

Developing the Tourists` Interest in the Museum:

A Case for the Livingstone Museum.

By

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ABSTRACT

The museums have great potential of attracting both local and international tourists. In many African museums, this potential has not been fully utilised to improve the visits by tourists to the museums. The visits to the museum will only improve if there is something attractive being offered. However, no matter how attractive the museum may be, it will not develop any interest in the tourists unless its products are made known to the public. This paper attempts to discuss briefly the different ways in which the tourists` interest in the museum can be developed in order to improve the number of visitors. It suggests possible ways through which the visitors to the museum could be satisfied so that they look forward to re-visiting the museum.

The discussion centers on the important role of Administrators and Museum guides in the development of the tourists` interest of the museum, and emphasises the importance of marketing or promoting the museum products to both the local and international tourists. It addresses issues relating to diversity and presentation of exhibits, design and management of visitor facilities, the relationship between visitors and museum staff, and also the relationship between Tour operators and Museum Managers. These are some of the issues that need the attention of Museum Staff in order to develop the tourists` interest in the museums.

Introduction

It is quite common that in many parts of the world especially the developing countries many museums have for years been poorly funded. The revenue collected as entrance fees is not adequate to fund the day-to-day running of the museums and to pay salaries and wages. The low levels of funding make it very difficult for museums to undertake vigorous promotional activities. As a result of poor promotional programs, there is lack of interest by the tourists to visit the museums, especially if they have visited it before. The question one may ask is; what is the cause of this attitude where tourists do not look forward to making a second or third visit to the museum? What should Museum staff do in order to develop the interest in potential tourists in the light of poor funding? This discussion identifies some of the possibilities for poor museums to function meaningfully. It starts by addressing the type of materials the museum presents and the way such material are displayed, and then looks at the relationships of museum staff with various stakeholders. The paper is based on observations made at the Livingstone Museum, though I believe some of its contents may be applicable to other museums as well.

Diversity and Presentation of Exhibits.

In many museums the nature of Museum exhibits and their presentation have remained the same for very long periods. According to Holloway (1994), when people are asked why they want to visit the museum they give several reasons, which include: "it is somewhere I have always wanted to be; some friends recommended it highly; or we have been going there regularly for the past few years". These kinds of responses indicate that the way the museum handles its clients has a bearing on what the expectations of the next visitor will be.

The kinds of items on display and the way they are exhibited can be used to motivate the visitors to the museum. It is important that as managers of museums we strive to change the items we display in our museums from time to time. In certain situations only the interpretation can be improved upon. As Musonda (1991) puts it,... "for museums to serve the tourism industry adequately, an attempt should be made to interpret objects on display as accurately as possible in order to leave its visitors as satisfied as possible." This is possible because museums have large collections in storerooms, and qualified staff, that can easily be made use of. It must however, be noted that a complete over-haul of a gallery is quite expensive. Therefore, less expensive sections of the galleries can be changed or improved upon to add to the variety of

objects. In an event that a tourist comes to the museum for the second time, and finds the same collections on display, arranged in the same manner, as when he/she first visited the museum, the tourist would leave the museum with a lot of dissatisfaction. One does not need to doubt what information such a frustrated tourist would relay to other potential tourists. The image would then be negative, and it would spread very quickly. This would discourage other potential visitors.

Nowadays the visitors to the museum expect more than just staring passively at exhibited artefacts or collections. They expect to be both educated and entertained. As a result the museum should strive to provide something that will make the tourist look forward to the next visit. In an effort "to attract new audiences, and bring back former visitors, many museums are moving away from the concept of 'objects in glass cases' in favour of better interpretation and more active participation by the visitors." (Holloway, 1994). This is one way the museum can get its visitors involved, and it brings the displayed items "alive" for them. This should however not mean compromising security of the displayed items. It is also worthwhile to have regular temporal exhibitions for different sections of the museum. Such exhibitions add to the variety of items on display. They also lessen the cost of mounting since they can easily be changed from one arrangement to another.

Design and Management of visitor facilities.

