



UNIT

Managing Public Awareness Programmes

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Understand the Role of Public Awareness in Travel & Tourism
- ✓ Analyze the Features of Inbound Tourism
- ✓ Identify the Role of a Local Community Tourism Action Group

Unit

Managing Public Awareness Programmes

The Role of Public Awareness

Keeping the general public updated about tourism is one of the key policies in tourism development. This means informing them of the latest developments and benefits to the social and economic well-being of the country. It also involves the need to encourage the public to provide support for further-developing international and domestic tourism industries. The total strategy of the public's understanding should be reflected in the policies.

Public opinion has to be moulded and guided. The public itself is a vital part of the tourism product, and they should show commitment towards its success. It is first the job of GTAs to instigate public support for tourism. At the same time, it is also the job of everyone who works in tourism.

For the public awareness programme of any local community, four basic questions have to be answered:

- What are the positive benefits of inbound tourism?
- Which issues does the local community need to be consulted on?
- To whom and what help needs to be offered?
- Who makes up the inbound tourist contingency and what are they like?

To answer these basic questions, the awareness programme:

- Explains and signals;
- Explains, consults, and involves;
- Explains and provides help;
- Explains and interprets.

A programme which makes the public aware also informs the tourists about vital facets of the local culture and how to conduct themselves, in order to gain maximum benefit from their visit. Public awareness has a number of parallels to marketing. It involves the transfer of ideas, plans and values, and makes use of a number of the same PR, promotional, advertising tools, sales and marketing. It tries to put a point of view across, involve people, enlighten them, educate them to profit from their inspirations and win their support.

A public familiarity agenda needs to be coordinated by the GTA itself at a national level. It should basically cover the contribution of tourism to both the economy and social development, as well the potential for future perspectives. Different facets of public awareness have to be arranged at a community level. Guidance must be provided by the GTA in the form of resources, suggestions and materials to local community action groups and visitor sections. Nationally, the GTA can coordinate other efforts, such as nationwide competitions.

One important aspect about public knowledge focuses on the idea of sustainable development. Not just as a vague concept, but in practical and tangible ways. It demands devotion to keeping high environmental criterion through practical controls. Figure 10.1 demonstrates the broad spectrum and material of a public awareness agenda.

