



Content from the Ethnic Cultural Tourism Destinations Conference July 13, 2011

Making the Case for Ethnic Cultural Tourism

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It is the settlement of the various ethnic groups & tourism opportunities, in the Twin Cities that precipitated the idea of this conference and clearly, based on the response I see here today, it is something – this idea of ethnic cultural tourism – that has sparked both a curiosity and an interest in looking at it, as a potential driver of a new economy in the city.

I think it is important to be clear on terminology as we delve into this important topic. We know that tourism is travel for leisure purposes, something defined as an action that grew out of one's ability to find and increase free time, identify disposable income and access advances in transportation and technology.

Philip Xie, in his book on [Authenticating Ethnic Tourism](#), reminds us that what distinguishes mass tourism from cultural tourism is that one focuses primarily on fun and entertainment; the other brings cultural experiences into a visitor context – generally the “high” arts – classical performances – ballet, opera for example; first-run plays; fine visual art shows, etc.

Xie goes on to explain - Ethnic cultural tourism, also known as multicultural tourism, brings a variety of elements into the discussion. In some countries, ethnic cultural tourism can mean something suggesting majority or first world travelers looking for authentic, sometimes exotic, experiences found only in countries populated by “third world” or indigenous peoples.

For our purposes, we will be looking at two defined aspects of ethnic cultural tourism:

One that focuses on the product or experience as authentic, by way of providing true music, artifacts, arts & crafts, foods, monuments and architecture, etc. – things that are related to customs or practices associated with a particular ethnic group.

And, where a district, trail or corridor is formed, highlighting commercial activity staffed by or owned by a particular ethnic group – generally noted for restaurants & eateries, live cultural performances, clothing and gift shops and other commercial enterprises.

USTTA report, [Leslie Doggett](#), in the early 90's.

Growing interest in the cultural heritage of African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans.

Study highlighted several city initiatives, primarily looking at communities that offered unique cultural, historical or natural resources.

Ability to create jobs and generate income from the tourism and travel industry.

But it did not stop there – it also for the first time on a national level – acknowledged the value of minorities as a travel and tourism segment.

Two other important details the study noted was that ethnic tourism “enhanced community pride and strengthened community cultural values.”

Growing interest in the cultural heritage of minority ethnic groups has spurred a look at the economic development opportunities associated with ethnic cultural tourism in the US.

Ethnic cultural tourism for Americans seems to be growing. Genuine interest in – authentic and meaningful experiences.

Opportunity to provide visitors with cross-cultural encounters through the promotion of ethnic cultural tourism – something that can only enhance one’s appreciation for and understanding of minority cultures. And as E. Cohen’s article states in the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* – these experiences can result in changed attitudes and behaviors, that can lead to a more just and equitable relationship between minority and majority peoples.

Some things tourism marketing professionals rarely think about or consider are enhancing community pride, strengthening community cultural values and changing attitudes and behaviors about a group of people who are different.

Thoughts on the maturing of ethnic cultural tourism.

Destinations that had some wonderful, if not fully developed, tourism assets that promoted ethnic cultural and heritage things – historic civil rights locations, shops boasting visual artists, museum’s highlighting lesser known aspects of history for certain ethnic groups.

Unevenness or gaps in the product – great cultural heritage aspects in a place that had no regular public days and hours of operation; wonderful restaurants and eateries that did not take credit cards or had surly service staff; historic theatres promoting authentic performances - but were hard to find, did not offer parking or were located in neighborhoods that could not accommodate motor coaches. Or, cultural centers that provided no visitor amenities in close proximity.

Small business Owners - angry because they decided to open a business or expand a business believing that once the business was built, tourists would flood in and they would make lots of money.

Chamber and CVB officials express frustration because, while they loved the idea of having new things to promote, they were either over-selling the new product with little results, or were ill-equipped to handle the need for tourism development and community relationship services to the degree that was required.

Nearly 20 years later, there have been great strides made in how we responsibly look at creating viable and sustainable ethnic tourism opportunities in cities and rural locations across the country.

More resources are available to train and educate us about tourism and hospitality.

More official marketing and promotion agencies have added staff members who are from or familiar with the communities being engaged to include new tourism offerings.

There is more of a general acceptance and appreciation for multicultural aspects of a city or area.

More mainstream institutions have incorporated ethnic diversity in its programming, more festivals are being offered that provide culturally diverse features.

And, by the way, offering new and different tourism attractions and experiences are what makes your city destination raise its visibility as being viable, vibrant and exciting. It is also what often brings visitors back year, after year.

Creating viable and sustainable opportunities in tourism become components of a master plan for ethnic tourism districts or corridors.

Outcomes that grow from an economic development strategy for your community.

Tourism means businesses generating income, creating jobs, growing to accommodate more ways to supply the industry and service more visitors.

