THE TOURISM SYSTEM AND OPPORTUNITIES

By

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Presented at the "Tourism: The Future of a Region"
Workshop in Corpus Christi, Texas

May 6, 1987

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Traditionally, tourism is viewed by its many parts. We recognize readily the role of hotels, airlines and highways. For many years we have spent many millions of dollars -- at all levels from federal to local -- on tourism promotion. And, over the years, the technology and efficiency of the parts have improved greatly.

But, study of tourism throughout the country, and particularly in Texas, shows that our organization, our programs and our attitudes toward tourism haven't changed much in twenty years. Our life styles and motivations for travel have changed. Our ways of doing business today are far more complex. Our rules and regulations are more numerous. Our tax dollars don't go as far as they did. But, we still approach tourism the same way we did twenty years ago or more.

This observation suggests that great opportunities must lie ahead if our approaches to tourism were brought up to date. The purpose of this paper is to outline some of these opportunities, especially to take some new and dramatically different steps toward tourism development as a system.

Where Does Texas Stand?

As a foundation for viewing tourism differently in Texas, especially in the Southwest Region, it would be well to review some "good news" and "bad news" -- bad news only in the sense of issues that we must overcome if tourism is to grow.

It is always helpful to remind ourselves of the abundant assets we have in Texas, particularly in this Southwest Region.

The huge size of Texas is the envy of many other states, not just because of acreage but because of the diversity and abundance of resources. Many other states wish that they had the coastline, the lakes and rivers that are so abundant in Texas. These assets provide the foundation for a great many travel and recreational experiences. In addition, the variety and diversity of vegetation across Texas is the basis for landscape appreciation and photography as well as habitat for game. From mountains to coastal plains, the traveler and vacationer has ample opportunity to experience mountain climbing, hiking and scenic vistas due to topographic variation. And, all these natural resource assets are far more available
at all seasons in Texas due to the climate, an asset to tourism that is not yet developed.

Few areas of North America can claim the rich and abundant cultural resource assets of Texas. First Indian territory, Texas has been under Spanish, French, and Mexican rule as well as flying its own colors as a Republic between 1836 and 1845. The many historic facts as well as legend and lore make this a particularly interesting region to visit. The many ethnic and national groups have enriched the architecture, the crafts and customs of this region.

In terms of development, no state can boast as fine a highway system. Nearly every part of Texas is accessible by surfaced highways that can be used the year around. Scheduled and commuter air access adds greatly to the linkage between markets and destinations.

Tourist service businesses have matured and increased greatly in numbers. Virtually every community has modern lodging and food services. The urban areas of Texas themselves provide a built-in travel market. In this Southwest Region, the cities of San Antonio, Corpus Christi, Harlingen-Brownsville, Laredo and El Paso are not only interesting tourist destinations but market sources as well. Throughout southwestern Texas, many cities, large and small, have restored downtown areas and improved their attractiveness for visitors.

And, no review of the assets of Texas would be complete without recognition of the great strides in promotion that have catapulted Texas into a strong travel competitor. We should pay tribute to the effective promotional leaders of the past twenty years, such as Tom Taylor of the State Department of Highways and Public Transportation, Jim Battersby of the Discover Texas Association, and particularly Frank Hildebrand of the Texas Tourist Development Agency.

We have many things to be proud of and could profitably spend all the conference time identifying and reminding ourselves of the good things that have been accomplished in tourism. However, if Texas and this region are to move ahead with the times and if we really are serious about bigger and better tourism, we must view ourselves critically. Based upon my study of tourism throughout the world and my observation in Texas over the last twenty years, let me identify the top four issues that must change if Texas is to move ahead in tourism in the next few decades.

First, we have inadequate data on tourism. Generally we are bad record-keepers and accountants. Sure, we have a few data on travelers and some economic data from the U.S. Travel Data Center. But, if you have ever tried to do serious research on tourism in Texas, you soon find out that we don't know how many tourist businesses we have; we don't know the proportion of their business that is local or for travelers; we don't know what causes business failure or success; we don't know the complete roles of governments and non-profit organizations in tourism; and because we have only some sporadic studies, we don't have year after year data for trends.