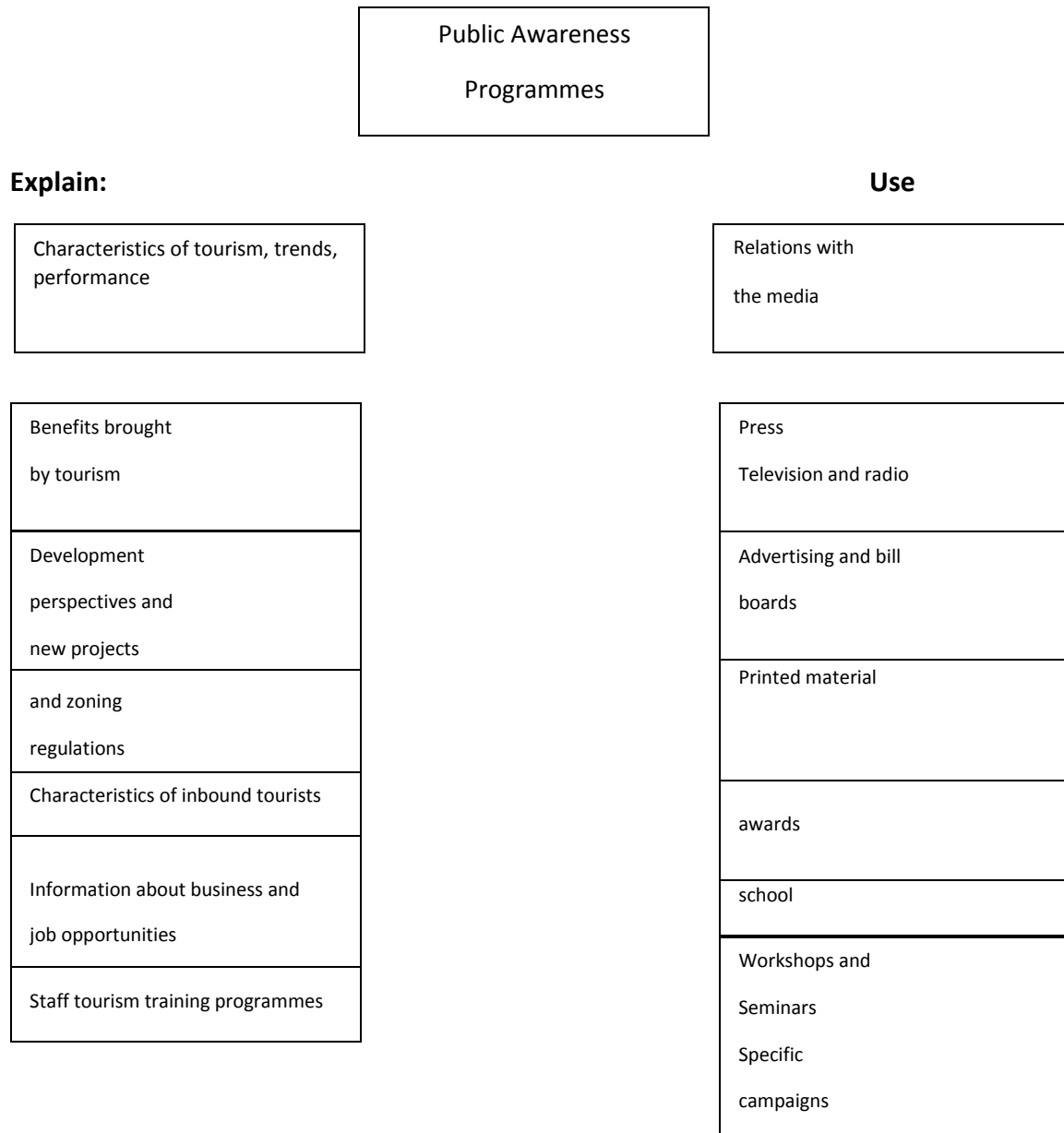


Fig.1 Public Awareness

What is There Positive to Say about Inbound Tourism?

This is a good question to ask the various groups. For instance, a collection of school children or local club members, societies and organisations. The question, along with the variety of answers, is precisely what public perception programmes intend to answer. As a starting point, it is important to agree with the message. After given the time to think and analyse the question, the ideas the people with most likely come up with will include the ones listed below. They are some of the positive facets (all highlighted previously) public awareness agenda should pinpoint.

Inbound tourism:

- Promotes economic development locally;
- Produces revenues;
- Generates new employment and career opportunities;
- Provides new opportunities for investments;
- Creates opportunities for small enterprises;
- Brings in foreign exchange;
- Establishes an audience for local cultural events;
- Generates curiosity for local cuisine;
- Establishes a market for local arts and crafts;
- Creates contacts with various cultures;
- Encourages curiosity in foreign languages;
- Aids in improving the local environment;
- Prompts the development of new infrastructure;
- Allows for providing new community services;
- Generates revenue for governments;
- Promotes the images of a country and the image of a destination;
- Makes cultural identity stronger;
- Benefits local manufacturing and agriculture;
- Investment is stimulated;
- Draws in students for educational programmes;
- Helps make it a nicer place to visit in general.

Almost every one of the above answers can involve international as well as domestic tourism, and can provide the foundation for more in-depth explanation and discussion. All of them can also provide a basis for news releases.

Which Issues should the Local Community Be Consulted About?

The above-outlined list covers points the public should be educated about. They are made up of information that will expand the public's comprehension of tourism. Some of the issues are not just a

matter of awareness and comprehension, but about consultation. Lots of individuals might have objections or serious concerns. They will require an opportunity to voice these concerns and make them known. Development plans for tourism, related physical plans and planning and zoning regulations have to be aired publicly, with meetings/conferences devoted to public questions, comments, objections and friendly discussion.

Action groups and individuals have to be made aware of their rights to voice and record their objections and appeals against any specific developments. When presenting new plans, the strategies, policies, rationale and objectives need to be clearly stated. Frequently, objections and concerns are born of misunderstandings. What is the outlook for tourism development? What are the numbers of tourists that will be accommodated at any given time? Is this in line with the capacity of the destination?

- In planning and zoning of land use, what are the different areas designated for and what purpose?
- Where and how will tourism be allowed to proceed and in what form?

The main concerns are typically as follows:

Where will the new roads be constructed, on which land and what purpose will they serve? Are there needs for new airports or extensions to existing ones? Is the existing basic infrastructure sufficient or will it have to be expanded? If expansion is needed, then, at what level and where is it needed? Water, waste disposal and power supplies etc. will need to be considered.

