

Philemon Oyewole (USA)

Strategies for the marketing of international tourism in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

Abstract

International tourism has become very important to several developing countries as a major source of foreign exchange earnings for their economic development. This is true of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean region. This paper analyzes the past performance and future potentials of this region in the global market for international tourism. Recommendations for marketing strategies and public policies to achieve these potentials while mitigating attendant problems are discussed.

Keywords: international tourism, marketing strategy, public policy, Latin America and Caribbean.

Introduction

The Latin America and Caribbean region needs to compete effectively with other locations and regions of the world in the global market for international tourism. It is thus important for the region to adopt innovative marketing strategies and adequate public policies as the new decade begins. This is crucial for the countries of the region. More than half of the 38 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region have international tourism receipts constituting more than 10% of their total annual exports (World Bank, 2003). Four of those countries even depend on international tourism for more than 50% of their total annual exports. These include: Barbados (51.7%), Antigua and Barbuda (63.2%), the Bahamas (63.8%), and St. Lucia (72.3%). The World Tourism Organization reiterates that for numerous countries of Latin America and Caribbean region: "...tourism appears to be the *most feasible* alternative for boosting economic development..." (WTO 2001, 11, italics added). Regrettably however, that World Tourism Organization's report added that when it comes to tourism arrivals and receipts: "The results generated in the Americas do not match the potential of its resources..." (WTO 2001, 11). For the region of Latin America and the Caribbean to achieve its potential, and remain competitive in the international tourism market, will require adequate long range planning, formulating pertinent public policies, and taking effective marketing actions. The focus of this paper therefore is to analyze past trends and future potentials in the region, identify issues that may pose a challenge to reaching these potentials, and advance marketing strategies and public policies to effectively deal with these issues.

Important changes have taken place over the years concerning the paradigms of tourism development. The conventional tourism development paradigm was based on the proposition that tourism can bring

relatively inexpensive economic growth to less developed countries (Sinclair and Tsegaye, 1990). It was claimed that compared to other industries, tourism requires less investment and yet promotes job creation, generates foreign earnings, improves the balance of payment and stimulates non-tourism investments (Archer and Fletcher, 1996). This has led to a rush to tourism development by the nations with the sole objective of *maximizing* its *economic* benefits. Negative impacts of such rushed tourism development soon became apparent in form of attendant adverse social-cultural costs, and environmental degradation. This led to a call for change in paradigm both on national and international fronts. The call was made to move away from the conventional tourism development paradigm (measured solely in terms of economic growth) to what is termed "sustainable tourism development" (Sharpley and Sharpley, 1997). Sustainable tourism development aims to promote equitable distribution of economic benefits to local residents, minimize negative social and cultural impacts, preserve the environment and encourage full community participation (Choi and Sirakaya, 2005). The thrust of this paper reflects this current paradigm of tourism development in its analysis and strategy recommendations for the marketing of international tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).

1. Literature

A few authors have examined international tourism in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean. Sarigöllü and Huang (2005), for example, studied North American tourists to Latin America. These visitors were segmented using benefits sought. Four segments emerged from the study, namely: (i) adventurer, (ii) multifarious, (iii) fun and relaxation seeker, and (iv) urbane, with the multifarious making up the largest segment constituting 35% of the sample. The segment represents the group of tourists that fully explore a destination looking for a variety of benefits including outdoor adventure, ecotourism, general sight-seeing, performing arts

and events, as well as fun and sun activities. The multifarious segment was also said to assign higher importance ratings to decision drivers such as accommodation provision, infrastructure, service, safety, and cost considerations than other segments.

In another study, Huang and Sarigöllü (2007) segmented tourists to the Caribbean also based on benefits sought. Four segments were identified, namely: (i) sun and fun seekers, (ii) active sports, (iii) sightseers, and (iv) variety seekers. Similar to Sarigöllü and Huang (2005)'s multifarious segment, the largest segment was Variety seekers group constituting almost 30% of the sample. It was found that Variety seekers tend to travel the most, while sightseers tend to travel the least. The Variety seekers again attached the highest importance ratings to such decision drivers as accommodation, services, infrastructure, local prices, and tourist safety.

