

Facts about Indigenous culture and history you should know



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Still from video <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVagOjzP6jo>> by David Langer <<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSPyUYVzIG2LvZ-Op7F5kkw>> . CC BY <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>>

 Read Simple Version (CLB3-4)

Did you know that there are more First Nations and Metis people living in Winnipeg than in any other city in the country? Based on statistics from Manitoba Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (now the Indigenous and Northern Relations <<https://www.gov.mb.ca/inr/>>), they represented 13.6% of Manitoba's population in 2001 and 8.5% of the total population in Winnipeg. Based on the same data, Manitoba's population includes the largest number of Metis people per capita in Canada. The Indigenous peoples are a significant and integral part of Manitoban society.

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The sad thing is that, upon coming to Manitoba newcomers are bombarded by negative stereotypes about Indigenous peoples. And because new Canadians lack a deeper understanding of the culture, history, and the challenges Indigenous Peoples faced (and continue to face) in society, we come to believe these stereotypes. The result is a prejudicial and negative attitude toward them. Or worse, we fall into the trap of fearing what we don't understand. This creates a barrier and we miss out on the opportunity to commune with them.

The key to changing this negativity is to be better informed. Learning more about our Indigenous brothers and sisters leads to better understanding and developing respect. Here are five facts about Indigenous peoples you should know:

1. Based on the Canadian Constitution, there are three groups of Indigenous peoples in Manitoba

Three groups reside in Manitoba: First Nations (Treaty and Status Indians); Inuit (Non-Status and other); and Métis.

The term "First Nation" has widely replaced the term "Indian" and to some extent "band" in the name of their communities. There are actually 63 First Nations communities in Manitoba including Ojibway, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene. Meanwhile, Inuit people are Aboriginal people who traditionally live in Canada's far north, or the Arctic. Métis, on the other hand, are people of mixed First Nation and European ancestry. They have a unique culture with ancestral origins such as Scottish, French, Ojibway, and Cree.

An important note: "Indian", "Eskimo", and "Native" are not appropriate to use. The politically correct terms are "Indigenous", "First Peoples" or "First Nations".

2. Their culture is diverse

One of the most common mistakes people make when dealing with the Indigenous peoples is thinking that it is a single cultural group. While they do share some traits, such as a deep connection to the land and to nature, different groups have different languages, culture, histories, beliefs, and identity.

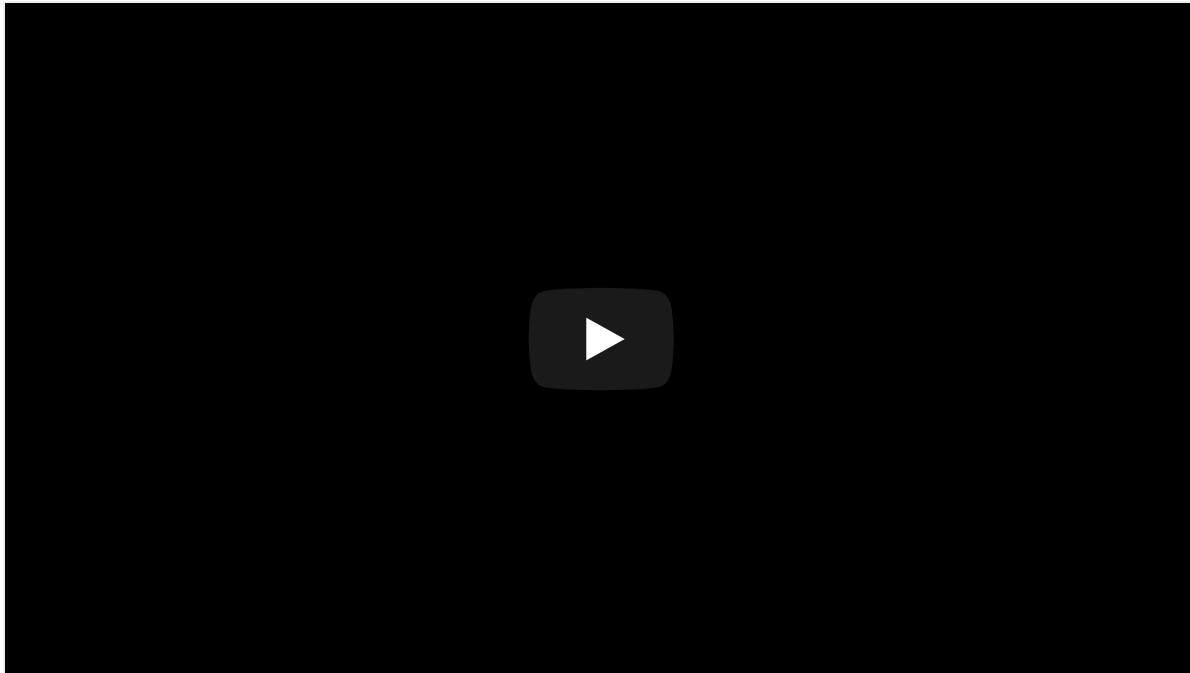
According to Statistics Canada <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-314-x/98-314-x2011003_3-eng.cfm> , there are over 60 Indigenous languages in Canada. Among these are the Ojibway or Oji-Cree mother tongues belonging to the Algonquian language family; Michif, the traditional language of the Métis; and Inuktitut, the native language of Inuits. Aside from language, they also have diverse cultural practices, beliefs and spiritual practices.

