

Product Development for Heritage Tourism

There is a need for a working partnership between those in the fields of cultural heritage and tourism to enhance visitors' experiences and to generate economic opportunities for local communities and other stakeholders. Sompong Amnuay-ngerntra shares his thoughts on the matter.

Due to the rapid changes with shrinking conservation budgets, and increasing consumer demand for a quality experience, a heritage manager needs to be adaptive, proactive, and market-



Interpretation techniques of both personal tourist guides and displays, both play an important role in enriching a visitors travel experience and their understanding of heritage values.

oriented. Understanding the concept of marketing contributes to an increase in the number of visitors and visitor management. Meanwhile, to develop a cultural heritage product, it is essential to understand the three levels of heritage tourism: core, tangible, and augmented. Interpretation plays an important role in the development of heritage tourism products at two levels: that of managing single sites (e.g. a temple, or historical building, etc.); and the other of managing a destination (e.g. an area consisting of various heritage sites, or historical monuments, etc.). Ideal interpretation requires that the right message and communication techniques are

used to enhance a visitors' understanding of heritage values and to receive a great travel experience. In addition, festivals and special events are proposed to create a value-added experience.

Introduction

There is a lack of understanding of the working partnership between cultural heritage and tourism which fails to create a great visitor experience and to generate economic opportunities for the local community and other associated stakeholders. Ironically enough, tourism success is perceived as a cultural tragedy for many heritage places (Hanna 1972 as cited by Picard 1995: 65). Traditionally, the prime mission of heritage sites has been to gather, preserve and study artifacts. The heritage manager was perceived as the keeper of the objects, as one who performed the custodial role for the cultural capital of that institution. Today managing heritage sites requires an understanding of the custodial role and the need to attract visitors, as a result of the rapid change in external environments, in particular the change of visitor behaviour and shrinking conservation budgets. Therefore, there is a need for a site manager to comprehend a marketing concept which contributes to achieving his organisation's objectives (Gilmore and Rentschler, 2002). This article aims to discuss why a heritage manager needs a comprehensive understanding of marketing concepts and how to develop heritage tourism products at both individual organisations and wide-destination levels. The significance of cultural heritage management marketing will be discussed first, followed by a discussion

of the conceptual heritage tourism product, and will conclude with a discussion of developing the products at both levels: an individual organisation and a wide-destination.

A Need to Change

Traditionally, there has been great resistance to thinking of cultural and heritage assets as products. Many heritage managers focus their attention on the tangible assets they manage, without appreciating the core product and the visitor experience, that they offer to visitors. A few managers have studied business and realise the significance of their heritage assets. Apparently, most managers are responsible for protecting and conserving tangible assets rather than providing a tourist experience.

Heritage managers have increasingly encountered a rapid change from uncontrollable external environments, impacting on the heritage asset management. These external environments are:

1. Shrinking conservation budgets, grants, and donations.
2. An increase of heritage conservation costs.
3. The change of heritage tourist behaviour.
4. Increasingly, heritage visitors are more educated, sophisticated, experienced, and have more expectations for a quality service.
5. An intense competition from other heritage attractions.
6. The change of technological advancement.

The above environments force the heritage managers to become proactive, adaptive, and innovative. The faster the heritage managers can adapt themselves, the more effective they manage a heritage site. Some heritage managers realise that they need to know more about marketing.

Impacts of Marketing

The use of a marketing approach to heritage asset management provides a number of benefits for heritage managers, whereas the failure to do so presents a number of threats to the sustainability of their assets. By understanding why people visit, the experience can be shaped to better satisfy their needs in a manner that is compatible with the wider cultural heritage management goals of the asset.

If the experience is not shaped to satisfy the visitors' needs, or if those needs are not known, then the tourists will shape the experience themselves to satisfy their own needs. In other words, they will define the asset according to their own core needs and consume it accordingly, even if it is quite different than the desires of the site managers (McKercher and Du Cros 2002).