- Precisely what planning regulations will need to be applied to hotels and other buildings related to tourism – building setbacks, height limitations, floor area and site ratios?
- How do these correlate with the other tourist buildings and projected zoning plans?
- Which areas will be banned for the development of hotel and other tourist facilities and why?
- Are there additional plans for car parking facilities, making some streets pedestrian-friendly or to limit vehicular traffic?

The public should be informed of where they can see the detailed plans and of any future gatherings that are planned to review the details of the plans. They should be aware of where and how to inquire about their concerns.

What Help Needs To Be Offered To The Local Community?

A lot of people will want to know about tourism - not just to know about it, but perhaps so they can take appropriate action. For instance, they may wish to inquire about how a child can prepare for a career in tourism; or how they might be able to rent out an extra room to accommodate a visiting student; or how they may be able to establish a guest house. People will require answers to the following types of inquires:

- Where can they learn more about tourism? Specify the following points in detail: foundation and awareness courses; lectures and conferences; publications and leaflets.
- How to meet/encounter tourists? A program may be put together by the visitor's bureau in which locals and tourists with matching professions, interests or hobbies can be introduced so they can spend some time together.
- What types of careers options or employment opportunities might open up? The opportunities, prospects and trainings obtainable inclusive of course details and educational programs.
- How may a small tourism business be started? Outlines of the initial concepts and ideas should be made available. How capital costs can be estimated, a business plan developed and how to acquire a loan.
- How a room in a house may be rented to members of youth groups or visiting students. Information should be made available about times, groups, needs, prices and listings. How to make questions of planning permission clear. Where the public may be able to view plans for the future schemes and get information and guidance.
- Places where foreign languages can be studied. Places where foreign language competencies can be used in tourism, inclusive of part-time jobs and trainings as guides for tourists. Information of language institutes, courses and programs should also be provided.
- How to produce products that the tourists would want to buy. This may mean guidance on menus and the items to include. It may also entail guidance on handicrafts, fashion items and souvenirs or jewellery designs.

The answers to these questions will need to have liaison between the local visitor's bureau, the GTA and other agencies and organisations; for instance, educational authorities, training institutes and secondary schools, the planning authority and local enterprise agency, town halls, even local governmental authorities, such as the chamber of commerce and other local trade and professional associations.

Who are the Inbound Tourists and What are They Like?

A majority of the public will typecast the visitors from abroad in their minds. This is also true in Europe, where the understanding of different countries is still limited and full of misconceptions. The below-described main characteristics of the culture which each major market stands for should be explained:

- The geography of the country, climate, constitution, population, government and economy;
- The culture and language, tribal and ethnic origins, historical influences and social and educational development.
- The arts: theatre, literature, painting, music, architecture, sculpture and crafts, etc. The impact of contemporary art;
- Food and drink;
- National holidays;
- Religious norms;

- Dress codes;
- Traditions and customs;
- Subcultures and minorities;
- Life, in general;
- Values, attitudes and lifestyles;
- Social norms and behavioural traits;
- Variations, in accordance with regions;
- Alcohol consumption, tobacco use and sexual behaviour;
- Narcotic abuse and drugs;

These main areas illustrate the all-inclusive country profile and nationality. It offers valuable understanding and awareness when catering to the needs of the tourists from different countries.

Local Community Involvement

Every community has residents who hold an interest in tourism and its development. They might be unrelated groups holding interests in different facets of tourism; the community archaeological or historical society, an environmental group or resident hotel owners and travel agencies. Some might be directly involved with the industry, others indirectly. Leaders will rise out such groups; individuals with clear-cut standpoints willing to offer their time to get background information ready, organise meetings, prepare agendas, and reach out to other individuals, groups and organizations. They will gain knowledge of others sharing their same views. In time, they will all come together, perhaps through the chamber of commerce or other such organization; a committee, or a subcommittee, which is organised for this purpose. Slowly, a public forum is established for tourism that can include professionals in tourism, tourism business people, and individuals working on the periphery of tourism in combination with the typical concerned citizen. This might take time and leaders will change, however, the enterprise keeps going.

The chances of it happening are greater at the local level in villages, small resort areas, or townships and maybe some cities. It shows the classic action of a small neighbourhood keen to have an effect on future development. The GTA has to be receptive to local inventiveness and aid in any possible way to bring people to work together. If, on the other hand, dynamic individuals, such as those from the private sector, are leading these types of initiatives, then the GTA should allow them to carry on and only provide a supportive role.

