

Indigenous festival KWE! returns to Quebec City in June

f May 18, 2022 · 4 min read



The KWE! Meet with Indigenous Peoples event is bringing its full-sized program back to Quebec City for its fifth edition June 17-21. Place Jean-Béliveau will host a variety of exciting musical performances, immersive exhibitions and culinary activities representing the cultural richness of the province's 11 First Nations.

"We have all shown resilience over the past two years and with the onset of spring, it is time to give recovery its full meaning," said event president Ghislain Picard, Chief of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec-Labrador.

Picard said the KWE team worked hard to develop this year's program, which the AFNQL and the Huron-Wendat Nation have spearheaded since 2017, drawing 30,000 visitors before the pandemic.

"Progress towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples has often been made in small

steps, but KWE provides an exceptional leverage to make greater ones," said Rémy Vincent, Grand Chief of the Huron-Wendat Nation. "Coming to the KWE! festival is an action that helps move us towards the reconciliation we want to achieve."

An exhibition of traditional Indigenous dwellings will help visitors better understand the architecture, construction and cultural practices associated with the Inuit tupiq, Wendat longhouse, Innu shaputuan, Anishinaabe wigwam, Innu teepee and Atikamekw Pikokan.

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“Discovery boxes”, Indigenous meal boxes for two, were so popular in previous years that they were snapped up in a day. This year, 600 will be available based on themes of hunting, fishing and gathering. A food truck offering bannock-themed meals will also be on hand.

Innu cosmetics company Akua Nature will feature a boxed set containing the “Savoirs des Pekuakamiulnuatsh” book on medicinal plants, a bag of raspberry leaf tea, a mamu soy candle with white sage and materials for making your own dreamcatcher.

The Cree Nation will be represented musically by Miigwin, the pride of Nemaska, who will open for Innu acts Dan-Georges McKenzie and Ninan June 19. Hip-hop is the focus on opening night, with Dan L’Initié, Anachnid and Q052. The following night will feature Atikamekw talent Régis Niquay with Pascal Ottawa and Laura Niquay.

On June 20, Innu musician Mike Paul will hit the stage ahead of the acclaimed Béatrice Deer Band and “Le Cabaret du Trickster”. On National Indigenous Peoples Day, June 21, Innu artist Kathia Rock will be launching her new album before the main event featuring Scott Pien Picard with guests Florent Vollant and Émile Bilodeau.

Dancing, drumming and throat singing performances will pop up each afternoon. Evenings will see Indigenous films and documentaries presented in collaboration with Wapikoni Mobile.

Indigenous literary organization Kwahiatonhk gives authors an unusual showcase for their work at Literary Bingo June 19, when the public can discover First Nations literature from the past 50 years. Wendake bookstore La Librairie Hannenorak will feature Indigenous books and children’s literature.

One of the event’s key activities is a discussion space called “Myths and Realities”, an opportunity for Indigenous leaders

Along with an artisans' boutique providing a marketplace for Indigenous sewing, beading and other art, artisans will demonstrate their creative process and explain the historical significance of their work. Kids will enjoy the accompanying makeup activity.

The event's official spokesperson, Innu surgeon Dr. Stanley Vollant, the first Indigenous surgeon to be trained in Quebec, will once again be leading the Puamun Meshkenu Walk. In 2016, he founded his non-profit organization of the same name to inspire Indigenous peoples to adopt healthy lifestyles.

"People often ask me, "What can I do as a Quebecer to improve the situation of the First Nations?" said Vollant. "A very simple thing is to come and meet us. Kwe means I hold out my hand to you. Kwe is a call to meet, to shake hands, to learn to know, to respect each other and to build together. Kwe is an action for reconciliation."

The complete schedule can be found online at kwefest.com and on its Facebook page.

Patrick Quinn, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter, The Nation

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