the community.

Reminder: One elder is not responsible for decision, ensure that you ask if anyone else is required to be consulted before finalising any plans or projects.

Sibuwanay/Tar Digri – Giving of the Gift

Sibuwanay in Kala Lawgaw Ya and Tar Digri in Meriam Mir are similar in meaning. Giving gifts is an important aspect of Torres Strait Islander culture and is a highly respected practice. The value is not on the gift itself, but the time, effort and spirit exchanged between the parties.

If you are the recipient at a meeting or event where this practice takes place you should receive the gift with a humble gesture and thank the individual or community.

This practice is not intended to create conflict of interest.

References and Contacts

List of all Prescribed Body Corporates can be found at:

<https://www.nativetitle.org.au/>

Geospatial Native Title Data

<http://www.nntt.gov.au/>

Local Government Directory

<http://www.dlgrma.qld.gov.au/local-government/local-government-directory/search-the-local-government-directory.html>

Torres Strait Regional Authority

<http://www.tsra.gov.au/>

National Indigenous Tourism Product Manual – 3rd Edition, Tourism Australia