

Making Tourism Count

for the Local Economy in the Caribbean
Guidelines for Good Practice

April 2006

Published by
Pro-Poor Tourism Partnership
and the Caribbean Tourism
Organisation



Funded by UK Travel Foundation



Brief 5

Involving local people and products in tours, packages and excursions

The Issue

The Caribbean has more to offer holidaymakers than sun, sand and sea. Tours, packages and excursions need to be available to offer a range of cultural, natural heritage and 'meet the people' opportunities. Such excursions are a key way of enhancing the product and customer experience, and spreading the benefits of tourism wider into the local economy.

Some Caribbean islands offer excursions based on people's culture, such as dance groups performing for tour groups, visits to villages for local food and/or music, and visits to cultural heritage sites. But most excursions are based on enjoying the beach or outdoors with little interaction with local people.

Developing new excursions requires a thorough and careful approach. A variety of components are involved, such as the provision of transportation, guiding and a range of activities, experiences and admissions. These also raise issues of quality and health and safety.

Consider the opportunities

- Holidaymakers from the UK and other European originating markets are seeking more fulfilling experiences in the destination, and opportunities to venture beyond the confines of their hotel or resort.
- Most tourism brochures currently focus exclusively on sun, sand and sea. Excursions that introduce tourists to sugar cane plantations, farms, villages, culinary techniques, dancing traditions, and the legacies of indigenous and colonial history are marginal in the current product offering in most countries.
- Excursions provide memorable experiences and 'stories to tell', particularly when based on direct interaction with local people. They can also encourage repeat visits by introducing tourists to other parts of the country and showing that there is more to be seen.
- Excursions can spread the benefits of tourism, particularly in all-inclusive resorts, and enable tourists to buy directly from craft producers or to contribute through entrance fees to the maintenance of natural and cultural heritage. The country captures more tourist expenditure without increasing the 'cover price'.
- Excursions can make good use of different destinations' unique rich culture.

Understand the challenges

Developing excursions requires careful planning. The challenge is to develop tours that engage with local people, meet market needs, are of appropriate quality and meet the health and safety requirements of the international operators and national regulation. Key issues relate to the EU Package Travel Directive, which places a duty of care on European tour operators, and the role of domestic tour operators and ground handlers in developing excursion programmes.

Standards, risk and legal liability

Although interpretations vary in different jurisdictions, tour operators are responsible for the quality and health and safety of anything that they offer in brochures, sell in resorts or recommend. As a result, tour operators and their staff are careful only to recommend excursions that they have inspected and audited for quality and health and safety. New excursions must fit these standards if they are to be sold to international tourists through tour operators.

Important factors are:

- The provision of food and drinks outside the controlled environment of a hotel or resort. International standards include the use of different coloured chopping boards, aluminium work surfaces and date stamping of food. Lunch stops also have to be audited for health and safety.

- The security of the area, which may require particular attention for evening excursions: if community members are direct beneficiaries and are included as partners, then this may significantly reduce the risk of any incidents.
- The responsibilities of tourists. It is important that visitors do not carry disease on to farms, nor take away plant or animal material that is indigenous to the site.

Disincentives affecting tour operators and hoteliers

There is less economic pressure on ground handlers to innovate if what they have already developed sells. Creating new quality products requires auditing by overseas tour operators for resale and takes time for them. They need to recognise the long-term advantages.

Hoteliers sometimes seek to discourage their guests from becoming involved in community-based activities outside of the hotel because of a loss of revenue for hotel-organized events and meals. Yet hotels need good local relations in their immediate neighbourhood. If there is a rich excursion programme visitors may stay longer.

Community organisation and behaviour

Begging and hassling undermine the quality of the tourism experience and keep tourists away. Controlling this involves a high degree of community organisation and leadership.

Developing local excursions: *working examples*

Turning the cocoa bean into a full day out

In **Dominican Republic**, 'Ruta del Cacao' is run by Monbayasa, the Association of Tourism Micro-entrepreneurs in Monte Plata. A tour has been developed to an organic cocoa farm and co-operative where guests can see cocoa and tropical fruits growing as well as the living conditions, production and processing techniques, and social projects.

Guests can also taste the unprocessed seeds and fruits in the field, buy locally manufactured arts, watch and participate in

folkloric dancing, enjoy a traditional lunch, and of course taste and buy organic cocoa products, such as cocoa wine. The tour emphasizes the socio-economic and ecological relevance of organic cocoa production in the region.

There is a similar attraction in Grenada at Belmont Estate. The original farmhouse has been recreated as a museum, 'dancing' of cocoa beans is performed to live drumming and singing, and there is a tour of cocoa processing and

machinery. There is also a gift shop where cocoa products and other artisanal products from the area are sold. The restaurant offers a Grenadian buffet which utilises produce from the 400-acre farm, and each guest is provided with a bar of locally made chocolate.

✓ Remember, what is common in your area may be new and fascinating to tourists

**More working examples
on page 4**

What can you do?