In his own study, Oyewole (2008) projected tourist arrivals to the Latin America and the Caribbean up to the year 2020. According to this projection, arrival of tourists will go up from 51.2 million in 2004 to 93.8 million by the year 2020, growing at annual rate of 3.81%. The receipts from the spending of these tourists were projected to go from US\$34 billion in 2004 to US\$70.3 billion in 2020. The author also developed a lower case scenario, and an upper case scenario for these projections indicating that actual outcomes could be influenced by a number of factors including the adoption of appropriate marketing strategies. For the lower case scenario, arrivals of tourist would be 87.5 million by the year 2020 with a corresponding receipts figure of US\$64.9 billion. On the other hand, under the upper case scenario, tourist arrivals would go up to 100.03 million by 2020, and the receipts would stand at US\$75.8 billion.

Some other studies on international tourism that focused on Latin America and the Caribbean region have mainly explored the region's potentials in the global international tourism market on one hand, and the attendant problems or challenges, on the other. Strizzi and Meis (1998), for example, affirmed that prospects for increased arrivals in LAC are strong given the region's rich and diverse historical and cultural heritage, natural endowments and the creation of a free trade area of the Americas. On the other hand, the authors also warned that: "The Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region will face numerous challenges and obstacles that if left unattended will limit its inbound and outbound travel market potential." (p.v)

Slower economic growth, weak economic and tourism infrastructures as well as worsening

environmental degradation are among the problems the authors noted. Mention was also made of rising crime, corruption and the spread of infectious diseases leading to increased tourism-related security and health concerns. In their later study of outbound tourism from LAC, Strizzi and Meis (2001) reported that outbound travel volume and spending of the region would be adversely affected by weaker regional income, job growth, and value of the LAC currencies. These conditions, the authors affirmed, will favor cheaper and closer tourist destinations over long-haul travels.

Lumsdon and Swift (2001, p. 53) also alluded to the fine prospects for tourism in Latin America. In fact, they submitted: "As a region, Latin America is only beginning to emerge as a major tourism destination." They reported that beach resorts are found in several LAC countries and many of them, such as Brazil, Costa Rica, and Ecuador, are noted for nature-based tourism. Such nature-based tourism attracts the scientific market that engages in adventure tourism and eco-tourism. The authors further emphasized the benefits of tourism to the region in three main areas, namely: contribution to GDP, encouragement of inward investment and increased employment opportunities. On the flip side though, Lumsdon and Swift (2001, p. 45) also warned that tourism, "whilst bringing the potential for development, also brings with it problems." The authors, in particular, mentioned the social and environmental costs of tourism in the form of destruction of the eco-systems and the architectural heritage including pollution of land and sea. They warned of the contamination of social-cultural values and structures, moral degradation, including child prostitution by tourists doing things abroad that they would never do at home!

Another author with a prospect-problem report on tourism in the Latin America and the Caribbean region was Schlüter (1991). The author listed several tourism attractions that are available in LAC. Among these are the Easter Island of Chile, the Galapagos Islands of Ecuador, the Contadora in Panama, the Culebra bay (now Papagayo Gulf) of Costa Rica, San Juan del Sur in Nicaragua, Tornasol in Honduras, Izabal in Guatemala, Puerto Plata in the Dominican Republic, the Cancun village in Mexico, the Mach Pinchu ruins in Peru, the Tazumal in El Salvador, and the Nassau/Paradise Island in Bahamas. In addition to these are chains of seaside resorts all along the coasts of the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans. The author, however, also espoused the attendant challenges for the region. Schlüter (1991) especially highlighted the problems with political unrest and natural disasters. These, the author noted, tend to have a negative influence on

the number of tourist arrivals in the region because the lack of knowledge about Latin American countries makes potential visitors rely on mass media, which generally only show interest in the region when natural or social disasters take place. Even if these happened in one country, the author observed that: “The negative image of one country spreads over the whole region or over a sub region seriously affecting the travel decisions.” (p. 23).

