



Report of the UNWTO Panel on Indigenous Tourism: Promoting equitable partnerships

ITB Berlin, Germany, 9 March 2017

The UNWTO Panel on Indigenous Tourism was held in Berlin on 9 March 2017, featuring a group of successful initiatives of socio-economic empowerment of indigenous communities through tourism based on equitable partnerships. The panelists highlighted the need for a more systematic guidance in the tourism sector regarding a sustainable and responsible development of indigenous tourism.

Introductory remarks

Márcio Favilla, Executive Director, UNWTO, welcomed the speakers and expressed his delight in seeing the Ministers of Tourism of the Philippines and Ghana in the audience. Mr. Favilla pointed out that in the context of the current growing demand for authentic travel experiences, indigenous tourism represents a unique product from the point of view of destinations. He stressed that there are at present about 370 million indigenous people, many of whom wish to opt for new sources of income, including tourism, in order to have their economic potential fully harnessed. In this context, he underlined the importance of involving indigenous communities so as to give them full ownership and self-determination on their tourism planning and development. The Executive Director described the 2017 International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development as a key opportunity for putting indigenous tourism high on the international agenda. While underlining the lack of global systematic guidance to foster a sustainable, responsible and ethical development of indigenous tourism, Mr. Favilla announced that the Secretariat has started developing a set of Recommendations in the field to be submitted for consideration of the World Committee on Tourism Ethics.

Andrew Jones, Chairman, Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), recalled PATA's commitment in promoting responsible and sustainable tourism to from and within the Asia-Pacific region. PATA's comprehensive report entitled "Indigenous Tourism and Human Rights in Asia Pacific Region" features an analysis of indigenous tourism around the world and provides a checklist for accountability of key stakeholder groups. The checklist combines principles of the Larrakia Declaration and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and frames actions under the themes of respect, empowerment, consultation, community development and business development. Mainly coordinated by Dr. Chris Bottrill (Capilano University), the report was produced by PATA in collaboration with the World Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA), and was regionally supported though the German Federal Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ). The research indicates that the key issues for sustainable indigenous tourism are engagement of indigenous communities, authenticity, as well as multiple stakeholder engagement and accountability in planning, development and capacity building. The full report is available at <http://sustain.pata.org>

Presentations

Mr. Amitava Bhattacharya, Founder and Director, banglanatak.com-Social Enterprise from West Bengal, India, described two successful initiatives of mobilization and capacity building of indigenous community-based organizations. Both initiatives are aimed at the gradual transformation of economically deprived villages into vibrant cultural tourism destinations through the development of village festivals and art centers. In the first case, the capacity building of local artist clusters involved educational activities for students to learn about traditional cultural practices, as well as non-art related technical training for artists such as sound engineering, technical equipment and communication skills. This initiative ultimately allowed for a group of artist clusters to develop and manage local folk art centers and annual village festivals. The second case was the collaboration with the tea tribes of Assam, an indigenous community which migrated from the central Indian plateaus to West Bengal more than 250 years ago and that never integrated with the other local ethnic groups. In this initiative, collaboration with the tribe led to the creation of the “CommuniTea Festival”, a platform for cultural interaction and strengthening of community pride.

[Click here for the presentation of Amitava Bhattacharya](#)

Mr. Steve Wroe, Director of Customer Experience and Destination Planning at Parks Australia, discussed Australia's Joint Management agreement between the Australian Government and National Parks' Traditional Owners. The agreement features the Government as the main tenant of national parks whose full ownership belongs to the Traditional Owners. Illustrating the opportunities of economic empowerment for indigenous people created by the agreement, Mr. Wroe explained that the Owners receive from the Government a major percentage of revenues for tourism activities in the parks, other than the rent. Furthermore, 40% of employees of the parks are indigenous people. Mr. Wroe also explained that the agreement foresees that the Traditional Owners have the right to be consulted and decide on any new tourism infrastructure that is built in the parks, which ensures respect and protection of traditional culture. Finally, regarding the protection of the vast and complex aboriginal culture on its territory, the Australian Government has also developed training and education plans to make sure that indigenous culture does not disappear.

