CULTURAL TOURISM PLANNING

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Today I have been asked to report to you some of my tourism and planning concepts that have direct application to this region of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. These concepts have grown out of my study and work with tourism for my entire fifty-year career. I have divided my presentation into five parts that I believe are very important if the people here wish to develop tourism based on a heritage theme.

1. TOURISM AND CULTURAL IMPACT

What was once considered frivolous and incidental has grown to be an activity of major world-wide significance. Tourism today provides direct and indirect jobs for over 200 million people world-wide. One in every 9 workers is involved in tourism. It accounts for 11% of consumer spending and 10.1% of the world’s GDP.

A remarkably high proportion of all this travel is now related to culture, especially here in the United States and increasingly in Texas. Some figures from Anthony Tighe of the National Endowment for the Arts will help illustrate this point.

*Of all US travelers in the country in 1991:
17% attended a play or concert
24% visited a museum or art gallery
25% visited a festival or craft fair
28% bought local/ethnic food or crafts
30% visited a historic site or building

*A survey by the National Endowment for the Arts showed that:
for the general population:

22% visited an art museum
17% attended a musical
13% attended a classical musical event
12% attended a play

*From a study of foreign visitors to the US by the US Travel and Tourism Administration we find that:

15% attended a concert, play or musical
25% visited an art gallery or museum
32% visited historical places
*And a recent forecast by the Travel Industry Association of America states that:

42% of all travelers intend to attend cultural events
37% intend to visit historical sites

These are just a few of the current travel indicators that are proving the great significance of cultural tourism today. The importance of this growing segment of tourism caused the World Tourism Organization back in 1985 to create its definition of cultural tourism:

Cultural tourism can...be defined in broad or narrow terms. In the narrow sense, it includes movements of persons for essentially cultural motivations, such as study tours, performing arts and cultural tours, travel to festivals and other cultural events, visits to sites and monuments, travel to study nature, folklore or art, and pilgrimages... In the broadest sense, all movements of persons might be included in the definition because they satisfy the human need for diversity, tending to raise the level of the individual and giving rise to new knowledge, experience, and encounters.

II. HOW TOURISM FUNCTIONS

With this overwhelming evidence of the significance of culture to tourism today, how can a region tap into this growing trend? Based on my experience of working with regions and communities, a first step is to gain a better understanding of how tourism really functions. Too often we think that promotion is the solution to tourism development. It is one component but we must understand that tourism involves much more.

This simple diagram (Figure 1) has profound implications for developing culture tourism. It states that the "push" side is the DEMAND side--what the travel market really seeks. As travel hosts, we must accept people the way they are.

The flip side of this equation is the SUPPLY side--what is developed to meet the needs and interests of the travel market. The supply side is provided locally and regionally by three action sectors: public agencies (parks, preserves, historic sites), nonprofit organizations (events, festivals, cultural development), and commercial sector (lodging, food service, travel services).

Particularly important is to understand some of the key trends within the travel market today. Here are a few of these trends:

*From consumption to non-consumption. Hunters are doing more photography than killing; fishermen are releasing their catches; more travelers want to enjoy
rather than destroy resources. Some of the most vocal environmental protectionists today are
the travelers who are disgusted with how some tourist destinations are abusing their
resources.

*From commonplace to sophisticated. The ordinary no longer satisfies. Travelers are more experienced and better educated and demand better quality. New
categories are emerging, such as ecotourists, alternative tourists, adventure tourists, and
certainly, cultural tourists.

*From younger to older. Population demographics are changing greatly. Older travelers are still mentally and physically active and have become the largest travel
segment. They have money and seek greater depth of experiences. Their travel preferences
are diverse because of past occupations and hobbies.

*From "I-me" to greater interest in others. Today’s travelers seek greater
understanding of other people of the world. Evidence can be found in the hundreds of
charitable organizations that are dedicated to service to others. Many tourists prefer group
cruise where they can share experiences with others.

*From WASP to colorblind. The travel market is no longer dominated by
white, Anglo Saxon Protestant tourists. Many ethnic and national groups are traveling and
today’s travelers are beginning to understand that other cultures have worthwhile values and
histories of accomplishments.

*From domestic to international. Increased air travel and rapid increases in
the economies of many countries are bringing millions more foreigners to our destination.
These foreign travelers often have interests quite different from our own.