The time the tourists spend in the museum is closely related to the items on display as well as the other facilities that the museum provides. The museums have on display a lot of information that requires a lot of time to fully understand. As a result the visitors would normally get tired and require some resting-place. The quality of the resting-place will affect how long the visitor will stay. The museum should provide comfortable seats and a clean environment for a resting place for visitors. It is important that such a place offers other supporting services such as refreshments and snacks. There is also need for clean toilets situated at a position that is easy to locate. Such facilities should have clear and strategically positioned signposts. This is important because not all visitors would feel comfortable to find out from the museum guides where the toilets are. At the Livingstone Museum and indeed other museums in Zambia this scenario is made worse by the fact that museum staff do not have identification attire or any form of identity that would help a visitor distinguish them from other visitors. As a result some visitors would rather keep quiet than ask someone they are not sure works for the museum or not. This implies that some kind of identification attire would improve the relationship between museum staff and the visitors. In an event that good facilities are unavailable the visitor will have no choice but to look for such services elsewhere.

Management should therefore take time to look at what other supporting services would make a tourist come back to the museum in the company of other friends. In this way the interest of tourists will be developed and the activities of the museum will be well known. This would in a way improve the revenue collections of the museum.

The relationship between visitors and museum staff

The visitors to the museum are very particular about the way museum staff relate to them. It is a common phenomenon that the museum guides would rather offer to guide foreign (white) tourists around the galleries, than the local visitors. This is at least true in the African perspective. It is also a known fact that most of our items on display have captions written in English, and yet not everyone of the local population, and even international tourists can read English. Some of the terms used on certain captions are highly technical, and as such they require explanations. It is also boring to some visitors to read one caption after another throughout the galleries. Therefore, the museum guides would help a lot in developing the tourists' interest especially in the local population by guiding the visitors and giving short but precise descriptions of what is on display. This would greatly reduce the time spent by tourists, but enhance their understanding of the museum without being bored. Such tourists stand a high chance of re-visiting the museum and even inviting other friends along. Management should therefore ensure that both local and international tourists are guided through the galleries, unless they decline such guidance. This implies that the museum guides need to fully understand what the museum offers and must be well organised so as to manage handling people of diverse cultures and backgrounds.

Relationship between Tour Operators and Museum Managers.

The other factor worth noting is the relationship of museum managers with Tour operators. Tour operators handle a lot of international tourists. Most of these Tour Operators concentrate on areas that will provide their clients with memorable moments. As a result they induce selectivity among tourists. According to Chidumayo (1986), this visitor selectivity among tourists can be reduced significantly by objective visitor education. I totally agree with this view because some visitors make choices based on inadequate information about what museums offer. The information the Tour Operators give to the tourists will determine the expectations of such tourists. In some cases this results in tourists not visiting the museum, or when they visit, they already have a low expectation of what the museum has to offer. The education section of the museum should therefore ensure that literature is made available to the Tour Operators and Lodge owners for distribution to their visitors. This is very important because museum guides are not experts in the various aspects of the museum galleries, and as such literature often fills the gaps created by lack of oral expertise. The literature would provide visitors with an idea of what to expect.

The influence of Tour Operators on tourists cannot be avoided. Therefore, the museum managers should from time to time

organise meetings with Tour Operators to provide them with information that would help the Tour Operators in promoting their tour package. Once the information is made available to Tour Operators, they would use it to induce tourists to visit the museum. In this way the tourists' interest in the museum would improve. The museums should therefore seriously consider making the museum visits as part of the tour package through partnership with Tour Operators. This would ensure that all tourists handled by Tour Operators in a partnership with the museum would pay for a visit to the museum, and eventually visit the museum. It would also mean that the museum and its products would become part of the Tour Operator's promotional material.

Conclusion

These programmes and services require finances, but it is worth undertaking them if museum products are to be marketed effectively. It is important that the museum products are effectively promoted using whatever cheap methods available. It is of no use complaining about poor funding as the reason for not marketing museums and their products when not all promotional methods require large amounts of money.

The challenge therefore is for museum managers to ensure that despite the low levels of funding, the museum promotional programmes are undertaken.

References

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