



# AIANTA

American Indian Alaska Native  
Tourism Association

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## **President Obama Signs NATIVE Act**

*Legislation to boost U.S. tribal tourism economic and cultural development*

**Washington, DC (September 26, 2016)** – President Barack Obama signed S. 1579, the Native American Tourism and Improving Visitor Experience (NATIVE) Act Friday. The Act requires the Departments of Commerce, the Interior, and other Federal agencies with recreational travel or tourism functions to update their management plans and tourism initiatives to include Indian tribes, tribal organizations, and Native Hawaiian organizations.

Sherry L. Rupert, American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA) Board President, said “this is an incredibly important day for Indian Country tourism, the beginning of an important collaboration between the federal, tribal and nonprofit sectors to strengthen and grow cultural heritage tourism in the U.S. We thank the President for signing the bill, and Senators Brian Schatz (D-Hawai’i) and John Thune (R-South Dakota) and Representative Markwayne Mullin (R-Oklahoma) for shepherding the legislation through Congress.”

Tourism in the United States and in Indian Country is one of the largest and fastest growing sectors of U.S. economic development and job creation. International tourism to Indian Country grew 181% from 2007 to 2015, resulting in \$8.6 billion in direct spending, according to U.S. Department of Commerce figures.

**“This law will empower native communities to tell their own stories and build their own economic opportunities, said Senator Brian Schatz. “Visitors are increasingly seeking out a more authentic and historically rich travel experience, and there is nothing more authentic and unique than the cultural tourism experience our native communities provide.”**

**“This is a good, common-sense bill that will have a real impact in tribal communities throughout the country, including the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota nations in South Dakota,” said Senator John Thune**

The NATIVE Act will require federal agencies with tourism assets and responsibilities to include tribes and native organizations in national tourism efforts and strategic planning. It will also provide American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian communities with access to resources and technical assistance needed to build sustainable recreational and cultural travel and tourism infrastructure and capacity in order to spur economic development and create good jobs.

(cont.)



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Joining the originators of the bill, Senator Schatz, and Senator Thune, the bipartisan co-sponsors of the NATIVE Act in the Senate were Jon Tester (D-Mont.), Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), Tom Udall (D-N.M.), Dean Heller (R-Nev.), Al Franken (D-Minn.), Mike Rounds (R-S.D.), Heidi Heitkamp (D-N.D.), John Hoeven (R-N.D.), and Gary Peters (D-Mich.). The bill passed the Senate in June.

Joining Markwayne Mullin (R-Okla) in House co-sponsorship were Dina Titus (D-NV), Don Young (R-Alaska), Kristi Noem (R-S.D.), Tom Cole (R-Okla.), Betty McCullum (D-Minn.), Mark Amodei (R-Nev), Kevin Cramer (R-N.D.), and Jared Huffman (D-Cal.). The bill passed the House last week.

**“The NATIVE Act is a strong piece of legislation that will drive economic growth not only in Native lands and cultural attractions, but also for communities in every corner of the country,”** said U.S. Travel Association President and CEO Roger Dow. **“We are pleased to see our government prioritize a measure to expand travel and tourism promotion and attract more international visitors, whose trips often have a tremendous positive ripple effect on the surrounding local economy.”**

Supporters of the legislation included U.S. Travel Association, American Indian and Alaska Native Tourism Association, Southeast Tourism Society, Western States Tourism Policy Council, National Congress of American Indians, Alaska Federation of Natives, and the Native Enterprise Initiative of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Support also came from tribes and tribal coalitions around the U.S, including the Intertribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes. Bill Anoutubby, Governor of the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma, said he wished to thank the legislative sponsors, especially Congressman Markwayne Mullin, for the opportunity to work more closely with federal agencies on tourism. “The NATIVE Act will help Oklahoma and the Chickasaw Nation continue to strengthen its robust tourism efforts, and for many other tribes across Indian Country, it will create essential relationships with our federal partners and links to audiences across the U.S. and the globe.”

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