TOURISM BEYOND THE BUSINESS

An Address By
Dr. Clare A. Gunn, Professor
Recreation and Parks Department, Texas A&M University

The National Tour Foundation Dinner
The National Tour Association Convention
Houston, November 9, 1983

Ladies and gentlemen of the National Tour Association.

Let me first commend you on the establishment of the National Tour Foundation, which I believe is one of the greatest innovations for tourism this country has seen. I consider it a rare privilege to be addressing you at this National Tour Foundation Dinner. It is very heartening to see this many people gathered together for the sole purpose of discussing tourism—what I consider as one of the most important elements of modern society. For a professor, who normally faces audiences from 10 to 30, this is a very heady experience, indeed.

In my work with tourism, I am increasingly optimistic. I see increased use of new technology. I see a much greater diversity of things for travelers to see and do. I see a wave of higher quality development. And we all know how tourism—an activity presumably frivolous and capricious—was the only segment of the economy to hold its own during the recent recession. While some areas did show some drop, others, such as Texas, even increased. Here, it more than doubled in the last six years—from $6 billion in 1976 to $13.7 billion in 1982.

Certainly, all this is testimony to the free enterprise system and how well in this country we have made it work for tourism. But, at the same time, I am observing a major challenge—one of increasing magnitude in the eighties. For many years we have paid close attention to our individual businesses—making them more cost-efficient, more marketable. But, today's tourism demands one more dimension.

Unless we begin to spend a portion of our business effort beyond our business, we just may not have as much business to attend to. In my opinion, we will never reach the true
potential of tourism unless we, first of all, pay attention to many factors outside our business, and second, do something about them.

So, in the next few minutes, I want to relate to your theme of "A New Direction" by looking at "Tourism Beyond the Business," and raise just three main issues. Let me pose them as questions to ask yourself.

POINT ONE: How can I improve my business by making the tourism system function more smoothly and more efficiently?

Notice that I use the term, tourism system. Because tourism is fragmented into so many separate parts, we do not always remember that our business is dependent upon a huge and very complicated system. Not only must each part function to its fullest—it must function in close harmony with all the others. For teaching purposes, I have found it useful to think of the tourism system as made up of five components, each with many, many parts. Some activities, such as the motorcoach tour business, cut across all of them.

If I were to identify the key one of the five, I would name attractions. Without attractions—the lure to places away from home—there would be no travel away from home. Attractions are those physical places and events that not only pull us but also provide us with the many satisfactions during the experience. This experience is the real tourism product. To what extent are you protecting and expanding your interests by encouraging the development of new attractions, perhaps even new destinations?

Over several years at Texas A&M University, we have identified a series of factors, such as natural and cultural resources, important to tourism development. By using this model and computer mapping, we are able to identify areas with greatest potential.

But, I find it difficult for business and communities to look beyond their personal interests to take this approach. I continue to hear statements like: resources have nothing to do with tourism; tourism is destructive of national parks; or that many hoteliers still believe that they are selling rooms and airlines claim that they are selling seats, when actually, they are selling a service to travelers on their way to attractions. This is an important difference. I am convinced that many areas have much greater potential for tourism than now being realized.
For example, we have just completed a study to discover the tourism potential in a little-known county about sixty miles east of San Antonio. We have identified 27 new projects that have a solid and logical foundation in their special resources and market opportunities.

Several of these projects center on creating a beautiful waterfront park and interpretive tower in an area now blighted and run down but within two blocks of the central business district. They are confident that they have the money and the leadership to create these new attractions; we are confident that they will for the first time become known as a destination and have a many-fold increase in tourism revenues within a very few years.

You have many opportunities, I am sure, of stimulating the development of new attractions and encouraging the improvement of existing ones.

Awareness of attractions forces us to be concerned about a second component—the people we are attracting. I know that many of you are doing your own market research. But, are you fostering the broad-scale annual market analysis that is needed?

These are dramatically changing times— Influencing changes in life styles and the distribution of markets. Are we keeping up? It is both good news and bad news to hear the projection that by the year 2030, for every two workers in this country, seven persons will be retired.

I happen to know that Canada has a better reading on the activities and preferences of American tourists than we do in the United States. We are fortunate in Texas, in that Frank Hildebrand, Executive Director of our Texas Tourist Development Agency, has launched a new annual survey of travelers in Texas.