Mr. Rhett Lego, Strategic Director-Continental Europe, Tourism Western Australia and CEO, The Conjoint Marketing Group GmbH, highlighted that good indigenous experiences provide destination marketers with unique opportunities for product differentiation, as current consumers seek legitimate and rewarding indigenous experiences that can enrich the holiday's appeal. Mr. Lego highlighted that tourism represents a key gateway for job creation, community pride, and self-determination of indigenous communities. For this reason, he held that Governments should have a role in establishing structures and systems that identify, promulgate and promote indigenous people and their culture in all relevant marketing channels (PR Print Online Digital et al). Mr. Lego explained that indigenous tourism is about respect, protection and self-determination.

[Click here for the presentation of Rhett Lego](#)

Ms. Mary Tolley, Marketing Manager: UK, Europe, Australia, FIT and Backpacker, Te Puia, New Zealand, illustrated Te Puia's case in creating authentic indigenous tourism opportunities that contribute to preserving and transmitting indigenous culture to future generations. Te Puia started its work at the beginning of last century by organizing guided tours. The tours gradually become known worldwide and visitor numbers

increased, up to the current 400,000 per year. Ms. Tolley explained how tourism has contributed to having Maori Culture going from a threat of dying out in the early 1900's to becoming known throughout the world. Ms. Tolley underlined the importance of community work in the process of product development, marketing and promotion, so as to ensure authenticity in tourism but also the respect of indigenous communities.

[Click here for the presentation of Mary Tolley](#)

Mr. Mark Watson, CEO, Tourism Concern, UK, highlighted that the growth of indigenous tourism in recent years has had both positive and negative sides. In case of the former, it has assisted cultural revitalization and contributed to empowerment. In terms of the negative sides, it has sometimes seen the marginalized indigenous people and their villages becoming showcases for tourists, reducing their culture to souvenirs for sale, their environment to be photographed and without real engagement with the local communities. Mr. Watson emphasized that Tourism Concern works for giving indigenous peoples meaningful engagement in the processes of planning and developing tourism which affects them, including allowing them to say no. He explained that evaluation of potential tourism development should recognize the rights of indigenous peoples and the responsibilities that they have to their territories. Tourism Concern has worked towards seeking consensus around indigenous tourism for several years, and aims to continue to cooperate with indigenous peoples, tour companies, NGOs, government departments and tourists in order to develop a strong code of conduct for tour operators, governments and for tourists themselves, in order to ensure that the tourism development is managed in a way which indigenous peoples seek for themselves and their territories.

Interventions from the audience

H.E. Ms. Wanda Corazon Tulto-Teo, Minister of Tourism of the Philippines briefly intervened to stress the importance of tourism as a source of social and economic empowerment of indigenous communities in the Philippines. She pointed out that the Philippines is a culturally diverse country with estimated 14 million indigenous people, belonging to 110 different ethnic and linguistic groups. The Minister underlined that in full recognition of such diversity the Government of the Philippines has enacted the "Indigenous People Act" that confers the indigenous peoples the right to manage and participate in development decisions on their territories.

H.E. Ms. Catherine Afeku, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Arts of Ghana spoke of Ghana as a walking museum, with over 17 dialects spoken across the country, and the natural tribal languages taught in schools. She highlighted that equitable partnerships are part of Ghana's everyday life, with each of Ghana's ten regions celebrating at least three indigenous culture festivals per year. The Minister also raised the question regarding the problem of the conciliation between showcasing of indigenous culture for tourism purposes and privacy. She made the example of funerals in Ghana which are attracting growing attention from tourists, and might represent a privacy invasion from the point of view of locals. In that regard, the Minister wondered about the sustainability of tourism promotion in this situation and other similar cases. The Minister also mentioned the challenges linked to the attempts of promoting the traditional culture in tourism that in the case of Ghana is very much oral and therefore delicate for interpretation.