Second, we are drifting. The state has no tourism plan nor policy. The officials who work with tourism know a great deal about what is important to the people of Texas but it has never been declared nor approved politically. This does not mean we should look to Austin to control tourism — quite the contrary. However, it would be of great help
to all sectors working with tourism to know that tourism is recognized as important by government. As an example, it was my good fortune to work with a consulting firm last year to prepare a new policy and management plan for tourism in the state of New York. There are many aspects of this plan that could be applied to Texas.

Third, today tourism is far more competitive than only a decade ago. In only ten years, cities, states and foreign countries have stepped up their tourism development and promotion as never before. Hotels are more competitive; restaurants are more competitive; theme parks are more competitive; airlines are more competitive. Competition is good for the consumer but it means that the traveler is easily lured away to those destinations that appear to provide a better experience at a better price, no matter where it is. This means also that every community and region must change its ways if it is to be recognized in the marketplace.

And finally, we are still promotion-minded; not product-minded. Promotion has a very important role but advertisers several decades ago knew they could not sell a poor product. In tourism recognition of the product is not as easy as in manufactured goods where it is more visible. A manufacturer has a finite product that can be packaged and shipped to markets. Not so for tourism. Markets are distributed to destination areas that contain many elements of attractions, services and transportation that make up the product. Because markets are more highly educated, more experienced and more discriminating, our tourism products must be of higher quality. In no time in history have the travel markets been more demanding.

These observations of today's plus and minus sides of tourism in Texas lead one to ask, how can tourism be made to function more smoothly?

Understanding The Tourism System

Tourism is a complicated phenomenon, managed by no one individual organization. If we are to improve tourism in this or any other region, we need to view tourism beyond the limits of our own business or agency. Study of overall tourism in its many dimensions reveals that everywhere in the world it is made up of some common functional components. Identifying and understanding these components assists in directing or managing them for greater success. One model suggests that all of tourism functions can be placed into five major components making up the demand and supply sides of tourism. (Figure 1).

(1) Tourist Markets. Nearly every report on tourism today recognizes new characteristics of travel markets. We are finally discovering that travelers are not all alike, that there are many ways of classifying them into segments. Location of markets, especially with reference to destination is important. This region is fortunate in having population concentrations within as well as just outside the region. We need to be more aware of people's travel interest, both for business and personal objectives. Our cultural backgrounds differ and so do our interests in travel. And, we need to understand the personal characteristics of travel markets. The development and promotion of tourism is highly dependent upon the nature and trends of markets.
(2) Attractions. No one travels without travel objectives—attractions. All those places that promise fulfillment of travel purpose can be called attractions. Destinations are not successful unless they contain the physical and program developments that provide for satisfying experiences. Convention centers, meeting places, industrial and business conference rooms and trade contacts are attractions for business travel. Resorts, campgrounds, parks, sports arenas, shopping centers and historic sites are some of the many attractions for personal pleasure travel. If it can be said that the markets provide the "push" for travel, attractions in destinations provide the "pull".

(3) Transportation. A critical link often taken for granted, is transportation. Personal transportation to cities, to attractions and within attraction complexes places a different demand on transportation systems than only the engineering side. Travel is complicated by the routes used, regulations on use, the price of fuel, and the costs of vehicles. It is further complicated by its quality—convenience, comfort, safety, dependability, flexibility. Today, a major issue in most cities is intermodal transportation, linking air, car rental, personal car, bus, and sometimes rail and cruise ship travel.

(4) Services. When markets show an interest in destinations and have the ability to travel; when attractions have been developed and are well managed for visitor enjoyment and use; and when travelers have good access to destinations, then, and only then, is there demand for services. It is through travel services—lodging, food service, retail sales—that tourism makes greatest economic impact. The location, quality and pricing of services are critical to successful tourism.

