Sustainable Tourism Management at Heritage Sites: Challenges and Opportunities

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Rapid Growth of Tourism

- International tourist arrivals have grown from 25mn in 1950s to over 1.1bn in 2013. Number to reach 1.8bn in 2030.
- Domestic tourism is even larger than that. For China, domestic tourism is 5 times larger than international tourism.
Many Benefits from Tourism

- Contributes to GDP and employment
- Important export of the services sector
- Brings in foreign exchange
- Primary tool to reduce poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals

Source: UNWTO Tourism Highlights
Contribution of Tourism

Source: UNWTO Tourism Highlights 2014
Tourism in Asia

- Asia has emerged as the second largest travel destination after Europe
- Asia is a trove of exotic cultural and artistic treasures rich in heritage
- Its tourism arrivals is fastest growing in the world
- ASEAN recognizes tourism as a priority area for integration
Pressure on Heritage Sites

- Huge increase in tourism generate pressures on cultural and natural heritage assets
Angkor Wat Under Threat

- Angkor Wat temple complex receives 2mn visitors & faces “critical” threats from heavy traffic.
- Visitors climb over Angkor every year causing heavy deterioration of original Khmer stonework.
- Temples are threatened by the rapid development in Siem Reap. The sprawl of hotels and restaurants lowers water table and causes Bayon Temple’s 54 towers to sink to the ground.

(Source: Global Heritage Fund)
China’s Heritage Under Threat

• Chinese made 2.6bn trips in 2011 and the number will rise further
• Even remote places are seeing large number of tourists who enjoy rising income
• Lijiang, a World Heritage Site in Yunnan, receives 11mn tourists a year & struggles to accommodate the surge in tourists
• Locals move out of the city centre & rent their homes to businesses as commercialization rise rapidly
Pressure from High Volume

• Issues:
  • Can tourism infrastructure cope with volume of tourism?
  • Capacity of the monument to cater for visitor flow?
  • Pollution on monument generated by tourist traffic, e.g. lowering of water table as more hotels are built in the site
  • High degree of social impact on villages in the vicinity but do they have the training to benefit from tourism activity?
Is Tourism a Threat or an Opportunity for Heritage Sites?

- A large part of the answer depends on the management of sustainable tourism at the heritage site.
- Outstanding heritage sites are highly visible “must see” places where tourists seek unique and special experiences.
- The challenge is how to develop tourism services that provide high quality tourist experience that benefits local communities and support heritage conservation.
Opportunities from Tourism

- Revenue generation for site conservation and maintenance
- Education of a wider public which fosters cross-cultural understanding, enhance cultural values and pride in host communities
- Driver of regional economic development
Tourism to be Sustainable

- Should include all forms of tourism:
  - Both mass tourism and special interest segments
  - Minimize negative socio-cultural and environmental impact
  - Bring benefits for communities and increase environmental protection
  - Provide a fulfilling and high quality tourist experience
Elements of Sustainable Tourism

- **Optimal use of environmental resources.** Maintain ecological processes and conserve natural heritage and biodiversity

- **Respect socio-cultural authenticity of host communities**

- **Provide socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders**
Challenge Between Conservation and Tourism

- Tourism development brings concentration of visitors in increasing level and pace to key destinations, e.g. at world heritage sites
- Challenge for all parties to balance competing goals and responsibilities of the need to protect as well as present the sites well to visitors
- Requires careful planning and decision making, as well as close coordination and cooperation between conservation and tourism managers
Education About the Site

- Heritage sites have important role in public education about their cultural and natural heritage resources
- Need to protect their integrity and values for current and future generations
- The local population must also be educated about the heritage sites and values so that they provide long-term support for tourism
Planning and Protection

- Good planning and protective measures in historic towns coupled with good revenue generation create a vibrant tourism experience
- Good revenue is important for the local government which is a key stakeholder and generator of successful and sustainable tourism at heritage sites
- Requires political leadership and good governance together with assistance from central government
Integrated Planning & Management

- Specific management plans can overcome illegal development and the decline in the quality of the environment
- With proper plans, the provision of infrastructure can be matched with demand
- The private sector can be engaged in conservation efforts, e.g. Hoi An in Vietnam
Monitoring and Co-Management

- Effective monitoring systems important for making responsible decisions
- The positive and negative impacts of tourism on any heritage can be understood
- Requires co-management with local communities through clear agreements and good communication
Conservation Works

- Conservation works by local people using traditional methods are preferred to the introduction of modern materials.
- This is particularly important in regard to essential features such as roofing and external cladding as this influence the appearance of the urban setting.
Revitalizing Religious Values

- Carefully revitalize the socio-religious values of religious monuments which are highly regarded by pilgrims and worshippers with an interest in the living cultural and religious values of the place.
Protecting Traditional Agricultural Landscape

- Traditional agricultural landscapes require careful planning and protection when new tourist facilities and infrastructure are to be introduced or upgraded.
Raising Awareness for Sustainability

- Raise awareness about heritage protection to sustain long-term business operations
- Require cooperation among travel agents, tourist guides, tourism companies and local authorities
- Jiuzhaigou and Huangshan National Parks demonstrate that sound management of tourism infrastructure and services can handle large number of tourists without harming environment
Enhancing Local Community Benefit

- A wide range of community involvement in tourism possible to enhance livelihoods for local people
- Tourism provides direct and indirect employment opportunities
- Intangible cultural values and traditional lifestyle of the local people could be integrated into tourism products
- Language training programmes for local people
Good Interpretation to Enhance Visitor Experience

- Heritage interpretation with well structured facts and observations enable visitor to understand better the meaning of the place
- Specific features of site presented in a wider historical, geographical and socio-economic context
- Use visual images, physical objects and modern technology to enhance the messages provided
Reducing Tourism Congestion

- Good monitoring of visitor numbers and fluctuating congestion to better manage site
- Walking and trekking along pathways could reduce congestion at cable ways and car access
- Collaboration between tour operators and site managers to identify different places to relief crowding at main sites
Mitigating Environmental Impacts of Tourism

- Environmental management practices are important to mitigate the negative impacts of tourism
- Tour guides are encouraged to talk about contemporary environmental management to tourists
- Environmental management is not confined to the boundaries of the historic village but extended to the surrounding rural areas
- Progressive urbanisation should not degrade the environmental and scenic qualities of the historic community
Conclusion

- Tourism will continue to grow at new and existing heritage sites
- Good destination planning and management of the site with sustainable practices can enhance the benefits of tourism while mitigating the negative effects
- Community support through active involvement and collaboration among tourism managers, local authorities and stakeholders will be the key to sustainable tourism at heritage sites
- Empower and increase the participation of local communities so that they become beneficiaries of heritage tourism