If channels or people willing to lead do not materialise, and tourism is a vital sector, then GTAs should take the lead. They can start seminars or hold workshops to bring people together initially, to inspire their interests. Local people and organisations can then continue forward on their own.

The Role of a Local Community Tourism Action Group

As illustrated at the beginning of this chapter, the GTA needs to head public recognition at the national level. It must develop strong links with the press and keep the media well-informed on sector-wide accomplishments, statistics on tourism, growth in supply and various other main trends and developments. Other activities are best-performed by the GTA itself, at a national level. This can include radio and T.V. programmes, production of audiovisuals and related material, and competitions at a national level.

A number of activities can also be conducted at local or regional levels, since it is at this level that close-knit community involvement can be built. A neighbourhood-based tourism action group can put together a lot of activities. Various organizations may take the initiative in heading the group. This can depend on the local GTA as well, or if the municipality maintains a department or office, or if the steps to establish a visitor's bureau have been set in motion. Typically, the functions of local community action groups are the following:

- Keep a close association with the GTA getting its newsletter, an ongoing exchange of existing tourism information, audiovisual and printed material and notes, and guidelines and suggestions on developing public perception regarding tourism. Maintain close associations with the sector's trade and professional associations and consultative organizations relating to tourism, like a council or committee on tourism education and training, or joint marketing board or relating bodies.
- Put together a host programme offering fundamental basic courses for tourism-linked workers.
- Inform the public of the benefits and obligations that come with tourism.
- Inform the public of the background and culture of the potential visitors.
- Generate public interest in the features and needs of tourism.
- Let the public know of new schemes and developments, going over their appeal and impact.
- Earn the loyalty of tourism workers, as well as the population in general for the successful development of tourism. Make education and trainings available for every worker in direct association with tourism.
- Keep close links with the media, gaining their help and support when pursuing the outlined objectives;
- Carry out broad-spectrum activities in pursuit of the outlined agenda including seminars, workshops, exhibitions, festivals, competitions and other distinctive events;
- Advertise tourism-related public knowledge communicated via selected media.

If the local community action group is capable of carrying out this function in a satisfactory way, the GTA can choose to provide financial support. For example, the GTA can make available a fixed financial grant; it may match the funds provided/invested by the local private sector or local government. Needless to

say, it is in the interests of the GTA and the tourism industry as a whole to build efficient and far-reaching local involvement.

Relations with the Press

It is vital to have good relations with the press. This responsibility falls with the public relations team of the GTA. It is essential that this activity is not fragmented; that different people are not contacting the press in a way that is not systematic and coordinated. All dealings with the press should be conducted through one centralized public relations office. While some flexibility needs to exist in terms of press contacts, employees should follow clearly-established rules. In regard to public awareness, the GTA should ensure that the press is kept up to date. They should be informed of tourism growth, the number of tourists, typical duration of stay, earnings of foreign exchange, employment created and the impact on GDP and government funds.

Regarding the involvement of the government in tourism shaping, new public sector projects, community services improvement, especially, in regards to health and education, and new infrastructure plans. Regarding tourism's encouragement for the contemporary culture, arts e.g. film festivals, music festivals, successful local bands and pop groups, musicians, other singers, poets, writers and artists. Regarding the potential for upgrading and expansion, how the sector is going to improve quality levels and sustain them. Any new projects in the pipeline, including details such as where, in what form and their impacts.

Press Releases and Press Conferences

Email and the traditional fax machine provide exceptional methods of distributing press releases. They should include all points of interest and be dispatched immediately. It is best to provide the media with extra material rather than not enough. While still considered to be press releases, they should also be featured on radio and T.V, perhaps even published online. Personnel composing the releases need to be trained in accordance with their responsibilities and write in the appropriate journalistic style. It is vital that the releases are perfect – well composed, no spelling mistakes or syntax errors. A press release has to be newsworthy. There is no point sending out weak stories that hold no interest. It is also necessary to follow up on stories. Press releases have to make updates available on what has occurred and what will happen next. All media outlets need to be provided with the required information. It is unwise to work with only a few select publications and ignore others. This does not mean some releases can't be passed on selectively, however. Not everything is of interest to everyone. A properly-established public relations office should be aware of where to send particular stories and where they will be of no interest. Only worthy occasions will generate the need for press conferences. The news that has to be released needs to be of value, with the GTA leader acting as spokesperson.