Good practice approaches for hotels and tour operators¹

- ✔ Go exploring: find out about local talents, traditions and sites. Think laterally about what could become an innovative quality product.
- ✔ Excursions and activities contribute most to the local economy where they build on existing livelihoods and cultural activities – the ‘living culture’.
- ✔ Create partnerships between local and overseas operators to ensure that quality and health and safety issues are managed properly.
- ✔ Work with all stakeholders to ensure guest security and reduce hassle for tourists. This requires close collaboration between tourism operators and local community leaders, organisations, local government and police. The community needs exposure to what makes tourism work – or not work. And they need tangible benefits from making their area welcoming for tourists. Words of wisdom from others are insufficient incentive.
- ✔ Integrate local interaction and local shopping into existing excursions. Visiting local craft markets or workshops can enhance tourists’ experience and expenditure.
- ✔ In developing excursions that fit with tourists’ perceptions and expectations, draw on advice from local representatives of international tour operators, client feedback, and international guide books.
- ✔ Jointly develop codes of practice on commissions and incentives². Guides and drivers need to work for a bigger cake, not a bigger share of a small cake.
- ✔ Ensure high quality guiding with local knowledge. Tours that involve local people will not be successful if guides are hostile or dismissive of local culture. A diverse guide service can substantially enhance the tourist experience and create local employment.
- ✔ Be open to different kinds of guide training. The licensing of guides can ensure quality; however it can also exclude those without formal education but with good conversational language skills. Initiatives by government which take unlicensed informal sector guides and train them are one way to enable less educated guides to enter the market.
- ✔ Ensure destination managers and local guides work in collaboration on the development of guiding materials. In Belize, some destinations no longer offer self-guided brochures, but only maps to ensure that tourists use local guides.
- ✔ Train entrepreneurs. Training for local suppliers of crafts, tours, and other services is essential – in customer relations, business management, health and safety. Tourism businesses can provide much of this, particularly ‘experiential training’ where local entrepreneurs experience tourism first hand.
- ✔ Assess and manage social impacts of tourism. For example, encourage tourists to cover up, particularly when entering churches, and discourage them from giving away sweets in the street or from the windows of vehicles. Begging is often generated by the behaviour of tourists.
- ✔ Assess and manage environmental impacts. Cruise boats can pose particular problems because of the large numbers of people in small areas. Tourists need to be able to dispose of litter responsibly. Wear and tear at heritage sites or disturbance of wildlife needs to be monitored and managed. Coaches should cut their engines to reduce noise and air pollution.

Benefits to be gained

from new, diverse, people-focused excursions

- **For hoteliers:** extended length of stay, repeat business, word of mouth marketing and referrals
- **For tour operators:** increased business, revenues/profits from commissions, a more distinctive offer
- **For local communities:** employment and enterprise opportunities, inclusion in opportunities provided by tourism, and promotion of cultural preservation through tourism
- **For all:** a better experience, customer satisfaction, increased spend and an enhanced brand

Developing local excursions: more *working examples*

Recognising the value of local traditions

In **Dominican Republic**, Bachata is a style of rural guitar music, which until recently was regarded as vulgar, associated with rural backwardness and poor quality. Only after Bachata artists began to win international acclaim in the 1990s was Bachata included in tourism programmes.

✔ Don't dismiss the value of local culture

Learning about marketing the hard way

Mamiku Gardens, an eco-heritage site in the **Windward Islands** has been able to break into the cruise ship onshore excursion market. One of the lessons learned by the proprietor was the importance of marketing. '[We] were totally unaware of the importance of marketing when the Gardens were first opened and valuable time was lost.' The enterprise has now spent far more than originally planned on a website, videos, maps, brochures, flyers, radio and television features, and road signs. Based on her experience, the owner estimated that it took 'two years or more' for a cruise line to become interested in a new product.

✔ Help local entrepreneurs to invest sufficiently in marketing and to tap into your tourist market

About the Briefs ...

The eight Briefs in this series provide practical tips on how to develop different types of local linkages, drawing on experience in several different countries in the Caribbean ▶

For other Briefs in the series and further information see www.propoortourism.org.uk/caribbean

Brief 1: Overview: tourism and the local economy – building linkages

Brief 2: Bringing local producers into the supply chain

Brief 3: Building links with local farmers

Brief 4: Employing local staff

Brief 5: Involving local people and products in tours, packages and excursions

Brief 6: Encouraging tourists to spend in the local economy

Brief 7: Building neighbourhood partnerships

Brief 8: Managing internal change for developing local linkages.

The Appendix provides more details, further examples, sources, and a useful list of contacts.

The Briefs outline some of the benefits and challenges of local linkages, and then focus on what to do. They provide tips on good practice mainly for hoteliers, but also for other private, governmental and non-governmental operators in tourism.

Endnotes:

1. See also a Travel Foundation checklist and guide to creating sustainable excursions, at www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk/tools_training_guidelines.asp
2. For an example of development of codes of practice with local guides and vendors, see details from The Gambia in PPT Working Paper No. 15 *Improving Access for the Informal Sector to Tourism in The Gambia*, by Adama Bah and Harold Goodwin (2003) www.propoortourism.org.uk/15_Gambia.pdf

More details, sources and further examples can be found in the Appendix.