Couldn't your business benefit by a new thrust into regular annual analysis of the behavior, the psychographics, and geographical changes of tourist markets?

Of course, the third component, transportation, is well under control. Or, is it? Frankly, all of you in the other components face many challenges of things like: improving intermodal travel; making sure that our interstates will not continue to deteriorate; making positive adjustments to deregulation; improving highway safety; raising personal travel to a higher policy level so that all highway decisions are not made by trucking and freight interests; and, by being increasingly sensitive to the transportation needs of travelers.
A fourth component, information and direction, I am sure is not generally a problem with NTA members. You already know the value of informing and guiding tourists. But, throughout the tourism system, there is a need for greater awareness of how this component is of value to everyone.

For example, in my travels, I often find a piece of literature in my hotel room that is a generalized full-color montage of local attractions. However, almost never does this literature have a map or copy that gives me the information I want, such as when these attractions are open, their cost, and especially how to get there from here. In many tourism conferences I attend, I hear much about promotion but very little about creating effective information.

Think about how you and NTA can make it easier for the traveler to learn about destinations.

I have left to last a fifth component, services and facilities, such as lodging, food service, and retail stores, because we so often put it first. Even though this component is highly dependent upon all the others, I still find that these businesses are reluctant to reach out so that all parties can be more successful.

And so, my first point this evening is to challenge you to be thinking more and more about better management of the overall tourism system. Not in an autocratic or bureaucratic sense, but rather how you and NTA can foster a more smoothly running system for the good of all.

POINT TWO: How can I improve my business by supporting greater research?

Right at the start, let me commend NTA for its forward thinking and policy in support of research within your National Tour Foundation.

Probably the greatest problem with research is the negative image of the word, "research." In the minds of many, research means something difficult, complicated, expensive, and producing something unintelligible or useless anyway. Unfortunately, sometimes this is true.

But, the complications of tourism increasingly demand that we get at the facts. And, we in tourism are far behind other businesses in this regard. How do we know this?
Dr. James M. Rovelstad, University of Wisconsin--Parkside, recently ran a national survey that compared tourism business market research with American businesses as a whole. The results are slightly embarrassing.

1. Tourism organizations in the U.S. are not as committed to market research as are their counterparts in consumer package goods.
2. Marketing research professionals as a whole have given little attention to tourism.
3. The research gap is substantially greater for mid-size and smaller firms.

And, this study encompasses only marketing research. If we turned to other aspects of tourism, such as destinations, the picture would be even more challenging.

Why research? Without research, where do you and I usually get our basic information? Experts (Earl R. Babbie in Social Research for Consumers) tell us it is likely to be the following four ways:

1. Personal experience is supposed to be the best teacher. After all, what's better than first-hand experience?
2. Tradition is another source of information. We accept as gospel ways of doing business only because traditionally that's the way it has been done.
3. Some of us listen to authority. We hear that authoritative sources have reported this or that.
4. In recent years, such as the response to the conflict in Vietnam, overall public opinion becomes a strong source of information.

But, all of these have a major pitfall. We overgeneralize. Because of an accident in one fun-ride in a theme park, where millions have had fun safely for many years, the generalization is made that all theme parks are unsafe. Loaning agencies overgeneralize that because one business failed, all others of that type are doomed to failure.

Personal experience, tradition, authority, and public opinion can help us in many ways, but we really don't know unless topics of interest have been given greater rigor, which we call research. Research has precise rules that help protect us against errors of overgeneralization and other pitfalls of these more popular ways of finding information.
A bright spot on the horizon was a recent meeting called by the National Park Service. The purpose was to identify the research needs between tourism and the National Park Service. We identified some 47 topics, all of which could have some bearing on your business. By the way, the only panel member from the private sector was one of your own board members, Mikie Wall. I was pleased to read that your NTA president-elect, Mr. Hal Mischnick, has been named to the National Parks Advisory Board. This position should enhance greatly the exchange of information and the stimulation of needed research.

Our biggest problem in tourism research today is support. Tourism research cannot be directed toward answering your needs if it is not given greater funding.

And so, I believe that research, my second point, is a major challenge before all of us who want a bigger and better tourism industry.

POINT THREE: How can I improve my business by supporting better education?