*From casual to intellectually inquisitive. The ordinary and the shoddy no
longer satisfy. Travelers today want to learn more about how things work. They seek deeper
information about nature and cultural background.

Every one of these trends has importance for cultural tourism development. Now, let’s
look at the SUPPLY side.

How Does Your Supply Side Match Up?

This broad review of some trends among travelers should make us think about how
well our present development meets these trends. Because the supply side is ours to choose,
develop and manage, we must examine what we now offer here in our community and the
surrounding area.

I find it helpful to define the Supply Side of tourism as made up of five very critical
and interdependent components. (Figure 2) Each one is made up of hundreds of
establishments that are created not by the commercial sector alone. The many nonprofit organizations and agencies of government also are important players in what is developed for the supply side of tourism.

Attractions

The power unit of tourism is made up of all the things to see and do—the ATTRACTIONS. Attractions provide two very important functions. They provide the "pull", the lure, the appeal to would-be travelers back home. Second, they must provide satisfaction. The traveler must leave an area with even greater satisfaction than was promised in advertising. An increase in the availability of developed cultural attractions can be a great stimulant for increased tourism.

Transportation

Transportation is an obvious function that must provide convenient, comfortable, and safe movement of people. Today, a critical issue is intermodal travel—including fly-drive and linkages between all modes. Consideration of time and distance from traveler origins is an important aspect of transportation and tourism.

Services

It is through services, such as lodging and food, that the greatest economic returns from tourism are derived. However, these are facilitators, not causes—they depend greatly on attractions. An important factor in location of services is their dual markets—local people as well as travelers. Because of higher expectations of travelers today, upgrading of service quality is an important issue.

Information

A major deficiency in tourism development is the lack of good descriptive information for visitors. Coming on the market are new interactive computerized information systems that can give travelers instant guidance on routes, attractions, and travel services. At destination areas, visitors are seeking more complete interpretive centers that contain exhibits, demonstrations, lectures, and literature about the area. It must be emphasized that most of today's travel brochures are promotional rather than informative.

Promotion

The function of promotion seeks to entice people to travel. It is usually expressed in four ways—advertising, publicity, public relations, and incentives (discounts, packages, premiums). Critical today is making sure that those attractions advertised are truly available as stated.
Implications of These Supply Components

This model shows these components as integral parts of an overall tourism functioning system. The point is that all are interdependent. No matter what your role may be in tourism, you are dependent as much on others as yourself for your success. Any change in any other component influences you. Your establishment, in turn, influences all other components. This fact suggests that much greater cooperation among all actors within tourism is essential.

III. WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS?

A first step in developing cultural tourism in all five components of the supply side is to agree on your goals rather than just stumble along. I suggest you consider three very important goals.

1. ECONOMIC. If your goal is to enhance the economy, it is feasible. Tourism can increase income, jobs and tax revenues. It can open up opportunities for new businesses and new nonprofit or public sector employment. However, it must be recognized that tourism also has costs. It will require new investment. It will likely require expanded water supply, waste disposal, police, and fire protection.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL. The financial returns from tourism can foster increased preservation of archeological sites, historic sites, and enhanced habitat for wildlife. It can stimulate communities and rural areas to establish scenic road controls. However, unless properly planned, tourism can pollute recreational waters, destroy natural landscapes, and create ugly commercialism.

3. SOCIETAL. Tourism can actually be used to rally community forces together. It can strengthen the sense of community, as has been done by the Amish in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. It can enrich the local culture with influxes of influences from outside visitors. However, masses of tourists can increase competition for local services, inundate a community with undesirable behavior, and destroy the unique culture of a place.

It can be seen readily that unless you state your goals clearly and plan your future objectives and strategies to avoid the several pitfalls, tourism may not be the pot of gold at the end of your tourism rainbow.

IV. PLANS AND PROCESSES

Fortunately, several planning and development guides toward positive tourism goals are now available. Here are a few you should obtain.


*Tourism USA*, edited by Glenn Weaver, published by US Travel and Tourism
Administration, Att.: Tourism USA, Department of Commerce, H1862, Washington DC 20230 ($5.00).


Developing Tourism in Your Community, available from Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77834-2261.

Cultural Tourism, by Bridget B. McCarthy, write to Cultural Tourism, 7277 SW Barnes Road, Portland, OR 97225 ($63).

Community Tourism Assessment Manual, to be published this spring by The Western Rural Development Center, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR 97331-3607.