(5) Information/Promotion. A final component consists of two parts, only because they often are found combined in one agency. Of increasing importance for travelers is the provision of adequate information—guidebooks, maps, descriptive literature, atlases, interpretation centers, tour guides, directional and informative signs. Travelers deserve better guidance on how to find attractions, when they are open and what they cost. Well known is the need and effectiveness of promotion. All forms are of increasing importance—advertising, publicity, public relations and incentives (discounts, packages, give-aways).

It should be emphasized that all the developed components of tourism are not truly defined as an industry. Certainly, a major role is carried on by private commercial enterprise but there are two other major actors. Governments are responsible for a great many attractions and transportation networks. Governments supply the basic infrastructure—water supply, waste disposal, police and fire protection. In this country, a great many developments, such as historic sites and structures are owned and operated by non-profit organizations.

This review of the functional tourism components is not new or surprising to most people active in tourism. What is new to many communities is recognition of how they are interdependent parts of a dynamic tourism system. Our preoccupation with our individual business or agency has tended to cloud our vision of this system.
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The greatest opportunity in Texas tourism today is making the system work better in every way. Every individual part of tourism can be more successful if it reaches out beyond its own internal management. The reason is simple. Every part is dependent upon every other part. But, there are several barriers to this networking, desirable as it is for overall tourism.

First, there is a popular misconception of tourism product. A hotel management rightfully spends a great amount of time and money on housekeeping, bookkeeping, food service, upkeep, and personnel matters. But, an important part of its product is the travel purpose and the attractions that brought the traveler there. All businesses, all governmental developments and non-profit establishments will gain when they reach out beyond the confines of the establishments and network with the other parts of the total product.

Second, all enterprises and agencies have difficulty in justifying outreach. Capital and operating expenses do not usually allow extra amounts for a manager to spend time on committees or organizations outside the business. For tourism, this should be a regularly budgeted item -- networking with the other functional parts of tourism.

A third barrier is business or organizational loyalty and turf. We tend to be very protective of our establishments and hesitate to be supportive of what erroneously appears to be competitive or extraneous. Turf protection keeps many state agencies from communicating with each other. Sometimes legal mandates and regulations prevent it. However, only when these barriers are broken down can the most effective tourism development be accomplished.

Fourth, when tourism economic impact is described it is assumed that all businesses cater exclusively to travelers. Not so. Nearly all tourist businesses cater as much or more to residents as to travelers. Even hotels obtain significant portions of their revenues from local residents. When tourist-oriented businesses keep better records on the extent of these two markets -- visitors and residents -- they will be able to provide much better service and products for both.

Finally, today's educational and training programs tend to perpetuate the "in-house" rather than an integrated approach to all tourism establishments. Seldom do students in the specific fields of hotel management, restaurant management, traffic management, attraction management or park management learn anything about their dependence upon the other elements of tourism. When our future managers and employees are taught more about the functioning of the tourism system they will have a better understanding of how they can gain through greater networking.

DESTINATION ZONES

Even further endorsement of the concept of networking becomes clear if tourism destinations are better understood. The diagram in Figure 2 illustrates a basic destination zone and its key parts. We might call this a radial zone because it includes the area surrounding a basic service center or community. By means of air and land access, travelers are brought to the service community, the logical location for most services as
well as urban attractions. Surrounding this service center is several attraction complexes, linked to the city by important travel corridors. Viewing a destination in this manner helps to dramatize the need for all decision-makers to be aware of each other and how each can help the other. Certainly, it calls for much greater interagency governmental integration and public-private cooperation.

In recent years, we have learned of the great importance of urban zones as travel destinations for both touring circuits and longer-stay tourism. Cities not only provide the basic tourist services, they have become more interesting and more fulfilling as meeting our travel objectives. Here is where we find most historic sites and buildings. Here is where the traveler finds most entertainment and cultural activities. Here is the location for a great amount of trade and conference activity. And, here is the location of one of the greatest of all travel attractions — homes of friends and relatives.