For example, the performance of the sector for the previous year inclusive of a complete set of results, or the launch of major tourism projects. The press conference needs to be carried out at an appropriate

place, with seats that are comfortable and up-to-date audiovisual equipment. The invited press should be provided with all the facilities to keep them comfortable like refreshments and coffee. It will be a good idea for the GTA to invite participation of trade and professional associations, appropriate to the topics to be discussed. The sector then shows a united front, showing that it is functioning in a coordinated fashion.

Advertising

Billboards are an effective way to promote public knowledge. They symbolize a direct way of advertising that has immediate impact. Also they are seen by a large number of people and a good cross-section of random society. The variety of locations and space has to be considered, so a network covering the whole city or area can be created. Billboards, for instance, can carry the following types of messages:

- Courtesy pays, so it is important to smile a little and spread a little pleasure;
- Keep the Place Beautiful
(Making it beautiful - keeping it beautiful);
- Tourism Helps **Us All**
(Tourism brings benefits - new hospitals, new schools and new roads - help **us** to help tourists);
- It's Nice to Come Back
(When people leave happy they want to come back)

A large variety of different themes may be used and developed. Big billboards provide strong images and strong messages. Local newspaper and magazine advertisements can also be employed. This does not have to be at the expense of the GTA. Private sector groups with an interest in tourism can be prompted to sponsor some of the advertising. Radio and television stations may be requested to carry out the same, as well.

Tourist Newspapers

Newspapers, which relate to tourists, are typically published on a weekly basis in English around the world. English has established itself as the universally-accepted second global language. 400 million people use English as their main tongue and estimates suggest about 400 million others speak it as their second language. Another several hundred million have working knowledge of the language and can communicate at a foundational level.

Most probably, the newspaper will emphasize local news, information on tourism, different places, people and interesting attractions, in addition to news of events, entertainment, what to eat and where, and what to see i.e. the features of the country. It may also include maps of the town or local area. It can have a section on letters to the editor, and various other regular features. Editors should maintain close contact with the GTA. In return, the GTA should provide support and help to the newspapers whenever possible.

Television and Radio

Using television and radio is dependent on the country itself and its culture. Numerous programs can use the theme of tourism. Radio is well-suited to tourism discussions and call-in programmes, where listeners can offer viewpoints and ask questions. Tourism can be supported through local stations with live broadcasts from resorts and hotels. Tourists and tourism-worker interviews may be featured, in combination with different kinds of quiz programs. Programs with a tourists discussing their holiday and selecting favourite music pieces could be produced. There can be programs covering the background and cultures of different countries. Television also provides a number of options. A series of dance competitions or talent competitions featuring tourists may provide entertainment. Tourist profiles, discussion programmes and foreign language courses all offer ways to provide exposure for tourism. It also helps to build and develop public awareness.

Competitions

Skill-based competitions are preferred to competitions that are luck-based. Professionals can be asked to join and showcase their knowledge and skills. Competitions can also be based on general tourism ideas and insights.

For example:

- Chef of the year, waiter of the year, barman of the year, etc.;
- Restaurant of the year, hotel of the year, travel agency of the year, etc.;
- A national essay competition for tourist guides;
- Competitions between school-children based on tourism;
- The most beautiful house or garden;
- The best short story about tourism;
- A festival based on cookery competition and exhibitions;
- The most courteous immigration officer, police officer or customs officer;
- Taxi driver of the year;
- Best article on tourism published in a newspaper;
- Best public awareness poster.

There are many other possible competitions, which can be matched to the specific characteristics of the tourism industry of the country. Some competitions may be organized at a national level, while others can be conducted at a local level. Prizes should be arranged in association with the sector itself, especially with the aid of airlines and multinational companies. Some of the personnel who win could be

given a short study trip abroad to meet their counterparts in different countries. Other more conventional prizes can also be used.

All competitions should get full media coverage, since the purpose is to bring attention to tourism and endorse opportunities the industry offers. Various tourism companies might be willing to sponsor selected competitions.

Schools

A special text, which would introduce tourism to secondary schools, should be readied. It should cover the overall characteristics of tourism; the demand, the product, development of tourism, planning, environmental economic and sociocultural impacts etc. It should highlight the opportunities offered by the tourism sector.

