TOURISM FACTS AND FALLACIES

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ABSTRACT

At the same time that tourism is promoted heavily and is known to produce economic benefits, it is generally misunderstood. With greater understanding, planning and development can be more successful. At least the following top ten fallacies need to be countered with tourism facts if development is to progress: tourism is an industry; hotels and airlines drive tourism; it can be developed anywhere; cheap investment money is the greatest need; advertising can create tourism; tourism has no costs; tourism and environmentalism are incompatible; rural areas should "go it alone"; Chambers of Commerce are the best tourism leaders; and traditional planning is best. When communities and states recognize these as fallacies, they will have removed many barriers to the future development of tourism.

"Tourism at the Crossroads" Conference
Lakewood, New Jersey, Feb. 18, 1994

Because I have been working with tourism for many years, I recall when tourism leaders had difficulty convincing legislators that tourism was worth supporting with public moneys. What they lacked was hard economic data. Now we have it. We know that tourism provides jobs, wages, and taxes.

But, we tended to stop at this level of understanding. As a researcher and teacher I was challenged by many questions. What does tourism really include? If tourism is to grow, what also, other than economic impact, must we know? As I began to search for answers, I worked as much as I could outside the classroom, in the real world of tourism, both here and abroad. This experience has led me to the conclusion that there are many very important fundamentals that make tourism succeed, but, equally important, that most of these are not well understood.

And so, for the next few minutes, I would like to share with you what I believe to be the top ten fallacies about tourism that seem to get in the way of best tourism planning and development.

FALLACY: Tourism is an industry.

FACT: It is not an industry.

Tourism is an agglomeration of many facilities and programs, developed by a great number and a wide diversity of actors. It varies from industrial definitions on several counts. It has no single product--it has many. It is not housed in easily identified factories and warehouses--it is widespread over urban and rural areas. It is not managed by identifiable CEOs--it is managed by a huge array of developers. It is not developed through promotional campaigns toward a few CEOs--it requires collaboration by many public and private planners and developers. The location and operation of tourism is highly dependent upon geographical factors, much more so than plants and industries.

And so, if you wish to develop tourism, you can not use the methods commonly used to attract industry. Many more people must be involved and much more careful planning must be done.

FALLACY: Hotels and airlines drive the tourism system.

FACT: Hotels and airlines are facilitators, not causes.

Too often, communities seeking tourism believe the first step is to build a new hotel and expand the airport for scheduled airline access. Although study of the area may show deficiencies in these services, the first step is to evaluate the attractions. The activating power for all of tourism lies in the attractions--the things for travelers to see and do, whether for business or pleasure. Attractions provide two very important functions. They provide the pulling power for travelers to come to a destination. They also provide the satisfactions to travelers, fulfilling the objectives of their travel. Without well-planned and well-managed attractions, the facilities of hotels and access may not be needed.

This means that a first step to develop tourism is to determine better marketing of existing attractions and to discover opportunities for developing new attractions.

FALLACY: Tourism can be developed anywhere.

FACT: Some geographic areas have greater potential than others.

Just as has been found in agriculture, you cannot grow tourism on poor "soil". By soil, I mean geographic factors that foster the development of tourism. Generally, tourism thrives best when it can be built on four critical factors. These are: natural resources, cultural resources, transportation and cities. If you are primarily concerned about bolstering the economy through tourism, your chances are much greater wherever you have an abundance and high quality of--

natural resources: water, wildlife, vegetation, topographic change, favorable climate.

cultural resources: historic sites, cultural heritage, potential for sports and entertainment, and centers of business and industry.

transportation: good access, good linkage to travel market sources (air, land, water).

cities: established community with economic diversity, good management, and ample infrastructure (water, waste disposal, police and fire protection).

This means that enthusiasm and commitment are not enough, even though they are valuable. Without these basic geographical assets an area will have much greater difficulty in developing tourism as compared to one that has them in abundance.

FALLACY: Cheap money is tourism's greatest need.

FACT: Financial backing is available for feasible projects.

There is a prevalent misconception that the only problem inhibiting tourism development is the inability to obtain funding. Most complaints about tourist business finance comes from those who have poor products, insufficient geographic factors and or poor financial records. The truth is that for feasible projects, both public and private, financial backing is much more available than most people think. The key word is feasibility. If a prospective developer has an ill-conceived and poorly planned project, intends to locate in an area of poor tourism factors, has a poor understanding of the target market, has over-estimated returns and under-estimated costs, and has a poor track record of management competence, financial backing will be difficult. However, with an opposite scenario with all factors positive, the chances are reasonably good. Even in the public and non-profit sector, money is available, barring major political changes in the future.

And so, for the future success of tourism, the lack of financial support is not a major inhibitor; a poor feasibility is.

FALLACY: Billboards and advertising can create tourism.

FACT: Only an improved product can create tourism.

Although promotion, including advertising, is an important part of the supply side of tourism, it cannot function without something to promote. That something is a satisfying visitor experience which depends greatly on attractions, services, transportation and informational systems. Many communities, observing massive traffic flows along nearby highways have been disappointed with the results from expensive billboards. Unless you have many worthwhile things to offer, based on the best tourism support factors, billboards are a waste of money and may even clutter up the very scenery you are trying to sell.

So, an area seeking tourism development must first give attention to what it has to offer the traveler. Only then will promotion be effective.

FALLACY: Tourism has no costs.

