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Tourism4Peace Forum

An Example of Best Practice in Peace through Tourism Education

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Preamble

The Tourism4Peace Forum was established in 2005 as an initiative by the Israel Hotel Managers Association and sponsored by the Peres Center for Peace. The purpose of the creation of the forum is to advance peace through tourism by strengthening dialogue and ties between the regions and the tourism industry. The third annual meeting of the Tourism4Peace Forum was hosted for the first time outside the Middle East, in the Netherlands. The Tourism4Peace conference was organised by the Christelijke Hogeschool Nederland (CHN University) in October 31-November 2, 2006.

A panel presentation included senior hospitality executives of Egypt, Israel, Jordan, The Palestinian Authority. Their presentation included a prototype tour brochure, "The Pillars of Civilization," which illustrates their vision for regional tourism promotion. The four-country tour program offers cultural experiences, religious pilgrimages to the Holy Land and a wide variety of tourist sites and resorts.

By endorsing this vision delegates agreed among many others to 1) work towards easing freedom of movement for easier access to tourists and Palestinian tourism professionals in the area; 2) gather efforts on joint marketing and promotion activities; and 3) facilitate joint professional workshops for top hotel and travel executives in the region.

Overview

Delegates respectively presented tourism in their countries indicating respective unique selling points (USPs) but also emphasizing the cultural similarities that exist between the concerned destinations.

No borders, no boundaries, no animosity; just beautiful cultural experience

That was the message by delegate from Israel Rafi Baeri, Vice President Marketing and Sales of Dan Hotels-Israel to the students. The Tourism4Peace forum conference at the CHN university has been of an important success, not only because it has gathered delegates from the Arab world and Israel around the same table, but most importantly because it has served as an eye-opener for students -citizens of the world, future marketers, politicians, policymaker and entrepreneurs- making them more aware of the importance and power of tourism as a facilitator and beneficiary of peace.

You probably won't believe it, but there are people in the Middle East who want peace

Janos Damon, Executive Director, Israel Hotel Manager Association

The delegates' echoed message was that, despite the conflict, tourism does happen in their region and could and should grow even more because of the so many tourism treasures and opportunities that this part of the world offers. While the media tend to 'over dramatise' the situation in the Middle East, sensitise and sensationalise their media products, it is time to 'cheer up' a bit. The challenge of the delegates has been on focusing on, and emphasising, the other somewhat forgotten face of the Middle East. Their mission thus has been to cover the other side of the story and, through tourism, share with the people of the world the other positive realities of the region.

Surely, there is conflict, but not only that: there is life as well. The delegates have taken a non-political strategy and collected their efforts around marketing their region as a one and inviting tourism destination that has hospitable people, full of life and energy. Their joint destination marketing presentation entitled the Pillars of Civilization indicates: *For the first time in history, you can experience all of our glorious sites in one visit, with one ticket, at one low price. Discover the magic of our cultures, our people, our histories, our hospitality.* Tourism is about hospitality and hospitality is about bringing guests and hosts together.

The Major challenge: students could not relate the contents of the conference, which is primarily destination marketing, to its primary purpose which relates to promoting peace in the region. That was an unfamiliar concept to our students. During each presentation and at the end of the conference, a number of questions were asked but several of them remained unclear to them. The two most challenging questions were: a) how can we talk about peace in such a troubled region without talking about politics? And b) tourism contributes to peace or peace contributes to tourism?

Challenges faced

- Before the conference students were very much enthusiastic to learn more about a very timely and interesting topic: Peace through Tourism.
- During the conference: the level of euphoria had levelled down, because the delegates' presentations was perceived to be less challenging than expected; more about destination marketing than about 'peace'.
- At the end of the conference: a level of apathy or disinterest was reached.

Actions implemented

- Discussion and feedback
 - Raising awareness about culture of peace
 - Understanding that peace can be addressed without politics
 - Understanding that peace can be a topic of discussion without talking about war or conflict

Conclusion

- After the conference: the level of euphoria had reached its highest. Students have become even more interested in knowing about the so many ways that one can contribute to the forging of a culture of peace towards achieving an everlasting peace. A few students have even decided to pursue the tourism and peace topic in their BBA or MA dissertation research. They have understood that debates about peace and conflict abound, yet to promote peace in a troubled region without talking politics is scant, but possible, desirable, and even successful in reaching hearts and souls, deeply.

THE YOUTH OF THE WORLD WANT TO CREATE A CULTURE OF PEACE

UNESCO

As defined by the United Nations, the Culture of Peace:

is a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations... For peace and non-violence to prevail, we need to foster a culture of peace through education.

Like many other value-driven tourism and hospitality schools and associations (AHA), The CHN University:

strives to develop tourism and hospitality leaders of tomorrow who have a positive attitude, demonstrate strong work values, lead by example, encourage tolerance, celebrate diversity and promote peace around the world.

UNESCO has identified eight action areas to foster a culture of peace; the first one is fostering a culture of peace through education. The Tourism4Peace Forum is a good example of attitudes and behavior inherent in a culture of peace, and a good and successful example to promote a culture of peace in educational institutes, especially that: *Tomorrow's leaders are today's youth. Their education and participation is key to the world's future.*

Tourism has no borders

is the message of Raed Saadeh, President Arab (Palestinian) Hotel Association to our students, a message of transcendence and hope.

Tourism is key to improving relations with other countries

Michael Nazzal, Vice Chairman of the Arab Federation of Hospitality and Tourism.