While research and education are often seen as long-range, there are many short-range efforts that can be of great assistance. But, are we doing what we should? Reviewing your literature and the outline of this conference, I was pleased to see the educational thrust of NTA and the National Tour Foundation with its seminars, manuals, and scholarships.

Let me highlight some of the challenges I see in tourism education.

Who is educating the future entrepreneurs? If ever there was a field needing innovation, creativity, and new ways of providing for recreation and travel, it is the field of tourism. How can we educate more people in the field of tourism entrepreneurship? In my work overseas, I find that the lack of this characteristic of tourism development is their greatest drawback. In other words, we take entrepreneurship for granted because it's part of our heritage. But, are we letting this great asset of ours decay, especially in this field where we need new approaches to attractions, service businesses, transportation, and information? How can we do a better job of education for future entrepreneurs?

Who is educating the future developers? Do we continue to depend on those with money but with little expertise in our field, or do we intentionally provide educational courses that
stress the special needs of tourism development? The principles of shopping centers and housing projects do not necessarily apply to tourism.

Who is educating the future managers, supervisors, specialists, and workers? We are doing a better job in some fields, such as hotel and restaurant management, than in others. But, are these enough? I argue that we cannot afford to continue proselytizing from other fields in order to get our tourism jobs done. It is time we recognize these specialized fields and begin the proper education and training.

Who is educating the future organization managers? I would venture that out of the some 500 organizations relating to tourism in this country, very few of their managers have had specialized education for this special role. The setting of policy, the relationship to members, and the special funding problems of non-profit organizations require many things beyond the qualifications of the average manager.

Who is educating the future travelers? You may smile at this. But, many of us believe that there is room for travel education, even down into the grades. I just learned that at this conference, your organization is launching a Travel-For-Tomorrow Council, with the purpose of consumer awareness—spreading the word that travel affects every facet of human life. How well do people really know how to travel—to handle the mechanics of travel, to respect certain courtesies in other cultures, to gain all the pleasures and enrichment that they can get from travel? To what extent do we teach children about geography any more? I have a hunch that many of our international diplomatic problems today would at least be better understood, if not eliminated, if as children we had received better education about other cultures.

And, finally, who is educating the future teachers of tourism? At the present time, we at Texas A&M University have probably graduated more Ph Ds now teaching tourism in universities than any other school. Certainly, we are proud of this record. But, it is very small compared to the need. Many more programs at many universities and colleges are needed to educate teachers in the many facets of tourism.

It is heartening for those of us who did pioneer in education of tourism to see some progress. At the present time, in this country, there are 90 programs at the four-year college and university level, teaching commercial recreation and tourism.
But, I would be remiss if I did not suggest some ways that you can help raise the status of tourism education in this country. Let me mention just three.

We need help in convincing various high school, college, and university boards and administrators that these kinds of education are needed today. We are convinced, but they are not. When you view the billions of dollars expended on more traditional programs, and often with less social and economic impact, it raises questions of priorities in education.

We need help in recruiting more young people to enter this fascinating and rewarding field. You may think everyone knows about tourism but I guarantee that high school students and counsellors do not. They generally are not aware of the many trade schools, short courses, two-year certificate programs, four-year college and university programs, to say nothing of the masters and Ph D programs. They need to learn about tourism as a satisfying and productive career.

And, we need your help in curriculum building. Sure, we think we know education. But, we need input from industry to understand better some of your special needs.

What can we conclude from this brief summary of some challenges in tourism—TOURISM BEYOND THE BUSINESS?

As futurists are telling us, and as every day's news reminds us, we are experiencing dramatic changes in almost every way that we look at ourselves and the world. And, it is easy to become pessimistic. But, as I look back at over 30 years of association with tourism, I am very optimistic about the future—not blindly, but in a studied fashion. I have every confidence that internally within your own businesses you will continue to improve.

My main message tonight is to continue this—but also to look beyond, to help yourself:
by stimulating better ties with the many outside factors that influence your success;
by supporting more and better research; and
by increasing the volume of people with tourism education.

Ladies and gentlemen of NTA and the National Tour Foundation, if you meet this challenge, and I believe you already have programs in place to do it, I am convinced that tourism will then demonstrate even greater satisfactions for travelers, greater protection of resource assets, greater overall economic impact, and certainly, greater rewards for your business.