Other authors have alluded to other sources of tourism prospects for the LAC region. For example, Morrison et al. (1996) reported that cruise line tourism is growing in the LAC region, especially in the Caribbean. The market, they mentioned, is dominated by the USA, which accounts for approximately 80% of world cruises. Likewise, Getino (1990) reported that five countries in the LAC region are particularly noted for beach tourism. These include Brazil, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Venezuela, the author said.

On the negative side however, Canastrelli and Costa (1991) invoked the concept of tourism “carrying capacity”. This concept pertains to the relationship between level of demand and magnitude of impacts on the destination’s community life economically, ecologically, culturally and socially. For example, the authors alluded to the significant impact of cruise ships such as on the Caribbean islands, where large numbers of people disembark for a short period of time with high level of intrusion into the local community life. Hence, such tourist presence has high “carrying capacity”. Lumsdon and Smith (2001) identified four main levels of tourism carrying capacity, namely: (i) the level above which the character of the place is damaged and the quality of the experience is threatened; (ii) the level above which physical damage occurs; (iii) the level above which irreversible damage takes place; and (iv) the level above which the local community suffers unacceptable side effects. Thus, any marketing strategies for international tourism in a locality should be cognizant of the tourism’s “carrying capacity”. This is the basis of the two-pronged marketing strategies developed in this paper for the LAC region.

2. Data source and methodology

The historical data used for this study were from the World Bank’s “World Development Indicators” (World Bank, 2006, 2009), as well as the World Tourism Organization’s “Tourism Market Trends” (Various issues). Data for projected figures were taken from Oyewole (2008). International tourist arrivals to the LAC region were examined over a 40-year period, from the year 1980 up to the year 2020. Corresponding receipts figures were also examined for the same past and future periods.

Arrival figures were given in millions of persons, while receipt figures were given in billions of U.S. dollars. A trend analysis of these figures was carried out, following which detailed strategies were developed for the region for the marketing of international tourism in the global market. The strategies advanced for the region were based on the literature as reviewed above. In particular, the strategies were underpinned by the new paradigm of tourism in the literature, “sustainable tourism development”, as well as the concept of tourism “carrying capacity” as discussed above.