Similarly, if the asset is positioned vaguely in the marketplace, or if the tourists are unaware of the position strategy used, a greater likelihood exists that the wrong type of tourists will visit. The wrong type of visitors can adversely threaten cultural heritage resources of the host communities. Alternatively, the failure to appreciate the tourism significance of an asset and the accompanying need to transform it for tourism consumption may result in the unappealing presentation of the site, resulting in lower visitation levels, lower satisfaction levels, less repeat visitation, and fewer financial returns (McKercher and Du Cros 2002).

The success of a product depends on the ability of the producers to understand the

needs of the consumers and then to shape the product accordingly. However, this does not mean that visitors have the right to do anything they want. Marketing does not only aim to increase visitor numbers, but also help heritage managers to control overcrowding, which causes negative impacts on cultural heritage and visitor experiences. The mar-



*Phra Ram Ratchananivej
(the Gunner Palace of King Chulalongkorn).*

keting approach enables the heritage managers to define the core product on their own terms and in doing so, identify and target the desired type of visitors. In this way, the asset is presented in a manner that makes it most appealing to the desired type of user and less appealing to undesired visitors. The heritage-oriented visitors should be targeted as they are willing to contribute to conservation through high entry fees. This group makes a relatively high per capita financial contribution.

Pricing and Cultural Heritage Management

A high quality and high price policy will bring

economic benefits to local communities while minimise cultural heritage. The strategy not only seeks to maximise visitor numbers, but to provide special interest tourists with a quality experience. Attracting small numbers of high spenders will maximise economic benefits while limiting the need for investment of site infrastructure. Heritage tourism is expected to provide the economic base for local communities and may also provide the principal motor for development of the region as a whole.

Fees and pricing can be effective in reducing visitor numbers during the busiest times of the day, week or year. For many vulnerable heritage places, raising fees during busy periods and lowering them

during the low season can achieve a more balanced flow of visitors (Fyall and Garrod 1998). Meanwhile, visitors who make only a limited contribution to the local economy should have lower priority if the capacity is limited. A ticket giving access to all assets, valid for one week and priced accordingly, has been suggested. The Taj Mahal in India and the Angkor Wat in Cambodia are examples of successful World Heritage Sites where pricing is considered a useful management tool (Wager 1995; Timothy and Boyd 2003). However, this may not apply to all sites, as heritage visitors are price inelastic: when prices rise, demand remains reasonably unaffected (Fyall and Garrod 1998).



Phra Nakorn Kiri, the hill-top palace of King Mongkut.

Alternatively, diversification and development of additional leisure attractions should be introduced to direct visitors' attention away from overcrowding heritage sites. The principle of dispersion is useful in this regard as it helps to generate economic development to local communities, promote other heritage tourism products, and enhance travel experiences (Page 1992). Some suggested activities include re-establishing traditional classical dance, shadow-puppet theatre, and light and sound presentations.

Conceptual Heritage Tourism Product

Understanding a conceptual product will contribute to the development of heritage tourism products. Conceptually, a product can be perceived as: core, tangible, and augmented.

The core product, the most important feature, describes the core benefits or solutions provided by its consumption. The core product of heritage tourism is a visitors' experience. Developing this experience should be based on the unique characteristics of local communities that are meaningful to potential customers. Notably, it is a challenging job for heritage managers to conserve a sense of authenticity so that visitors can enjoy a quality experience. Once a place loses its authenticity and sense of place, it will be difficult to satisfy visitors. A loss of indigenous handicraft at Kro Kret, in Nonthaburi, and the pseudo-floating marketing in Pattaya (the original one is in Damnoen Saduak, Ratchaburi) are examples of poor heritage attractions that tourists feel that they are no longer experiencing the authenticity in the place.

