

Tourism Product Development and Marketing: Relevance of African Destination to the Asian market

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Introduction

Tourism is arguably one of the major industries across the globe and it is set to continue to grow. As an industry it has the capacity to contribute to the overall development of humanity. It creates jobs, develops cultures, provides infrastructure, enshrines peace and understanding etc. In any local environment, where it flourishes, it should be seen as a development management tool instead of to be seen as an enemy of the environment to be used for instant economic gains.

Unlike agriculture and manufacturing industries, tourism can get started with minimum capital. But tourism is also labor intensive. It is the only industry that can employ anybody regardless of age, gender or social status. In many aspects of the jobs that tourism creates, it attracts minimum qualification for entry. It also has the capacity to reduce poverty if it is well established in rural areas or places where poverty exists.

In the present days, wherever development issues are discussed, tourism can not be totally ignored as it contributes over 5% of global GDP and over 10% of exports in about 41 of the 50 poorest countries according to the UNWTO. Thirty three of these countries are in Africa.

According to statistics from the WTTC, the travel and tourism industry in North Africa represents 13.4% of GDP and provides 12% of employment. In Sub Saharan Africa, the sector contributes to 8% GDP and generates 10.5 million jobs, accounting for 6.6% of total employment. Tourism revenue in Africa is expected to grow by 4.7% per annum in real terms between 2007 and 2016.

Given the types of jobs and social, economic and environmental and community policies that a successful tourism industry brings along, the benefits at a destination can include a) direct employment, b) support for other industries and professions, c) stimulate exports of place-made products, d) expose other aspects of the businesses that are not known before the advent of tourism, e) source of state and local taxes, and can indeed generate f) a multiplier effect. With prudent planning and execution, tourism has the capacity to expedite a return on investment. But there has to be a commitment to its long-term development.

In order for tourism to be relevant and beneficial (to the local environment and investors), products have to be identified, branded and marketed. In order to do this, some questions will have to be answered. In this regard, this presentation will highlight the need for product development and marketing

of African tourism. It will also seek to identify the benefits of marketing such products to Asian markets considered as emerging markets for tourism and long haul tourists to an African destination.

Product development

To have a complete understanding, we need to seek answers to the following questions. What is a product and what is a tourism product? What is the African destination? Does it portray a safe image? Do the products address the needs or does it satisfy client demands? How are they packaged? Are they attractive to existing clients? Are they attractive (specifically) to Asian clients? Will the products be profitable, competitive? How can this be developed? Who will invest? Etc.

According to several scholars, products are any offerings that can satisfy a need or want of consumers. These may consist of one or a combination of components, including physical goods, services, experiences, events, persons, places, properties, organizations, information and ideas. A tourism product includes a combination of those components that contribute to the satisfaction of travelers and visitors.

Tourism products are diverse. They can be natural, cultural, historical, religious, etc. They can also be tangible and intangible. Tourism products provide avenue for satisfaction, experience, and generally lead to a WOW effect and response. The outcome can also be very relevant in lifestyle.

Even though tourism products or attractions can be universal with replications and serializations, markets can be identified with specific product needs. Markets and indeed tourists can be domestic/international (and can be categorized according to short haul and long haul). Eventually returnees can constitute a major market. But there has to be a good understanding of who are the tourists.

As this is a gathering of Asia and Africa, it is pertinent to understand the aspect of the Asian tourism market within the global context. With Japan as a major player in the global economy, and noting the increasing rise of China, the emerging role of India and Malaysia, these will thus create a huge market of business travelers, middle class with extra income for travel, adventure and leisure and educated youth seeking adventure, or simply looking for something new or exotic. Already as is being forecasted, Asia's contribution to global travelers and tourists will be the largest by the year 2020. This is not a market to ignore.

Promoting and marketing African tourism products will need planning and strategies. Issues to be considered will include specific product promotion and marketing, logistics of travel (distance and connection, visas, etc), infrastructure (both hard and soft), publicity, cultural expose, etc. African countries are diverse. Tourism growth worldwide is also benefiting from such diversities. Tourism products are now increasingly becoming enhanced by innovation and creativity. There could be need for niche marketing in order to expose such products. In addition, Africa indeed has a very long history of heritage and culture.

Strategies for Development and Marketing

Strategies for Africa tourism development and marketing will have to be able to seek development and economic prosperity. Given the overwhelming rural majority of the African population, the living heritage of Africa will have to be a key theme connecting the rural communities, nature and the culture that exists. This is borne from the fact that tourism resources both cultural and natural are mostly located in the rural areas. Therefore, tourism to the rural destination is an add on, because there is already an existing means of livelihood.

In addition to the natural and physical nature of the African continent, tourism products reflects the rich heritage that can be classified as historical, cultural, social and even religious.

Historical themes of heritage:

The contemporary global view of Africa is stereotypical. Africa is mostly seen as hopeless, poverty, migration, conflicts, wars, etc. We need to promote, package and market a new African story. There is aesthetics in Africa, there is lifestyle, there are people and there is a new wave of thinking and doing things.

But the historical heritage of which Africa can showcase and can be unique and interesting to both, long haul, short haul or even domestic tourists are scattered everywhere on the continent. These include hunting, subsistence

farming, domestication of animals, blacksmiths, traders, village settlements, cities, great Empires with their architecture, etc.

Cultural heritage:

Themes in this context range from local culture to popular (modern) culture. The African lifestyle is dynamic from many calls to local markets, to vibrant streetscapes. These relates in the behavior, arts, dance, music, drama, economic lifestyle, beautification, etc.

Each community or village has stories to tell. There are also proverbs, myths, legends, folklore stories and other interesting aspects of the community that visitors and tourists could find interesting.

Religious and other issues

Religious or indeed spirituality can be seen in all facets of African lifestyles. To visiting tourists, this can be a major attraction. Indeed these have also been exported and are now famous attractions in South America (Brazil, Cuba, etc.) and the African American Churches in the USA. This is also evident in Europe, especially, in Spain, Portugal, and the UK. In addition to these: rituals, ceremonies, festivals shrines, sacred places, names of people, names of places, mobile phones, etc. All these can be useful and could highlight the various aspects of livelihood in different localities on the African continent. For these to be relevant, we need an appropriate marketing strategy.

Conclusion and the way forward

In the global tourism trend, there is a general interest in sustainable tourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism and others often collectively referred to as “alternative tourism”. In putting together African tourism products that can be unique in a sense and resonate with alternative tourism, product development, marketing and branding can help develop or expose the African tourism market as that of new wave tourism.

The products can be clustered, packaged, promoted and marketed if there is more commitment by governments, investors both foreign and domestic, major stakeholders, etc. Finally, the role of academics and or consultants will be to identify such products and markets so as to unravel the benefits that the tourism industry can bring to the local community and the overall framework of the African – Asian relationship as articulated by TICAD.