



RETHINKING TOURISM; CHANGE IS BETTER THAN MORE OF THE SAME

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Was the World Tourism Day an occasion to celebrate? Then why was the theme “Rethink Tourism” attached to it? According to the Secretary-General of UNWTO -UN World Tourism Organization-: “the World Tourism Day has always been a chance to come together and celebrate the many and varied accomplishments of our sector.” And so, it appeared that everyone started celebrating and sending out press releases about successes of the past.

But....., in the same address the Secretary General also noted: “However, this year especially we also recognize that we cannot go back to the old ways of working. We must Rethink Tourism.” And that was something missing in all the press releases. Rethinking means considering something, especially in order to change it.

Some authorities and organizations claim that they have a five-year plan for tourism development. It is somewhere in a drawer, as if it is an insurance policy to be kept in a safe place. Good years

bring good things. But making a five-year plan counting on five consecutive good years is risky. Nothing to be proud of to claim having such a plan. A vision is okay, but a plan may become questionable when one starts with the 'what-ifs'. One can plan the development of infrastructure, accommodations and technicalities related to tourism.



One just cannot plan the behavior of people abroad. It cannot even be predicted. Tourists are individuals from a different country. They are often much depending on what is happening in their own country and environment. We have seen that in the past, whether it was recession or pandemic. Current inflation and energy prices are a concern. And then there can be trends that have some influence on their consumer behavior. One just cannot plan on their numbers for the next five years; it's wishful thinking.

What can be planned for sure are the basics what they like. In principle, they are all looking forward to spending their time in paradise on Earth. A place of exceptional happiness, pleasure, delight, contentment, and fulfillment. That is where the challenges begin, and where rethinking tourism comes in. It is a challenge because the competition will try to do the same to attract them to their paradise concept. Therefore, the planning should include outdoing the competition as for what they are offering now and intend to offer in the future.

Destination or tourism product development should start with trying to get on their bucket list. A bucket list is a list of experiences one wants to have before dying. It comes from the phrase "kicking the bucket", which simply means in one dramatical word, dying. Typically, a bucket lists always have at least one 'the best life has to offer'. Be the one.

Then, the actual experience at the bucket-list destination should be such that the desire is created to make the visit to the destination part of the lifestyle. Thus, cultivating buckaroos, the iconic figure of a cowpuncher, into loyal repeat visitors. A lifestyle typically reflects an individual's attitudes, way of life, values, or world view. The only regret from a stay at a destination should be that the visitor couldn't stay longer!

The worst one can do is planning the destination as a day-care facility for tourists. Don't create

hustle- and-bustle attractions in a tourism product, if that not something that belongs in paradise. The most important thing is to have unique offerings. Unique is something that others cannot claim to have. Authenticity and heritage come to mind. Natural environment is an essential part of Paradise.



Swaying palm trees are absolutely not unique enough to be mentioned. Palm trees love tropical climates, anywhere in the world. Nothing unique about them. Amazingly the orange flamboyant trees and the purple gardenias are never mentioned. There are forty or more beautiful tropical plants with flowers in many different colors including red, orange, purple, pink, white, etc. that can make one feel like being in paradise on warm sunny days. But how many Caribbean islands actually have a department to cultivate flowering plants and trees in public places?

What about 'Guestocology'? You will not find the word in the dictionary. It is the study of the people for whom services are provided. It is a term and originates from the same man who said: "You don't build it for yourself. You know what the people want, and you build it for them", Walt Disney. Make no mistake, tourism or destination development is not about creating another Disney-like destination. It is learning some of the principles that may lead to success. What the guests want and need, means knowing and understanding the clientele from abroad. Not just their culture and behavior, but their true needs, perceptions, and expectations. These should not be taken lightly, considering that for many a vacation is just a once-a-year happening.

A destination should establish a comfortable and lasting position in the marketplace. Tourism and destination development should acknowledge that there is a link between guest satisfaction and brand reputation. This combination can set one destination apart from all others. Assumptions and calculations in planning don't always square with reality. Dare to think differently about how tourism can be changed. Daring to think beyond the conventional way of thought is part of the recipe. When feet are kind of numb, polishing the shoes is not the solution. Last but not least, think of how to get them to paradise fast and easy at a reasonable price.

'Rethink Tourism' is the theme!



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