3. We share similar histories

Many immigrants have fled to Manitoba because of oppression, displacement, or human rights abuse in their home countries. To some degree, the Indigenous peoples can relate to these themes as history will show us. From the time the very first European settlers arrived in Canada, and for many years since, they have struggled for self-determination, land entitlement, and self-government. Not only were they displaced from their land, they were pushed into reserves and denied the right to their own culture. Many youth lost their identities as a result of being forced into residential schools <<https://livelearn.ca/article/living-in-manitoba/what-newcomers-need-to-know-about-residential-schools/>> . These were government-sponsored religious schools established to assimilate the children into Canadian culture.

4. We celebrate many Indigenous festivals in Manitoba

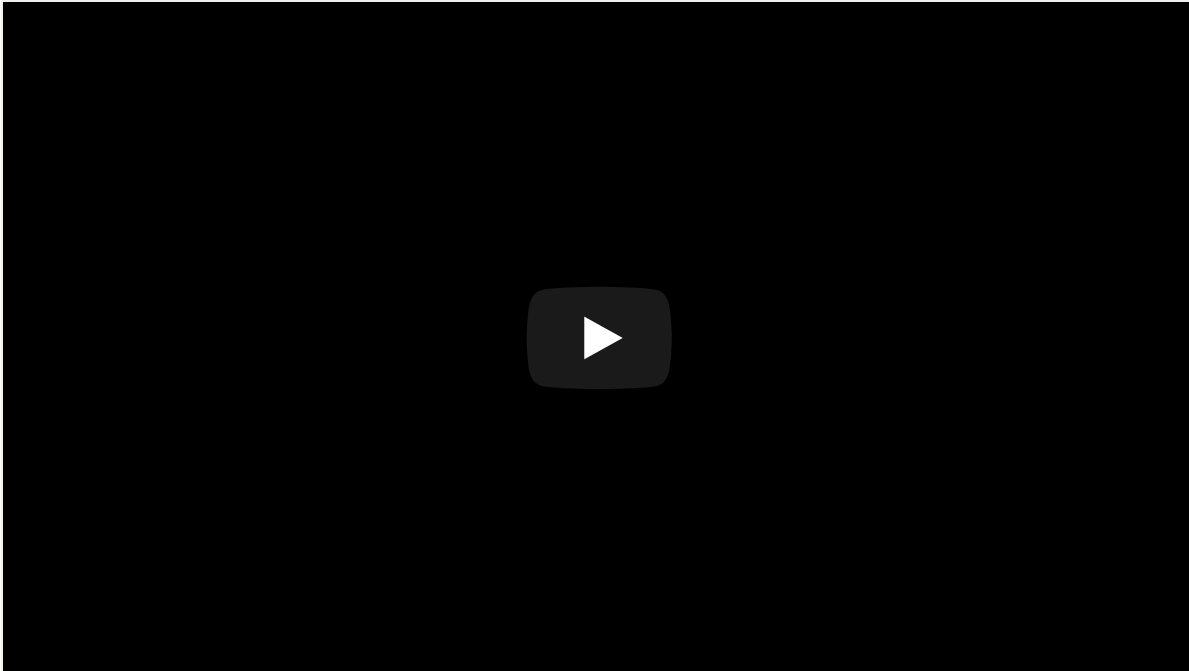
Aside from National Aboriginal Day which is held on June 21, Aboriginal Music Week, and the Manito-Ahbee International Festival, are held in Winnipeg. Meanwhile, the **Winnipeg Aboriginal Film Festival** <<http://www.waff.ca/>> is the “third largest festival in North America showcasing the best new Indigenous film and video from across Canada, the US and around the world”.



