

No. 5: Developing local excursions for tourists

In essence: A valuable way for hotels and tourism operators to support the local economy while enhancing their own product is to develop local excursions for their clients. Such excursions include visits to rural villages, craft-makers, to heritage sites, and opportunities to enjoy local cuisine, dancing, or cultural events. Examples below illustrate that there are a large number of ways in which hotels, lodge operators and resorts can assist local entrepreneurs to develop an excursion appropriate to clients through involvement in business planning, provision of capital and training, and access to marketing.

The value of excursions

Excursions offered by accommodation providers are often integral parts of the tourism package. Excursions are added to increase the attractiveness of the accommodation product with the aim being to attract guests in the first place and possibly induce them to stay longer and spend more. Excursions can also be the main appeal of the vacation where accommodation itself (the lodge or the hotel) plays a secondary role, the key examples of this being the great variety of niche and special interest cultural tours being sold, many of which often travel along specific routes.

A tourism excursion may or may not include a 'pro-poor' element, i.e. an explicit agenda to include and promote activities that provide net benefits to the poor. But where small tourism operations are trying to expand, one technique to assist the poor is to incorporate them into the core product of larger operations. With tourists increasingly looking for an 'authentic' product, mainstream tourism businesses (e.g. the accommodation sector) can benefit from offering excursions that involve less-mainstream and often marginalised businesses.

The dispersal of tourists to attractions in marginalised communities can offer a number of opportunities for economic development and poverty reduction. A new route can lead to the development of local enterprises, increasing the demand for goods and services of the poor. This will also provide employment opportunities, which can increase both individual income as well as the collective income of the whole community. This in turn can also lead to capacity building and the development of local infrastructure. It is essential for new excursions and routes to link in with traditional tourism structures and extend them to incorporate new features, new products and new stakeholders in order for them to be commercially viable, which is essential if poor producers are to benefit (Meyer, 2004).

Combining excursions into a 'route'

Tourism routes bring together a variety of activities and attractions under a unified theme. While individual excursions are often developed and offered by individual private sector businesses (see boxes 1, 2 and 3), tourism routes and circuits are frequently the product of close collaboration between individual service providers that pool resources and increase the attractiveness of the wider destination. The development of themed excursions and routes as tourist attractions has gained prominence in recent years. These routes stimulate entrepreneurial opportunity through the development of ancillary products and services (Grefe 1994, Gunn 1979, Fagence 1991, Lew 1991, Miossec 1977, Long et al 1990, Getz and Page 1997). They are often supported by the public sector as the example of St. Lucia (box 3) shows.

One key benefit of routes is that they can tie-up several attractions that would independently not have the potential to entice visitors to spend time and money. Using a synergy effect promises to have greater pulling power. Routes also disperse visitors' money among a larger number of recipients. Thus, encouraging tourists to venture into the peripheries of a destination can stimulate the economy in those areas and provide income and employment. At the same time, a route can increase the overall attractiveness of a product by presenting 'new' features to its visitors, thus providing a platform for revised marketing programs with the aim of increasing length of stay and total spending.

Below are some examples of how the private sector (tour-operators and accommodation providers) and a public sector initiative have used excursions and routes to spread the benefits of tourism. Box 1 provides examples of

how two US based tour operators (Karell Travel and Premiere Tours) have incorporate trips to the New Rest Township in South Africa as an important product feature Similarly box 2 (Club Sun N Sand) shows a similar approach developed by a holiday resort in Kenya. These examples show the benefits from going beyond making donations to community projects to using them as an integral part of the product offered to tourists. Box 3 demonstrates how a governmental initiative (St. Lucia Heritage Programme) is working to diversify the product and disperse tourists to marginal areas. Excursions and guided tours along purposely designed routes are key elements in their dispersal strategies.

Box 1: The New Rest settlement as a product feature of Karell Travel's African Dream Vacations and Premier Tours

i. New Rest and Karell Travel's African Dream Vacations

Community work is an important part of Karell Travel's African Dream Vacations. Karell Travel's community involvement began as a quiet grassroots endeavour several years ago in a community called New Rest, located just outside of Cape Town. They developed a small and very personal guided tour to the township with the aim to learn about how this and countless other communities in South Africa are struggling to re-engineer themselves to survive in the 21st century. The company's involvement in the New Rest included the provision of running water and homes with permanent roofs; the opening of a crèche; and the provision of brick-making machines.

The company's clients increasingly showed an interest in taking tours to the New Rest settlement. Benefits of including a township into the travel itinerary meant direct and indirect income to the township and its residents, but also vast opportunities to benefit from tourists making voluntary donations. Below are extracts from a testimony used in Karell's brochures to advertise excursions to the New Rest area.

"AIDS awareness in our community was brought about by tourists ... To combat crime and anti-social behavior amongst our youth, we started choirs who entertain our visitors. Soccer and netball teams has also been established again with the assistance of our tourists. Even our youngsters are all benefiting so much not only monetarily, but also socially. They've now become accustomed to "whites", as the only whites that do frequent our area are the police which were always hostile. Instead of guns there are cameras and smiling faces ... With their assistance and our collaborations we've moved from a destitute community to an active and positive community.

