

REVIEWING THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF TOURISM



In most of the world, April marks the beginning of spring, renewal and of fresh hope. It also marks the gateway to the busy tourism season and a time for tourism professionals to step back and contemplate their industry.

Tourism has become an ever more complicated industry. Tourism professionals need to worry about everything from war to economic stagnation, from health threats to food poisoning, from high prices to less than acceptable customer service. Faced with an avalanche of problems, it is all too easy to forget some of tourism's basic building blocks.

Tourism & More is pleased to present the following set of building blocks in alphabetical order. The following article does not seek to indicate that one building block is more important than others, rather just as when children play, each block is essential and if we withdraw any of the blocks, the entire structure may come tumbling down.

- **Is it affordable?** Not every tourism destination is economically feasible for every pocketbook. Segment your market and go after the type of person who will be most comfortable in your community. Tourism is like a marriage in that not every community is right for every customer. No matter what your community's economic status, no one wants to be deceived. Good tourism starts when people find value for the cost of the product. No one expects a tourism community to lose money but customers do expect that you offer your community's tourism products at a fair price.

- **Attractions.** No tourism industry can last without attractions. People come for the unique and special, and not for what they can get at home. If you are a beach community, for example, remember that there are lots of beaches in the world. Thus, ask yourself: what makes my community's beaches special? What combination of attractions provides my community with a unique attraction advantage?

- **Beautification.** Do not neglect to see your area through the eyes of your visitor. Places that are dirty, smelly, and polluted repeal tourists and attract crime. Beautification projects are no expensive. Start with cleaning trash, planting flowers and pruning trees. Make sure that sidewalks are in good repair and that signage fits into your locale's overall theme.

- **Cleanliness.** Too many tourism entities do not pay enough attention to issues of health and cleanliness. The public is now demanding food options that are both nutritious and healthy; the threat of pandemics has at times become a cause for alarm. Tourism communities must be careful of insect-borne illnesses, the problem of bedbugs, tourists bringing contagious diseases to their shores. While not every illness can be contained, we can do much by encouraging: clean streets, the washing of hands and signage indication that bug spray is essential in infested areas.

- **Safety and security.** These two concepts go hand in hand in the world of tourism. If food is not safe tourists will not return; if visitors must live in fear of crime or terrorism, the lack of safety and security will eventually destroy your tourism product.

Unfortunately many in tourism fail to grasp safety and security issues as an essential building block of tourism. Accomplishing a safe and secure tourism environment is no easy task as it takes hard work on the part of not only tourism personnel but a large number of related industries. These safety and security professionals comprise people from many unrelated fields. To assure tourism product safety and security then means having tourism sensitive personnel in such categories as food inspectors, front desk personnel, immigration and customs officials, airport inspections, police departments, private security.

One way that tourism officials have to bring all of these separate entities with a variety of missions under one umbrella is with the TOPPs (Tourism Oriented Policing and Protection Services) program. This program allows for a coordinated effort from a variety of personnel who are then tourism sensitive and do their jobs with professionalism and customer care.

- Staff: Tourism is about people. Staff needs to be composed of people who like people. Even the most open and gregarious of staff members however can become tired or worn out. Tourism management needs to be aware that front line personnel are also human beings and need rest periods and encouragement. Too many visitors have watched one lone person at a hotel's front desk try to check someone out while answering the phone, and dealing with another room's crisis, all on a minimal amount of sleep. The bottom line is that well-treated staff members often offer the best in customer service.

- Provide service, service and more service. All too many tourism specialists forget how important is good customer service given with a smile. Customer service is an essential quality of good tourism. People often forget a pretty sunset but they almost never forget a person who has gone out of his/her way to help them or a person who is unnecessarily rude.

One of the great complaints about the airline industry is not the high prices or the irregular service but the lack of customer service and care. Tourism is all about hospitality and if our staff members do not wish to see our clients as honored guests then it might be better if they sought another form of employment.

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