FACT: Tourism has several costs.

Many communities that sought tourism in the naive belief that it was free have been sorely disappointed. Tourism does have costs--three major ways.

There are many economic costs in developing tourism. Investment, public and private, is required. Capital costs of land and facilities must come from somewhere for new business development. Cities and counties may face large capital costs of new water supplies, new waste disposal systems, new streets, new lighting and expanded police and fire protection of tourism if developed.

There are important social costs. Not every community wants more visitors because they will increase congestion, increase litter problems, increase wear and tear on public facilities, and may even increase cultural conflict. Existing life styles and cultural traditions may be upset when masses of strangers come into town.

And, there can be severe environmental costs. A bulldozing grading philosophy can destroy landscape quality. Improper site development can create erosion. Improper sewage treatment can pollute recreational waters. Massive land development, such as for resort complexes and golf courses, can destroy valuable natural and cultural resources if not carefully planned.

All these negative impacts can be reduced or even eliminated, but not without good planning from the very start.

FALLACY: Tourism and environmentalism are incompatible.

FACT: Tourism cannot exist without environmental protection.

Without clean air, unpolluted water, abundant wildlife, interesting plant materials, and controlled soil erosion, tourism cannot exist. These are fundamental to the travel experience, the very product that must be provided if tourism is to succeed.

Yet, many community and state tourism leaders are of the opinion that

environmentalism inhibits tourism--that it is noneconomic. As yet, there is very little proactive leadership on the part of tourism sponsors for strong controls and investments needed to restore and maintain a better environment. We hear a lot these days about environmental degradation but are tourism interests doing anything about it?

Worldwide, this is a serious problem. Over one million square miles of tree cover have been lost since 1970. Farmers have lost an estimated 480 billion tons of topsoil. Industries and municipalities continue to dump raw sewage into streams and lakes. In Texas, it was recently reported that $2.5 million a day of tourist revenues were being lost because arsenic, oil, grease and other toxic wastes were flowing into Galveston Bay.

It is becoming more and more apparent that if tourism is to attain its desired objectives, much stronger environmentalism must be advocated and practiced.

FALLACY: **Rural areas and small towns should "go-it-alone".**
FACT: **Rural area and small town tourism have much to gain by cooperating with nearby larger cities.**

There is a prevailing antagonism and rivalry between cities and surrounding small towns. It is often believed that it is demeaning and disloyal to communicate between areas. But, this local view is not shared nor even tolerated by visitors--the very market that must be attracted and satisfied, Markets could care less where the city limits lie nor which public agency is responsible needed development.

Instead, the greater the critical mass of attractions and services, the greater can be the positive impacts of tourism. There are several mutual benefits from cooperation. The larger city gains by having more for visitors to see and do by collaborating with nearby small towns and rural areas. Outdoor recreation makes up a very large component of tourist activity Conversely, as more people visit the surrounding area, more money is spent in the small towns and rural areas. By cooperating on promotion a larger and more appealing product can be offered. When larger cities invest in surrounding resource protection--parks, preserves, wildlife sanctuaries, better waste management--both rural areas and cities benefit.

No, it is not in anyone's interest for rural areas and small towns to try to "go-it-alone" for tourism development.

FALLACY: Chambers of Commerce provide the best tourism leadership.
FACT: New structures are needed for best tourism development.

Even though many Chambers of Commerce are active in tourism, this field demands a different structure and action program than normally found in a Chamber. For tourism planning and development, the following must be considered. The leadership organization should include representatives of park and recreation developers, environmentalists, historic preservationists, the arts and crafts, city government, state government and citizens of the community and surrounding area in addition to representatives of business. The goals must include enhanced visitor satisfaction, resource protection, integration into the life of the community as well as promotion and economic improvement. The action program must go beyond contact with CEOs of business and include decision makers in the governmental and nonprofit sectors as well as commercial enterprise.

It has been my experience that these functions are important and generally outside the traditional framework and function of Chambers of Commerce. A tourism planning and development organization should have its own autonomy, program, and responsibilities.

FALLACY: Traditional consulting planners and planning produces the best plans.
FACT: Today's tourism planning requires new cooperative approaches.

Unfortunately, the cliche of "plans gathering dust on the shelf" too often is true. This truth stems primarily from the older elitist approach by planners--that planners know what is best for everyone else. Today, all this has changed. We now see the value of public involvement from the very start. Today, the best planning for tourism, especially at the destination and community scales, is done cooperatively by local citizens, tourism developers, and professional planners. In fact, the planner serves not only as an expert in planning but primarily as a catalyst for bringing together the many constituencies that are involved in tourism. This includes those who are impacted as well as those who seek tourism development. This process requires more effort, more time and many more meetings and workshops by all parties concerned. But, it pays off because it works. Planners can create plans and recommend creative development but they do not develop--others do. Unless local people, investors, and the public and private tourism sectors take action, the planner's reports

will remain on the shelf.

No, traditional planning approaches do not work. The new processes are integrative and cooperative. They must balance resource protection with development and--most important--they must result in action.

CONCLUSIONS

What can we conclude from this discussion? First of all, tourism remains an increasingly viable economic producer. Second, a great amount of education is needed in order to understand tourism and its very special characteristics. Finally, the future development of tourism requires new team cooperation by a great many interests combined with an entirely new kind of planner and planning processes. Moneys spent only on promotion, such as has dominated focus of the past, will no longer do the job.