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Guiding Scenarios

Learning objectives

After studying this chapter, you should be able to understand:

- How to guide visitors in different scenarios
- What is cultural tourism? Its importance, and visitor motivations and expectation
- The technique of guiding at an archaeological site
- Nuances of guiding at a religious site
- How to lead a group in a museum
- Why visitors are attracted to nature
- Nuances of leading guests in nature

Tour guides often need to interpret cultural and natural settings. In this chapter, we discuss three specific cultural settings – guiding at archaeological sites, religious sites, and museums. We also discuss guiding on nature trails.

Cultural tourism

Cultural tourism is a popular reason for tourism, where visitors engage with local culture, specifically the hosts' lifestyle in their geographical setting. The hosts' lifestyles are often influenced by their history, art and architectural legacy, religion, and other elements. While visitors experience the contemporary, they try to make sense of it by visiting monuments, archaeological sites, museums, and places of worship and religious significance. During a limited period of visits to the destinations, visitors often need experts to interpret these elements.

According to UNWTO (2020), cultural tourism is “A type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination. These attractions/products relate to a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions.”

Cultural tourism can often be slow tourism based in rural areas, where the visitors engage in traditions of indigenous cultural communities to have a feel of their values and lifestyles. It is also commoditised urban tourism to historical and cultural centres where they tend to have a snippet of places' history, connected with the present mediated by an expert – a tour company or an individual. With technological innovations, visitors are increasingly empowered to surf the destination independently. However, this does not undermine the need for and importance of assisted cultural encounters on the tours.

Visitors arrive at a destination for an authentic story rooted in history, tradition, and often the contemporary in life within the physical context of the place. The underlying assumption is that the host community has a story to tell. Destination leaderships organise for personal and non-personal interpretation. The guide is one of the essential components of this scheme of interpretation.

Cultural tours are a big business today. Destinations in many emerging economies rely on cultural tourism for their economic development (OCED, 2009). Major tourist attractions are often historical and cultural places. It is believed that cultural tourists spend more at the destination than other tourists. While some visitors arrive with the sole purpose of cultural tourism, others append cultural tours to their travel plans. For example, an individual on a business trip or visiting a friend or relative might take time for a limited cultural tour. Unintentionally, a visitor may experience cultural immersion by interacting with locals, their language, cuisine, traditions and customs during the stay.

Besides the economic returns, cultural tourism also has far-reaching social impacts. Being the tourism product, the host community becomes more aware of and concerned about their cultural assets. While retaining the cultural identity of these assets, tourism entrepreneurs creatively present them to the world, especially the visitors. They may subtly adapt their offers to be more presentable and consumable. It creates a sense of pride with cognisable attempts to regain and restore the cultural identity. Engagement with visitors from different cultural backgrounds and attempts to construe the culture for them also enhance the cross-cultural sensitivity of the hosts.

Types of cultural tourists

As the industry realised the importance of cultural tourism, there were attempts to understand and typify cultural tourists towards the end of millennia. The purpose of discussing the typology of cultural tourism is that the tour guide should try to understand the underlying motivation for the tour and accordingly have an interpretation plan for them. Some guests will need superficial information which is broader but shallower. Some other guests might look for a narrow yet more profound understanding of the cultural products.