The not so obvious aspects of the industry include staffing services, cleaning services, suppliers of commodities - critical in the economic chain of the tourism industry. In this way, tourism can mean economic opportunity for ethnic communities. Hotels for instance, contract with services to clean clothes for its guests, use vendors to seasonally clean carpets, windows, to purchase supplies. Hotels buy locally - fruits, vegetables and flowers

Smaller properties buy breads, pastries, and other food items.

Hotel management of national chains have goals that are often times set at the national level – many have diversity goals in hiring and purchasing.

Questions for local communities assessing tourism project -

What does your community have to offer? Are you selling some type of ethnic clothing, jewelry or souvenirs? Are the items of quality? Is it at a fair price point? How do people know to come to your shop or store?

What live performances are you promoting? Is it a true representation of your ethnic group? Do you or your community members mind connecting one of the performances into a scheduled visit by an interested group of tourists? How does it get marketed?

Do you offer tours? If your tours are noted as historic, is your content based on facts backed by scholarship? Are you offering guided tours of the neighborhood? How is the tour being developed and by whom? What stories and sites are being interpreted? Is it well paced and engaging? Has it been determined to have value?

Tour companies that failed.

Business 101 lesson - was poorly managed and under-capitalized.

Forming an ethnic cultural tourism district or corridor.

District can be a neighborhood or area of a community. Several contiguous blocks can be known as a district. Some might be loosely formed – meaning several shops in an area become an unofficial district. They may or may not have something in common.

Sometimes destination marketers will give it a name and perhaps signage and way-finding, to assist visitors that happen there.

Other districts specifically planned for an area with many common things associated with it – common culture, related merchandise or foods, eateries, several historic sites and monuments, museum or cultural center, open gathering area for live performances. Visitor amenities can sometimes be found – parking, maybe public restrooms, etc.

Districts with association structure and assessed fees for property owners, may provide services above and beyond city services can sometimes be expected – additional sidewalk cleaning, custom designed wayfinding, special streetscaping, lighting, coop advertising opportunities. Uniformed district staff are a familiar sight with downtown districts. A district can take on many different forms.

Ethnic cultural districts opportunities for generally disenfranchised communities to participate in an economic development project that generates jobs and grows businesses. In this way, the community is actively involved in promoting and marketing its own heritage and culture, while developing attractions for visitors.

Who are the stakeholders in this tourism community?

Stakeholders are – a people or a group having a direct interest, involvement, or investment in something. People who are part of the ethnic or cultural group involved, residents of the district you want to create, are stakeholders. You have elected officials, local businesses and companies tourism promotion officials, local artists and performers – they all have something at stake. As hard as it can be at times, be sure you have a general consensus about creating this proposed district.

Why is this important?

The community members provide the product – the authentic event or experience. Some of its key members may not want to participate – see it as selling out or don't see enough in it for them. Sometimes it can be seen as unwanted competition.

The elected officials will want to weigh-in on this, fund planning process, zoning laws to be considered – issues with license and inspections. Will the formation of the district require additional city or public services Area businesses need to be on board

The tourism promotion agency will have an interest in this, as well.

You want to have a well thought out plan that incorporates your best thinking about providing a quality visitor experience.

Philadelphia Story – beginning in 1988.

A study was conducted and found that Philadelphia had a mixed reputation among African Americans, but the historical and cultural assets that were of interest to these potential travelers far out-weighed the negative perceptions. The group formed committees of community leaders and began working to look at incorporating inclusive strategies with marketing, hospitality businesses and even education.

The Multicultural Affairs Congress (MAC), was the entity that provided the vision, strategic direction and oversight to what has become a very successful model. The direction has incorporated Latino and Asian American marketing strategies and all together has generated over \$1billion in economic impact since its formation.

There were many bumps along the road, and looking at your capacity, identifying resources and staying the course are three things we know as what has allowed the MAC – Philadelphia experience to be sustained.

Along with the development being spearheaded by MAC, the Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation (GPTMC) created neighborhood experiences, guided tours that became half day ethnic community experiences – designing these tours around several guiding principles – visitors touch, taste, participate and learn during the tours.

For the ethnic communities poised for tourism, we professionals should be clear on the end goal or outcome desired from the planning for tourism. Take the time to work with the communities. Don't expect things to happen quickly. Identify the resources needed to make a true difference for the area.

Elected officials have to part of the equation. You must be champions of this idea, support the planning for development, identify funds to support the work that is needed. Work with the community to review the city or state resources that will be required to make tourism work in ethnic communities.

Our communities must be ready to take on this challenge – know that opportunity is a real possibility that requires roll up your sleeves effort –

Ethnic Tourism produces jobs, creates businesses, generates economic advantages for our communities. The more defined the plan, the more opportunity for many to benefit from the products produced.