

9

Using locals as ambassadors: how to create a true experience

Aims and objectives

In this chapter we explore the role of locals in creating an authentic and a real tourism experience. The idea behind this chapter is to show how different forms of accommodation and guiding may contribute to the creation of a strong relationship between visitors and locals. This chapter revolves around definitions and examples that may help tourism professionals to understand the new tourism trends emerging. In the first part of this chapter, we will present three forms of accommodations: B&B, guesthouses and *gîtes* and a summary of the main differences between these three kinds of accommodation. The second part introduces the role of local guides and the different types of tourism guides. The last part gives examples of three significant new tourism trends within postmodern society, couchsurfing, wwoofing and home swapping, that tourism professionals should take into account in their tourism offers.

After completing this chapter, readers should be able to:

- Understand the role of locals in creating a true tourism experience.
- Know the main differences between types of accommodation
- Understand the role of local guides and distinguish between different kinds of local guides.
- Understand the new tourism trends emerging within the postmodern society.

This chapter will address a more specific dimension of authenticity, that pertaining to the need, increasingly expressed by tourists, of getting a more real view of the destinations that they visit. While heritage and all culturally-based attractions provide an interesting encounter with a destination, they also carry their frustrations. Tourists also want to complement those consumptions by a more direct and genuine contact with locals and to experience and understand their daily lives. In 2012, Kim, Ritchie and Cormick identified that one of the key elements to improving the memorability of the experience was to experience closely local culture. Therefore it is a topic that deserves to be investigated further by researchers.

This chapter will first review specific forms of accommodation such as B&B and *gîtes*, then turn to free forms of accommodation such as couchsurfing and new guiding programmes.

■ **Forms of accommodation: B&B, guesthouses and gîtes**

As international tourism demand keeps on increasing, the accommodation sector has to increase and diversify to match existing and evolving tourists' demand. Nowadays, we can find different kinds of accommodation for services such as low price, middle price and high price. Among the cheapest accommodation offers, bed and breakfast, guesthouses, motels and *gîtes* are very popular with contemporary travellers who are trying to get closer with locals and live a different experience. The objective of this chapter is to show an overview of these kinds of accommodation and the types of experience that they offer

□ **Bed and Breakfast: looking for locals**

In recent years, bed and breakfast operators have increased dramatically in numbers throughout the world. This is partly due to the recent economic recession but also to the fact that this form of accommodation is becoming increasingly popular among tourists. The bed and breakfast segment has been relatively resilient during the previous recession (Lanier and Berman, 1993) therefore it has shown to be a model that is likely to stay. At the same time, e-commerce has significantly changed the distribution channels of the travel industry. Bed and Breakfasts (B&B) could benefit from this evolution, unfortunately many B&B operators still do not have adequate knowledge to develop e-commerce.

B&B are also characterised by their diversity and categorizing exactly what a 'bed and breakfast' stands for can be challenging. While some B&B can offer an experience fairly close to a hotel product, others can be more of a 'mom and pop' operation, while some may be more akin to a person who needs money renting

out a basement as a B&B. Furthermore, B&B can have unique building settings because many of them are historic properties with distinctive construction materials and style that may not be in use anymore and which are difficult to replicate. B&B, generally, pose smaller risks than do large hotels. Overall, B&B typically have four to ten rooms for rent and owners will usually do their own cooking. In many cases the owners live on the premises.

Some B&Bs also offer diners in the evening which exposes them to more health regulation. On the other hand, bed and breakfasts do not face the same financial risks that hotels might have (for instance the investment and management pressure associated to facilities such as gyms, pools, etc.).

Definition of the 'Bed and Breakfast' concept

In tourism studies Bed and Breakfast is defined as a private residence where a guest is provided a bed for the night and then breakfast prior to departure. On some occasions, B&B offer diner but the majority does not provide this service. The host is primarily interested in making some extra money by renting an extra bedroom or two. Thus, the host is usually the owner of the B&B, but can also be someone hired by the owner to operate the business. Guests who choose a B&B are usually looking for lower cost accommodation, a more personal experience, and the opportunity to learn more about the area from a local resident. Furthermore, the bed and breakfast concept refers to three aspects:

- B&B private residence: it has five or fewer rental rooms and is owner occupied.
- B&B public accommodation: it is a B&B that is not owner occupied and has more than five rooms. It is considered as a commercial property or public accommodation.
- B&B public accommodation (no food permit): it is a B&B public accommodation that has 12 or less than 12 rooms and accommodates less than 24 guests a night. Additionally, only a complimentary continental or cook-and-serve breakfast is provided.

To sum up, the bed and breakfast can be defined according to six elements: 1) restricted food service, 2) 20 guestrooms or less, 3) serves food only to its registered guests, 4) serves breakfast or similar early morning meals (diner on rare occasions), 5) the price of breakfast is included in the overnight stay rate, and 6) the relationship between occupants (owners and guests) can be a major selling argument.

Types of Bed and Breakfast

Several types of B&B can be found on the marketplace:

- A B&B 'home-stay' with no more than four guest rooms. This type of B&B is usually in the host's own home to generate a supplementary source of income.