And, I would be remiss if I didn’t recommend my own book, Tourism Planning, published in a revised 3rd edition this year by Taylor & Francis, 1900 Frost Road, Suite 101, Bristol, PA 19007-1598 ($59.50, h. $24.50 p.) Based on these guides and other sources, I suggest that the following six steps can result in enhanced cultural tourism development.

1. REVIEW OF MARKETS. From local and state travel market research, try to categorize the several segments of the travel market. The idea of segments is critical because today we know that not all travelers want the same things.

2. REVIEW OF RESOURCES. Within the region and locally, you can study your resource strengths. In recent years I have developed a method of finding zones that have the greatest tourism potential. By using generalized maps of the factors shown in Figure 3, they can be added together to determine areas where these factors are most abundant and of best quality. Figure 4 illustrates the result of using this process for the state of Illinois.

3. GAP ANALYSIS. When market interests are compared with existing attractions and resources, several "gaps" may appear. These gaps reveal the potential, based on your resources, to develop the new needed attractions.

4. DISCOVERY OF OPPORTUNITIES. The process thus far can result in the discovery of opportunities you may not have considered. These opportunities may be found in all five components of the supply side--attractions, transportation, services, information, and promotion.

5. STAGING. Knowing that your entire "wish list" cannot be established immediately, it is necessary to prioritize these opportunities. Certainly, those new developments with least time and cost as well as greatest visibility should be done first. However, along with short-range projects, there should be a long-range plan for best tourism development.

6. FEASIBILITIES/SPONSORS. By publicizing the many opportunities, representatives of the three development sectors--commercial, nonprofit, public--can then
respond. It is their task to determine whether the projects are feasible within their established policies.

V. SOME SPECIAL ISSUES

*Telling history, a sensitive issue. Great care must be exercised regarding how history is told to visitors. Too often it is presented in a biased one-sided manner. Sensitivity to past cultures and events must dominate the way in which cultural tourism is developed.

*Historic restoration is not enough. Although a necessary first step, the restoration of an historic building is not enough for tourism. To that must be added: tour guides, interpretation, toilet facilities, heat, air conditioning, access for disabled, and parking.

*Plan area adjacent to site. Often the setting is as important as the site of an historic building. Both aesthetics and theme can complement the site itself. Historic reuse of these surrounding structures can provide food, crafts, entertainment, and museums.

*Clustering versus isolation. Isolated sites are less well attended than a clustered complex. So, within reason, it may be feasible to move structures into a compound of larger area so that a more complete story can be told, it can be better managed, and larger masses of tourists can be served.

*Cultural tourism is more than buildings. The past of any community has involved tradition, beliefs, successes, failures, conflict, diversity, a sense of place and pride of accomplishment. These qualities need to be considered in development and interpretation for visitors.

*Establish a major interpretive visitor center. The best means of introducing the visitor to your community and its culture is with an interpretive visitor center. This can contain information, displays, demonstrations, exhibits, ethnic costuming, ethnic crafts, ethnic foods, and auditorium for videos and performing arts.

*Cultural tourism—a community catalyst. The protection, education, and development of a community’s heritage for visitors can be equally effective for local citizens. This function can be the catalyst to bring the community together and to focus on its values and real quality of life.

Conclusion

In summary, the more that we consider tourism as a system and understand the values of our heritage, the more we can use tourism to reach desirable community objectives. Critical to all development of culture is leadership, organization, planning and design—all of which demand closer cooperation than we have ever experienced before.
CULTURAL TOURISM
SUPPLY SIDE QUIZ

ATTR ACTIONS
Because attractions are the life blood of tourism, a first step to build culture-based
tourism in a community is to make a comprehensive survey of undeveloped culture resources.
By "undeveloped" I refer to those foundations that have not yet been made into attraction
establishments. Raw resources are not attractions. Until each site is developed with access,
parking, services, and interpretation for visitors it is not yet an attraction. If you have not
already done so, I suggest that you examine the following questions within and around your
community.