3. Trend analysis result

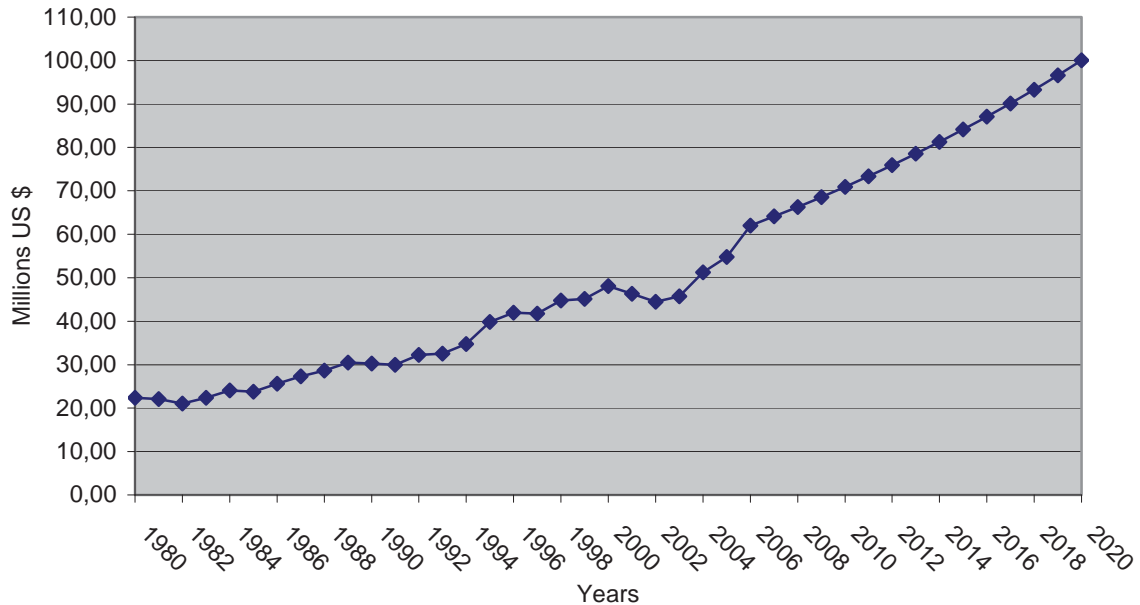
The trends of arrivals and receipts of international tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), during the period of 1980-2020, are diagrammatically presented in Figures 1 and 2, respectively. Looking at Figures 1 and 2, both the arrivals and receipts figures indicate a general upward trend over the period. Figure 1 shows that arrivals went up from 22.4 millions in 1980 to 51.2 millions in 2004. There was a major dip between 2000 and 2002, from 48.1 millions down to 44.5 millions, following the fateful event of September 11, 2001 terrorist attack in the USA. However, there was a quick recovery the following year 2003, as the number of arrivals went up to 45.7 millions in that year to continue the upward trend. This trend is theoretically expected to continue into the year 2020 when the figure of arrivals of tourists is projected to reach up to 100.03 millions (upper case scenario) at a growth rate of 3.72% per annum (Oyewole, 2008).

Figure 2 shows that receipts from international tourism started with a downward trend between 1980 (with US\$10.9 billion) and 1982 (with US\$8.2 billion). This trend was reversed, however, in 1986 when the receipts figure climbed back up to US\$10.5 billion. This started an upward trend that was sustained throughout the rest of the period. Although the major dip in arrivals between 2000 and 2002 also depressed receipts during this period from US\$28.0 billion to US\$26.6 billion, respectively; the figure went back up the following year 2003 to US\$29.2 billion to continue the upward trend. As for tourist arrivals, this trend is theoretically expected to continue also into the year 2020 when the figure of receipts is projected to reach up to US\$75.8 billions (upper case scenario) at a growth rate of 4.51% per annum (Oyewole, 2008).

This trend analysis indicates a vast potential for the LAC region in the global market for international tourism up to the year 2020. However, given the competitive nature of the global international tourism market, the projected figures remain just what they are: “potentials!” Thus, vast as these

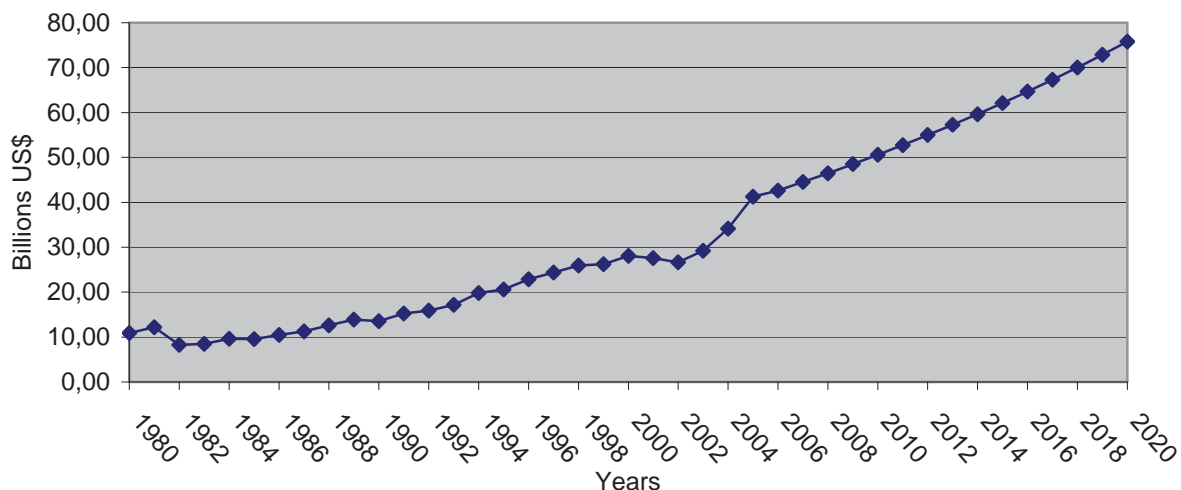
potentials are, they could only be turned into reality if the right public policies were formulated and adequate marketing strategies were planned and executed by the nations of the LAC region. On this point, Frost and Shanka (2001) reiterate that: "...international tourism can be a viable source of foreign exchange earnings ... as well as an industry that attracts foreign investment funds and increases domestic output and employment *only when realistic and careful planning is involved.*" (P. 43, italics added). Essentially, the governments of Latin