There are different ways in which tourism can be fitted into a school's curriculum. For instance, it can be combined with social studies, geography or current affairs. Additionally, the GTA or a local community action group may put together talks and presentations on tourism, specifically in relation to careers. Students need to be informed about employment possibilities and courses providing training. As previously stated, essays and other competitions intended to generate interest in tourism may be organised. Posters can be placed at strategic points in schools.

For instance, the GTA may commission a chain of 'Tourism – a Part of Our Future' posters, alternatively, an 'Our Tourism Industry' chain is possible. Leaflets highlighting the sector's careers or job opportunities it offers may be passed out.

A Host Programme

The individuals taking part in host programmes should be taken from all occupations, which have a direct link to tourism: especially employees of hotels or restaurants, shops-workers, taxi drivers, customs and immigration officials, airline and travel agency personnel, bank workers etc. The programme can be made up of a training module – of maybe thirty-hours contact time – which may be taught as a part - time or full - time course. After the development, the curriculum can be tested in small groups before being finalized and implemented.

The programme will most likely cover the following topics:

- Tourism general knowledge. What it is made up of and how does it becomes a success?
- Main points of national cultural heritage to be covered. What will be of interest to tourists? What will they see and where will they visit?
- Other facets of tourist products. What other visiting options are there?
- Background and culture of visitors. Where will they come from? What are they like?
- Motivating and behaviour facets of tourism. What are people looking for? What are their requirements?

- Standards, environment and quality. Maintenance and conservation.
- Tourist and crime. Warning and protecting the visitors.
- Communications and social skills; ways to deal with tourists.
- Making the vacation memorable.

Upon the completion of the course, there should be a test. Those completing the course in a satisfactory manner can be awarded a badge or a certificate - they then become accredited hosts. They must be supported and made to feel proud of their success. The adoption of such a host program can create rapid improvements to the quality of the overall tourism product.

Workshops and Seminars

The main purpose of public awareness conferences, seminars and workshops is to make people aware, have them participate, listen to them and join with them in talks about policies and upcoming plans. Common ground has to be reached, a consensus of opinion and a dedication to the chosen course of action. Such events require well-depicted presentations about the current situation, the requirements and options, and the proposed sector-wide expansion and development. Ideas regarding policies and strategies have to be explained in detail. People should be divided into discussion groups. Panels can be employed for the final feedback and discussion sessions. Conferences and workshops must encourage the greatest possible participation and feature a significant cross-section of speakers and panellists.

Campaigns

A portion of the advertising is best dedicated to a variety of other activities to form a campaign. One of which is inclusive of T.V and radio programs, competitions, contests, festivals and exhibitions. It has to be a rigorous programme, which is created around a theme and ran for a specified amount of time.

For example, it can be put together in the form of a set tourism week. This tourism week can be developed as an integrated program focusing on all facets of tourism. The head of a government office can be given the honour of opening it and it can feature prominent personalities during the week it is conducted. Activities should be tailored so as to attract wide press coverage.

Making the Tourists Aware

People need help to be able to enjoy and discover a new culture. For the most part, the religions of the world know very little about each other. Visitors have to be instructed on the basic beliefs and customs of the main local religions. A vast majority of visitors, when visiting sites of different religions, want to learn more. Published material can be beneficial. Leaflets and booklets can provide a fast and convenient summary of the most important aspects of the religion. Books covering more detailed information can also be put on-sale.

Posters can be employed to alert tourists about the way to dress and behave. The tourist guides can also address the issue of dress-code. The use of posters can prove to be highly beneficial. Some tourist

locations are very open and accommodating, others very conservative. Hotels or resorts can put together seminars on various aspects of the country's culture. While this is rarely done, tourists are welcoming to the opportunity, in easygoing, casual circumstances, to learn and hear out about the country they are visiting. The GTA should make it a point to encourage hotel owners to take more initiatives of this type.

All of the above combined makes it possible to make tourists aware of local customs. However, it is not always possible to control them completely. People on a vacation are there to have fun. A few might drink too much; others might be a little too noisy. Allow them to enjoy themselves and remember that when taking the masses into account, the behavior of tourists in general rarely gets out of hand.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Roger Doswell, (1997), Tourism: How Effective Management Makes the Difference*
- ✓ *Anne Gregory, (2010), Planning and Managing Public Relations Campaigns: A Strategic Approach*