A tangible component represents the second conceptual level of a product. It represents the physical manifestation of the core product that enhances visitors' satisfaction. Heritage tourism products must be shaped to satisfy the tourist needs and wants. Designing a tangible product to deliver a certain type of experience enables heritage places both to meet visitor expectations and to control the experience.

The augmented products provide additional features above and beyond the tangible product that add value and facilitate easier satisfaction of the core need. Notably, Kotler et al (1996) say that augmented products include aspects such as accessibility, atmosphere, the process of customer interaction with the service organisation, and customer interaction with each other.

Essential Elements of Heritage Tourism Product

Unlike a luxurious hospitality complex requiring a high capital investment, heritage assets can be developed as a cultural product with a minimum cost. It is suggested that cultural products encompass the unique features of a place while reflect its cultural traditions, history, ethnic backgrounds, and cultural landscapes. The primary part of a heritage tourism product includes a mix of tangible and intangible elements:

1. Historic buildings and monuments such as ancient palaces and temples.
2. Sites of important past events like a battle such as the bridge on the River Kwai, Kanchanaburi.
3. Natural features such as traditional landscape and indigenous wildlife.

4. Language, literature, music, and art.
5. Traditional lifestyle including culinary art, drink and sport (Swarbrooke 1994: 222)

In addition, Kimmel (n.d.) states that the primary elements of a heritage product are historical events, ethnicity, architecture, natural and cultural characteristics of a common or rural area, daily life of the community. Hospitality properties especially hotels and restaurants help to create an impressive experience for visitors. This may be expressed by a collection of historic local photographs exhibited in the property, architectural building, decoration, music, and dancing that should be consistent with the town identity. For Thailand, festivals and special events play an important role in tourism promotion campaigns which as a result increase visitations all year round. Likewise, a very successful handicraft campaign known as OTOP (One Tambon One Product) is regarded as an important element of heritage tourism derived from local wisdom.

Developing Heritage Products at an Individual Organisation Level

To create cultural tourism products, it is important to analyse heritage assets so as to come up with heritage significance which can be further developed as the cultural tourism product. This product should be experiential, unique, exciting, and appealing to the

target market (EPGC 1995). According to McKercher and Du Cros (2002), several successful heritage attractions tend to share the same common features:

- Telling a story
- Making the asset come alive
- Making the experience participatory
- Making the experience relevant to the tourists

Focusing on quality and authenticity.

These features are interrelated and presented to help visitors appreciate the heritage significance. Also, good interpretation enhances a visitors understanding of the heritage values. In doing so, it adds depth to visitors' experience making a visit more meaningful. Good interpretation increases customer satisfaction, and satisfied customers are good for heritage tourism business. Overall, the importance of interpretation of heritage places has become an accepted norm among practitioners in both cultural heritage and the tourism industry in general. These practitioners can

gain an effective process of communication, as interpretation can differentiate their heritage tourism from more main-

stream products. Likewise, interpretation can enrich travel experiences, increase customer satisfaction, attract higher-yield clientele, increase the rate and the length of visitation, and increase guide satisfaction (Hall and McArthur 1996).

The three palaces in Phetchaburi (Phra Nakorn Kiri, Phra Ram Ratchananivej, and Marukhathayawan) can be bundled as a prime cultural heritage destination. It would reveal the personalities and visions of three monarchs (King Mongkut, King Chulalongkorn, and King Vajiravudh) toward Siam modernisation, embedded in the architectural building

According to Amnuay-ngerntra (2003a), for most heritage attractions, interpretation can be used as a value-added component, especially for the niche market with cultural heritage interest. In the Asian context, in order to sustain competitive advantage, both heritage attractions and tour operators need to be able to differentiate themselves from other competitors by employing professional tourist guides who are experts in their field. Such tourist guides must be licensed and obtain a tertiary degree in history, architecture, archeology, or associated fields.