America and the Caribbean region should embark on a two-pronged policy and marketing strategy measures, namely: (i) those that will allow the region to fully tap, not stifle, the potential international tourism arrivals and receipts up to the end of the next decade as given in this paper, and (ii) those that will prepare the region to be ready to absorb the influx without detriments, in view of the socio-economic impacts of the large number of visitors expected. Suggestions for the two-pronged policy and marketing strategies are given below.



Sources: World Bank (2006, 2009), Oyewole (2008).

Fig. 1. Arrivals of international tourism into Latin America and the Caribbean



Sources: World Bank (2006, 2009), Oyewole (2008).

Fig. 2. Receipts from international tourism into Latin America and the Caribbean

4. Strategies to encourage inflow of tourists

4.1. Adequate physical infrastructure and utilities. In order to encourage the full potential

inflow of tourists, the governments of the LAC region will need to formulate policies aimed at overcoming the obstacles that may impede such inflow. Foremost among these is the problem of

inadequate or insufficient physical infrastructure and utilities as are common in most developing nations (WTO, 2001). Governments are often the facilitator and owner/operator of tourism facilities in the Latin America and the Caribbean region (Lumsdon and Swift, 2001). The consequence is that there is a perennial shortage of adequate hotel accommodation, road and rail network systems, airport, and seaport capacity, aircraft fleets, power generating facilities, as well as water and sanitation systems (Strizzi and Meis, 1998; WTO, 2001).

A policy of privatization, as well as deregulation of the tourism industry sector will help attract funds from the private sector for the necessary infrastructural development. In addition to this privatization/deregulation policy, governments should also adopt a policy of incentive package to encourage active participation of the private sector in the program. Along this line would be tax incentives, low interest loans, or interest rate rebates for the tourism sector, as well as reduction of tariffs for inputs for hotels and catering sectors. The effectiveness of such incentive policy is demonstrated by the 1999, Law No. 306 on Incentives for the Tourism Sector in the Republic of Nicaragua. Reports had it that within 1 year of passing that law, 100 applications were submitted and approved "...involving investments of over 83 million dollars." Of the 100 applications, 27 were for projects in hotel infrastructure (WTO, 2001, p. 130).

This is not to say that results of privatization and incentive policies will be the same like this in all other countries of Latin America and Caribbean region. As noted by Lumsdon and Swift (2001), while developing countries appreciate the importance of investment in tourism infrastructure, most are faced with lack of fund from domestic sources, however appealing the incentive(s). Hence, the need to seek for capital from abroad – by low-interest borrowing or by attracting foreign investors. As noted by Lumsdon and Swift (2001), the infrastructural development (such as modern hotels, resorts, and road networks) made possible by these foreign investments, is necessary to attract visitors from the more developed parts of the world such as USA and Western Europe.

