

Reflecting on the Future

As the Sun set slowly in the western sky, the tribal council paused in its discussion to take in the beauty of the moment. This was not the first day of their discussions and it surely would not be the last. A decision to move forward could create changes that could never be reversed.

Some of the younger tribal members had brought up the idea of developing a golf, tennis, and ski resort in the heart of the reservation. The area would be perfect—great views, optimal weather conditions, and easy access from several large metropolitan areas. There was even talk of adding a casino to the mix and creating a series of activities and events with year-round appeal.

Development of any of these ideas sounded exciting to some tribal council members because of the variety of jobs that would be created, but there were other concerns. The tribal council was familiar with the economic benefits of tourism because the tribe already operated a motel and other small-scale attractions to encourage visitors to the reservation. However, extensive tourism development was a completely different story. Questions were raised about how many new visitors would be attracted and what effects these additional visitors would have on the natural environment and the cultural traditions that tribal members cherished.

The lands of the reservation were fragile and untouched in an environmental sense. Development would require extensive improvements to the current reservation infrastructure to support more visitors. Some members of the council believed that an influx of tourists would forever damage the lands on which a hundred generations had lived. Other members expressed dismay about allowing tens of thousands of outsiders into the heart of the reservation. Would these outsiders show respect for the ways of the tribe? Could the tribe keep visitors out of the sacred areas, or would four-wheel-drive vehicles be racing everywhere, ignoring any restrictions the tribe might impose?

As the council members settled back into their discussions, they reached one decision. Before a final conclusion was made on the matter, they would need a professional analysis of the potential environmental and social/cultural impacts of each alternative.



Italy uses the nostalgia of the Roman Empire to attract tourists. Photo by Thomas Sun