A third form of destinations is very important for both large and small cities. It is what we call extended or secondary zone. Often small or medium size cities try to "go it alone," not realizing how much they can benefit by cooperating with a larger city, even fifty miles or more away. And, the benefit is mutual. The larger city can offer tours to the surrounding region, adding to its promotable tourism packages. Several cities in this region are already collaborating in this way on tourism development and promotion.

FINDING DESTINATION POTENTIAL

At Texas A&M we have developed the technology for finding destination zone potential. Just as all agricultural crops cannot be grown equally well everywhere, neither can tourism be developed everywhere. We know that it takes considerable initiative and investment to develop tourism but it certainly is wiser to apply these important factor where the likelihood of success is best.

Study of tourism has revealed a number of factors that would favor one location over another. We have grouped them into program factors and physical factors. Among the program factors that should be investigated in a region are:

- Market Characteristics
- Promotional Programs
- Information Systems
- Planning Bodies, Governments
- Socio-economic Influences

The physical factors that need to be inventoried and mapped are:

- Water, Waterlife
- Vegetative Cover, Wildlife
- Climate, Atmosphere
- Topography, Soils, Geology
- History, Ethnicity, Archeology, Legends
- Esthetics
- Institutions, Industries, Attractions
- Service Centers
- Transportation, Access
We have applied this approach to a few areas in Texas such as the central Texas region including the cities of Killeen, Waco, Temple, Bryan and College Station. By means of a series of nine maps and a computer graphic program, we overlayed these maps to form two composite maps. One was for the development of touring circuits and another composite map showed longer-stay development potential. This means that according to present markets and resources, some areas have much greater potential than others.

By employing this kind of mapping and research approach we can create some concepts for development. For this region, our researchers identified eight potential touring circuits, if the resources there were developed into attractions and other changes took place. Several opportunities were identified:

* greater development of historic architecture
* greater use of industrial and agricultural areas for tours
* new ranch resorts and farm vacation centers
* greater use of nature and scenery for tours

A similar composite map was developed for longer-stay tourism, indicating areas best suited to this kind of destination zones. Four zones were identified as having the most potential, each one having special assets lending itself to special markets and a theme for development. Opportunities identified were:

* increased meeting and conference facilities
* greatly improved entertainment attractions
* greater utilization of water-based recreation and resorts
* improved travel linkage between cities and attractions

This technology is in place and could be applied to this region as well as the entire state of Texas.

CONCLUSIONS

It should be clear by now that the greatest opportunities for tourism growth in Texas and elsewhere lie in the systems integration of the several parts of tourism. Lodging accommodations will gain when they are supportive of new parks, convention centers and transportation improvements. Public investments in infrastructure and amenities will be more efficient and socially acceptable when made in the context of visitors as well as residents. Developers of attractions (historic, theme parks, entertainment) will gain when their plans are integrated with those of service businesses and transportation planners. Tax dollars will be applied in a more socially responsible manner when government acquires cooperate on plans that impact tourism. Both governments and private enterprise will gain when relations are more cooperative than adversarial. Citizens of communities will benefit by supporting well-planned visitor attractions and services that bring new tourist dollars to the community. A greater sensitivity to the traveler's preferences and needs will result in fewer problems and better success for tourism.

If communities in southwestern Texas seek more tourism they can realize this goal by taking just four steps:
(1) analyze present and potential markets;

(2) analyze local supply side with special emphasis on adding attractions;

(3) Organize and give leadership for integration of the tourism system locally;

(4) Stimulate networking by every business, public and non-profit development related to tourism.

Of these four steps, perhaps the hardest to do and yet the one with creates potential is for everyone to reach out and assist all other parts of tourism to succeed. By so doing, tourists will gain better satisfactions and each part will be assured greater success.
Fig. 1 Functional Tourism System

Fig. 2 Destination Zone