4.2. New product development. With adequate infrastructure in place, a strategy of product diversification in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean, where individual country within the region develops a tourism model that concentrates on its sustainable competitive advantage, will be necessary to help the region as a whole realize its full potential in tourism. The Caribbean countries, for example, should capitalize on the growing cruise

line tourism, and expand their seaport capacities to handle cruise ships of up to 80,000 tons and more. Likewise, Brazil, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Venezuela along the oceans have good potentials in beach tourism. Depending on the competitive advantage of individual countries, the region should encourage diversification into such tourism products as ski-snow-mountain tourism; sports fishing; whale watching; hiking; scuba diving; volcanic viewing; ethnic tourism; cultural tourism; rural tourism; ecotourism; adventure tourism; world heritage site tourism; congresses and exhibitions. Local festivals could be turned into popular tourism products such as the World Music Creole Festival of Dominica, and Bequia Easter Regatta of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Likewise, as noted by Lumsdon and Swift (2001, p. 73): "As yet there has been little development of major entertainment attractions such as theme parks..." in the region. Therein lays another potential for product diversification to bring visitors to Latin America and the Caribbean region.

4.3. Encouraging repeat visitors. In order to fully harness the potentials for tourist arrivals in the LAC region, market penetration and market development strategies would be very essential. Market penetration strategy can encourage more use from current consumers of a product. Using this strategy, countries of Latin America and the Caribbean region should encourage repeat visits from tourists. This should prove cost effective. Haywood (1989) once noted that it is five times more costly to get a new customer than to retain an old one. To this end, adequate incentives should be given to current visitors to visit again. For example, giving coupons to tourists at tourist attraction sites, hotels etc. with 2 or more years of expiration could encourage them to visit again. Likewise, direct marketing method could be used to promote to such visitors. To do this, a database of former visitors could be developed perhaps by organizing sweepstakes to get voluntary personal information from visitors. Winners at the sweepstakes would be given prizes. Direct mails could be sent to all that entered the sweepstakes at their addresses abroad when they returned home. Such promotional direct mails could contain timetable of upcoming events in the region and possibly coupons and other incentives to participate. They could also contain solicitation for new referrals from these former visitors. Cayman Islands engaged in one of such direct mail programs with resounding success. Direct mails were sent to 46,000 previous visitors to the island from the United Kingdom. This led to 2,200 new referrals just from one single country (WTO, 2001). The need for this market penetration strategy in Latin America and Caribbean region is highlighted by a finding

from the study of North American tourists to Latin America by Sarigöllü and Huang (2005). Out of the 265 respondents surveyed only 29% (less than 1/3rd) said they visited Latin America before! The percentage was even much lower for the “Fun and Relaxation” (20%), and the “Urbane” (18%) tourist segments discovered in their study. In order to reach its full potentials, Latin America and Caribbean region would not only need to attract new visitors, but also encourage repeat visits from former visitors.

4.4. Stimulating tourist spending. Governments of Latin America and the Caribbean region would also need a policy to stimulate tourist spending in order to reap the full reward of encouraging tourist inflow. For example, duty exemption policy for tourists, such as the enactment of Law 25.406 relative to VAT rebates services consumption by foreign tourists by Argentina (WTO, 2001), could stimulate greater spending, and longer stay by tourists. Adequate policy on modes of payment could also be a stimulant. For example, developing financial institutions that will allow for payment by credit cards across country could lead to greater spending, especially by visitors from the more developed countries of the world. Furthermore, the international source market for tourism should be segmented on the basis of tourist propensity to spend as is done in Oyewole (2002). Then Latin America and the Caribbean region should target those countries with the greatest propensity to spend, promoting more heavily to such countries.