Aboriginal day at the Forks (Tourism Winnipeg)

Aboriginal Music Week presents between 25-35 First Nation, Métis, Inuit, Native American, and Indigenous music acts each year. Now called the **sākihiwē festival** <<http://www.aboriginalmusicweek.ca/news/read,article/202/introducing-the-sakihwe-festival>> (in 2018, it set for June 15-17). It was launched to encourage Indigenous youth to appreciate live music. The term sākihiwē means “to love” in Cree.

Meanwhile, **Manito-Ahbee** <<https://www.manitoahbee.com/>> is one of the biggest and most significant Indigenous festivals held in the province. Its aim is to share their heritage and culture to Manitobans and visitors to “unite, educate, and inspire”. It is held in the western Whiteshell area of Manitoba, regarded as Manito Ahbee or “where the Creator sits” in the Ojibway language.



Manito-Ahbee International festival

5. Louis Riel, founder of Manitoba, was a Métis

Louis Riel was a teacher and a leader and is regarded as one of the most controversial figures in Canadian history. He sought to preserve the culture and the rights of the Métis against the encroachment of European influence and was the creator of the Manitoba Act of 1870.

In current history, there are hundreds of notable Indigenous people in the arts, business, government, and in most sectors of society. You can learn about Elijah Harper, politician; Rosemarie Kuptana, human rights leader; Buffy Sainte-Marie, singer; Alanis Obomsawin, documentary filmmaker; Chief Dan George, actor; Daphne Odjig, artist; and many others who have had significant contributions to Canadian society.

Sources: The Canadian Encyclopedia

<<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools/>> ; Aboriginal diversity spans language, culture

<http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2008/01/15/aboriginal_diversity_spans_language_culture.html> , Bob Weber, The Canadian Press; 8 things newcomers should know about Aboriginal culture and history, <<http://canadianimmigrant.ca/slider/8-things-newcomers-should-know-about-aboriginal-culture-and-history>> Canadian Immigrant Magazine

<<http://canadianimmigrant.ca/slider/8-things-newcomers-should-know-about-aboriginal-culture-and-history>> ; Aboriginal Music Week

<<http://www.aboriginalmusicweek.ca/news/read,article/195/aboriginal-music-week-2016-set-for-august-9-13>> site; Tourism Winnipeg <<http://www.tourismwinnipeg.com/v6/things-to-do/festivals-events/display,profile/01811/aboriginal-day-live-festival>> .

With thanks to Bernice Pranteau, BSW, Educational Counsellor for reviewing the article.

Community Resources

8 things newcomers should know about Aboriginal culture and history

<<http://canadianimmigrant.ca/slider/8-things-newcomers-should-know-about-aboriginal-culture-and-history>> from Canadian Immigrant Magazine is a great article for newcomers. Also a must-read

is The connection between immigrants and Aboriginal people in Canada's mosaic

<<http://canadianimmigrant.ca/slider/the-connection-between-immigrants-and-aboriginal-people-in-canadas-mosaic>> by Rebecca Kuropatwa from the same magazine.



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