*Marukhathayawan
(the beach front palace of King Vajiravudh).*

Tilden (1977), the pioneering experts in interpretation, states that interpretation should capitalise on curiosity for the enrichment of the human mind and spirit. This should relate to the personality and life experiences of the visitor. In addition, interpretation should be provocative and reveal a larger truth that lies behind any statement of fact. For Thailand, there is a need for several heritage places to develop the quality of interpretation. Quite often, the interpretation fails to enrich travel experiences as it cannot stimulate visitors' curiosity nor speak to their needs and interests. As the significance of heritage places varies depending on heritage assets, it is critical for managers to research and identify the right message, which is interesting to target markets, and the right communication techniques increase a visitors

learning and understanding (Amnuay-ngerntra 2003b). According to Figure I., a range of communication techniques can be used on-site such as a personal tourist guide talking to groups, printed materials, signs, displays, demonstrations of cultural performances such as music, drama, art, electronic media such as the internet, video and audio, and combinations of any of these methods.

The majority of heritage tourists are not seeking a deep learning experience. Making the travel experience fun, light, and entertaining is more important for many tourists. There-

fore, visitor participation should be encouraged to increase a visitors understanding and experience. In addition, there is a need to develop an interpretative theme, a statement which connects different strands of information, and uses an idea or concept as a way of understanding a place. The interpretative theme will help visitors understand the connected facts of a heritage site. This makes the visit more interesting and more memorable.

Developing Heritage Products at A Wide Destination Level

Three strategies have been proposed to develop heritage assets into heritage tourism destination.

Bundling Attractions

Bundling helps to create a theme for a place,

creating a stronger sense of place for tourists by involving many places with similar meanings. Figure II. shows the three vacation palaces of King Mongkut, King Chulalongkorn, and King Vajiravudh in Phetchaburi, 126 kilometers south west of Bangkok. The three heritage places have great potential for being developed as a prime cultural heritage destination. Notably, these heritage buildings have a great value in setting out what is known about the respective personalities of the three kings, their views of modernity and of "the West", how their palaces might be seen to reflect those differences, and how the differences are at present interpreted and marketed by the three respective government agencies-the Fine Arts Department, the Royal Thai Army, and the Border Patron Police- currently responsible for the palaces. Notably, the architectural style of three palaces greatly reveal the socio-cultural change influenced by "the West" during the modernisation period in Thailand (1850's to 1925 A.D.). This can be further developed as an interpretative theme to appeal to a niche-market with a special interest in historical arts.

Festivals and Special Events

A festival is a spectacular way for tourists to learn about a community because it appeals to all senses and often celebrates important cultural events. To make the festival meaningful, there should be a wide range of cultural heritage such as food, religion, dancing, music, plays, contests, and handicrafts. Clearly, a festival will contribute to the economic development of local communities; simultaneously, it will encourage visitors to learn about the myths, religious meaning,

and heritage values behind a ceremony (Amnuay-ngerntra 2003a).

Programming, Packaging, and Partnership

Packaging can involve putting together a mix of products by linking a number of attractions together. Clearly, opportunities exist for destinations with similar or complementary heritage assets to come together for their mutual benefits (Morrison 1998). Thus, developing products for customers should be linked to wider ideas of collaboration and network development with other heritage attractions and the tourism industry in general.

Conclusion

Marketing is an important part of heritage tourism. Not only can it assist in promoting awareness aimed to increase visitor numbers, but it is a productive strategy used in managing both natural and cultural resources. When done properly, marketing can also be a useful tool for managing visitors and their impacts (Timothy and Boyd, 2003). Due to the rapid changes of external environments affecting cultural resource management, it is suggested that a heritage manager be adaptive, innovative, and marketing-oriented. Understanding visitor needs and interests is important for a manager to be able to provide services to meet visitors' expectations. Also, a working partnership with the tourism industry greatly contributes to the sustainable heritage tourism development which aims to generate economic benefits to local communities and to visitor quality experiences without degrading the quality of heritage values.