4.5. Modernization of the tourism sector. Also, governments of Latin America and Caribbean region will need a policy of tourism sector modernization. For example, adequate zoning laws should be enacted and enforced to prevent unplanned buildings and constructions, and preserve tourist attraction sites, beach access, etc. The sector modernization policy should also include protection of endangered species in the region. Hence, such activities like hunting and fishing should be regulated in order not to destroy the very attractions that bring in visitors! Likewise, tourism sector certification/licensing and inspection programs should be established and well funded to set up industry standards and enforce them. For example, high level of neatness and hygiene at hotel and restaurant establishments is very important to visitors' health. Government agencies should be established solely to inspect such tourism establishments with authority to impose fines or revoke the licenses of non-complying establishments. The goal here is not to eradicate traditional eating-places or the local delicacy menus (which may be tourist attractions in themselves), but

to ensure that whatever is served, and wherever it is served should be neat and hygienic for the sake of visitors' health.

4.6. Visitors' safety. Related to the issue of visitor's health is visitor's safety. As succinctly put by Reisinger and Mavondo (2005, p. 212): “Tourism cannot develop in places that are perceived as dangerous.” Several other authors agree that personal safety and level of perceived risk are major factors influencing tourists' intentions to travel even before the September 11, 2001 incident of terrorism in the USA (Crompton, 1992; Sönmez and Graefe, 1998). In their own study of visitors to tourist attractions in Australia, Reisinger and Mavondo (2005, p. 212; italics theirs) reported that: “*Intentions to travel internationally were determined by travel anxiety levels and level of perceived safety.*” As important as tourist safety is to tourism development, this will be a challenge for the governments of LAC region. Reportedly (Strizzi and Meis, 1998, 7), the region is said to record the largest numbers of kidnappings in the world, and that: “Criminal activity against foreign visitors in many LAC countries is a growing problem.” In order to encourage tourist inflow, governments of Latin America and Caribbean region will need a strong policy of tourist safety and security. In addition to regular Police force, special Tourism Police Corp should be established. This Police Corp should receive specialized training in recognizing dangers specific to tourists, and in helping tourists in dangers. This specialized Police Corp should be multi-lingual to be of help to foreign visitors. The Tourism Police Corp should be well equipped and maintain adequate presence at tourist attraction sites, hotels, motels, cafés, airports, seaports, and such other places where vulnerable tourists are known to be found.

4.7. Destination image. Related to concerns about tourists' safety is destination image. As O'Leary and Deegan (2005, 247, italics theirs) stated: “*Tourism images are critical to the success of any destination...*” Several other authors agree that destination image not only affects tourist satisfaction, but even his choice selection among competing destinations in the first place (Gilmore, 2002; Morgan and Prichard, 2002). Latin America and Caribbean governments will need to formulate policies and marketing strategies to change the image of the region as a tourist destination, especially with regard to crime and natural disasters. Germane to this point is the statement by Schlüter (1991, p. 23) who observed that: “The lack of knowledge about Latin American countries makes potential visitors rely on mass media, which

generally only show interest in the country when natural or social disasters take place.” The author added that: “The negative image of one country spreads over the whole region or a sub region seriously affecting the travel decision.” In view of this fact there is a need for Latin America and the Caribbean region to maintain a strong presence in their source markets. Marketing programs of continuous customer education should be in place both to promote the region and to combat any negative publicity from the mass media. While it is a fact that natural disasters like hurricane and volcanic eruptions do occur in the region due to its geographic and climatic nature, not all the time do these disrupt tourist activities. For example, despite the devastations caused by hurricane Mitch in Central America, a report (WTO, 2001, 122) had it that hotels in Guatemala “...sustained no damage at all and damage to roads was minimal.” Such information needs to be transmitted to the public urgently and accurately. For this purpose, it will be necessary for Latin America and the Caribbean countries to have resident tourism offices in their foreign source markets. The countries also need to stay on the cutting edge of communications and information technology, and develop effective interactive websites. It will be worthwhile for the countries to invest in the development of international television broadcasting stations such as the Nigeria’s “NTA Plus”. This will not only enhance rapid information dissemination, but also boost the region’s image in the international market. Further, regular participation in international tourism fairs such as the FITUR (Spain), ITB (Germany), BIT (Milan), and WTM (London) would enhance awareness and image of the region. In further pursuing building positive destination image, countries of the Latin America and Caribbean region could sponsor press trips, whereby journalists from foreign source markets visit a country, and are taken round to become more familiar with tourist sites and products. The hope is that the first hand knowledge gained by such visits will appear in the journals back home at the source market.