* Are there opportunities for increasing the number and variety of dance productions?
* Have prose and poetry with localized themes been identified and made readily available to
  visitors?
* Have examples of vernacular and historic architecture been identified, restored and opened
to the public?
* Can musical productions with local themes be increased?
* Can opera and theatrical productions of unique local value be increased?
* Can more museums of archeology, history, painting, sculpture, and photography be
  established?
* Are there adequate places for viewing and photographing the beauty of wildlife?
* Is there potential for scenic byways and tours?
* Is the community as attractive as it might be or are there too many areas that are ugly and
  need improvement?
* Is local folk art encouraged and can visitors find crafts representing the unique qualities of
  the area?
* Are special ethnic groups given full opportunity to display their special customs, arts,
  foods, and quality of life?
* Are children encouraged in schools to learn local traditions and history and develop their
  creativity?
* Are all organizations related to culture stimulating the tourism opportunities of their
  programs?
* Are all funding sources for culture well understood and utilized to the fullest?
* Are local governmental officials fully aware of the value of culture to tourism and do they
  support its development in their policies and actions?
* Are the several cultural attractions combined into themed tours?
* Has the potential for new festivals and events been explored?

When the potential for these and other new or expanded attractions has been
inventoried, the next step is to identify the most logical agencies and organizations to take
action. Design competitions and publicity on these opportunities could attract investors from
all three development groups--commercial enterprise, nonprofit organizations, public services.
Then, following design, construction, and management, these new attractions can be promoted, thereby increasing the volume of visitors and improving economic impact.

TRANSPORTATION

Several questions should be raised regarding existing transportation and access to and within the area. Satisfactory experiences of visitors depend greatly on this function—a bad travel experience can negate all other aspects of a trip. Here are some questions to consider.

* Can the market origins of travelers reach your destination readily and easily?
* Are local transit systems, such as buses and taxis, efficient and attractive for visitors to use?
* Do street and highway planners consider visitor needs on all decisions of road and street improvements, controls and signage?
* In congested areas at peak use should alternative modes of people-moving be considered?
* Are street linkages among tourist attractions, services and facilities attractive and do they give a good impression of the community?

SERVICES

Visitors interested in culture require much the same quality of services as other travelers. If culture is to thrive as a significant part of tourism, the following questions need to be asked:

* Do the guest rooms of hotels and motels contain information on cultural attractions—maps, fees, description?
* Are the staffs of lodging and food services trained to guide tourists toward cultural attractions?
* Does the decor of travel service business support the arts—local paintings, photographs?
* Are the service businesses cooperating on expanding and establishing more cultural attractions?

INFORMATION

Probably the greatest deficiency within tourism development today is the lack of adequate information available to visitors. It is worthwhile to investigate the present level in your community and surrounding area with the following questions.

* At travel entry locations, are there visitor centers that contain descriptions of attractions and services and how to find them?
* Is there adequate signage (such as "?" or "i" used in other countries) to lead visitors to these centers?
* Are guidebooks on cultural attractions plentiful and easily accessed?
* Are all guidebooks accurate and kept up to date on open hours, prices, and other needed information?
* Do all cultural attractions have well-trained tour guides?
* Are self-guided tours adequately labeled and described?
* In potential traveler origin locations, is descriptive literature about your destination readily available?
* Have new interactive computerized information kiosks been installed in strategic locations in your community?
* Have new descriptive video devices been installed in car rentals?
* Are traveler emergencies dealt with quickly, courteously, and efficiently?
* Is traveler information on local culture readily available in tourist service businesses, such as motels, hotels, restaurants, and car service stations?
* Have hospitality training programs been presented here?

PROMOTION

In today’s competitive tourism world, promotion continues to be a major function of tourism agencies. Research on marketing, such as market segmentation and conversion studies, are suggesting that new approaches to promotion are needed. Following are a few pertinent questions to be asked about local promotion.

* Have the promotional programs among the several players—attractions, service businesses, cities, counties, state—been coordinated to avoid duplication and conflict?
* Has the effectiveness of advertising programs been tested by means of conversion studies?
* Has advertising on the local culture been placed in the most productive media to reach travel prospects?
* To what extent is publicity used to promote cultural tourism in your area?
* Are public relations employed to promote the arts?
* Do tourist businesses offer incentives (discounts, premiums, packages) to promote visitors to your cultural attractions?

ORGANIZATION, MANAGEMENT

In addition to high quality management within each establishment, some umbrella organization is needed to foster cooperation and integration. Each establishment can gain when it realizes how others influence its success and how it influences the success of others. Both local citizens and visitors benefit from unified cultural development of tourism. Misinformation about attractions, poor access, duplication of effort, inefficient expenditure of funds, and conflict over issues can be avoided by regular networking among all the principal players of tourism.

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