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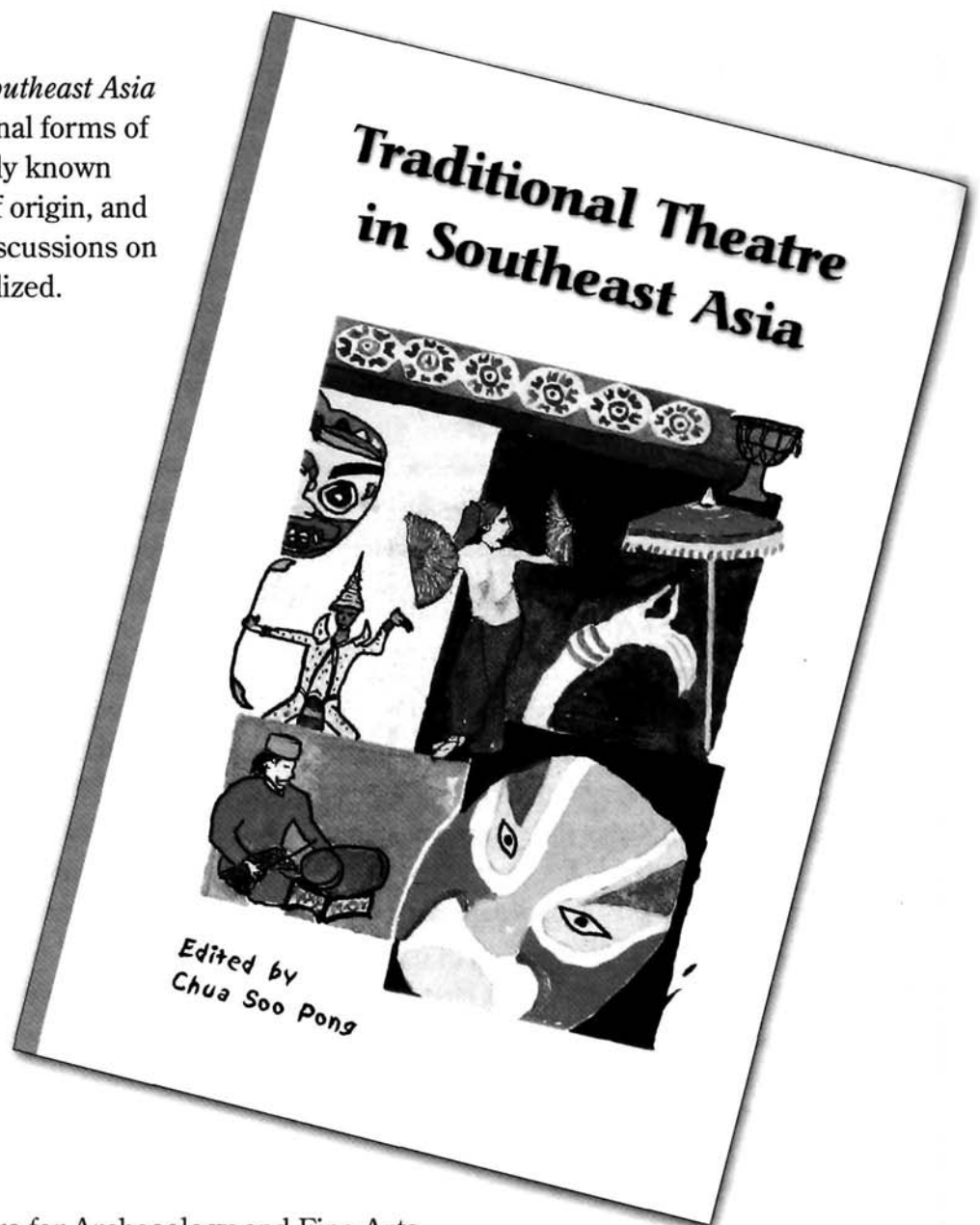
Photographs by Korrachai LeKpetch

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