Thando Sekume.

SATOUR REGISTERED GUIDE."

Source: www.karell.com/information/community_aid.html (accessed May 2004)

ii. New Rest and Premiere Tours

Premiere Tours selects accommodation facilities that are committed to sustainable practices on a day-to-day basis and apply a sensible approach to tourism, conservation and local community involvement. New Rest is one of the responsible tourism activities that a typical tour organised by Premier Tours would visit. The community has used the revenue generated from visitors to buy brick making machines, facilitating the construction of better housing.

Premier Tours have found distinct benefits, such as the ability to acquire new clientele due to a strong reputation, and a very high level of repeat and referral visits. The company also has an excellent track record in retaining employees.

Source: www.premiertours.com (accessed May 2004)

Box 2: Club Sun N Sand (Kenya)

Club Sun N Sand is located in Kikambala, on Mombasa's North Coast. The project aims to incorporate philanthropy as an integral part of business practice to achieve sustainable social and economic development. Club Sun N Sand supports a number of local initiatives including the provision of health care through a public health clinic and the supply of purified drinking water for the villagers.

An integral part of the product on offers is the weekly tour for hotel guests to expose them to the range of development initiatives and local partnerships that the hotel supports. Not only does this support awareness raising of the projects and added donations from visiting tourists, but it has become a sought after activity while visiting the hotel complex. At the same time, excursions to development projects supported by the resort have increased the resort's reputation as a 'responsible' service provider.

Source:

www.britishairways.com/cms/masterEN/content/company_information/community_and_environmental/previous_winners.pdf (accessed May 2004)

Box 3: Heritage Tourism Program St Lucia

In September 1998, the Ministry of Tourism, with funding from the Government of St. Lucia and the European Union, founded the 3 year Heritage Tourism Program. The plan was to more evenly distribute the benefits of tourism throughout the island, especially to the rural communities. The program's main objectives are to allow optimal economic returns from tourism for the St. Lucian community, while ensuring minimal impact on the environment, and guaranteeing long-term sustainability of the sector.

The programme focuses on 5 key areas including product development and niche marketing. A key element of the Heritage Tourism Program St. Lucia is the development of heritage products in rural communities, in particular through the development of tourism routes and excursions via the Heritage Tourism Programme.

The Heritage Tourism Program works with local programme participants to meet universally established standards for visitor safety and amenities such as restrooms. The program offers technical assistance, training, loans and grant funding for site enhancements such as parks, visitor centres, walkways, signs and marketing. Over 60 projects in total have so far been funded and small businesses in the rural areas have responded enthusiastically to the program. To achieve eligibility for participation, a site must meet a list of "Conditions for Program Assistance." For example, the conditions require that the site be environmentally friendly, able to guarantee benefits to the community, and able to contribute to economic linkages within the community. Participating sites include nature trails, waterfalls, botanical gardens, and colonial estates.

The programme has expanded and participants have formed HERITAS (the Heritage Tourism Association) which has developed its own branded commercial tours with a very recognisable logo of the Saint Lucia whiptail lizard. HERITAS is now setting its own tourism product standards and is marketing an ever-expanding tour programme. Given the absence of a middleman, these tours work out ten to 15 percent cheaper than many others run by foreign owned hotels.

HERITAS has set up sales desks at the port to capture the cruise market. To date, about half a million tours have been sold to cruise passengers who stopover in Saint Lucia for a day. A tour averages half a day to a full day and could include nature hikes to the east coast, rainforest or waterfalls, cultural trips to the capital, the Folk Research Centre or the Fond Latisab Creole Park celebrating Creole traditions and practices. Beyond revenue from straight tour sales it is estimated that there has been a \$EC150,000 spin off from the sale of related products in the first half of 2003. The range of "branded tours" is now being privatised, including the transportation component, an essential part of any tour.

Source: www.internationalspecialreports.com/archives/00/stlucia/13.html (accessed May 2004)

Additional sources of information and references:

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These briefs were produced by the Pro Poor Tourism Pilots (Southern Africa) Programme, as a way to share practical international examples of pro poor actions with programme partners and others. PPT Pilots is a 3 year programme funded by DFID's Business Linkages Challenge Fund, facilitating adoption of pro poor practices by tourism companies in Southern Africa.

There are eight briefs so far in the Business Implementation of Pro-Poor Tourism Series. They cover a diverse range of topics from branding to supply chains and tourism-agriculture linkages. Several rely on material extracted from websites of companies and other organisations, which is provided in good faith but cannot be taken as verification of pro poor impact. The briefs were written by Dorothea Meyer, Caroline Ashley and Clive Poultney (first versions produced May 2004, revised versions uploaded December 2004).

Further programme information and the full set of briefs are on www.pptpilot.org.za. Further background on PPT internationally is on www.propoortourism.org.uk.