4.8. Community involvement. Of great importance to tourism development in Latin America and the Caribbean region is a sound policy of public awareness and community involvement. Several authors (Choi and Sirakaya, 2005; Easterling, 2005; Fredline and Faulkner, 2000; Gursoy, Jurowski, and Uysal, 2002; Lawton, 2005; Sirakaya, Teye, and Sönmez, 2002) agree that the level of receptiveness of the local residents to tourism development and the way they treat tourists have an influence on attracting tourists, and on their level of satisfaction.

The local community should be strongly encouraged to participate in the development of destinations. Especially should NGO’s be encouraged to work with local communities for tourism development in a given area, viewing it as “...a local resource”, to be preserved “...for the common good and future generations...” (Murphy, 1985, p. 36). Internal publicity and promotional campaigns, such as Cayman Islands’ “Tourism Awareness Week” of 2000 (WTO, 2001), should be launched that inform the local residents of the benefits of tourism to them both at the local and national levels, and that appeal to them to be hospitable toward tourists. In their study of residents of Arizona communities, McGehee and Andereck (2004) reported that personal benefit from tourism rather than just personal characteristics predicted support for tourism by the locals. Along this line therefore, governments of Latin America should seek ways to ensure that the local residents share revenue from tourism development in an area personally. A way to achieve this would be to utilize local resources and local manpower in the tourism activities involving a destination by suitable job creation. For example, developing local handcrafts into souvenirs that could be mass-produced would utilize both the local resources and manpower while ensuring adequate share of tourism revenue with the community.

4.9. Manpower development. If the Latin America and Caribbean region would attain to its potentials in international tourism, manpower development policy in the tourism sector becomes a necessity. Special training programs and/or changes in school and college curriculum should be embarked upon to produce skilled labor in tourism and hospitality, such as linguists, tour guides, historians, chefs, waiters, as well as managers of operations and marketing.

4.10. Regional cooperation. In communicating with source markets, a strategy of joint regional promotional campaigns will benefit countries of Latin America and the Caribbean region not only in cost sharing but also in more effective coverage of the international markets. Several authors (Apostolopoulos and Sönmez, 2000 and 2001; Dieke and Karamustafa, 2000; Timothy, 2002; Tosun et al., 2005) agree that the current trend of globalization and strategic alliances taking place in manufacturing, business and commerce could hardly be resisted in the tourism sector as well. Hence, although they may be domestic competitors within their region, countries of Latin America and the Caribbean region should also see themselves as an entity competing with other locations and regions of the world in the global market. Hence, a policy of regional cooperation in tourism leading to creation

of joint tourism organizations would stand the entire region in good stead. Such joint tourism organizations would promote the region as a whole and coordinate multi-destination travel arrangements for tourists and travel agencies. In order to facilitate such multi-destination travels within the region, governments should consider a policy of “one visa visits all”. With this policy, one visa issued by one country in the region would permit visits to all the other participating countries. This would be a great incentive to cross over from one country to the other(s) on a single trip, benefiting both the traveler and the countries visited.

4.11. International relations. Achieving the full potentials of international tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean region will also have implications for policies on international relations. This is because political relationship with a foreign country has been shown to impact the number of tourists a destination receives from such country. A ready example is the case of Cuba. Once favored by the USA visitors, the number of arrivals from that country dropped from 160,958 in 1959 to a negligible figure in the 1960’s due to the Cuban-American crisis (Republica de Cuba, 1982). As of 1999, the number of arrivals only stood at 62,345 (WTO, 2001), a far cry from the pre-crisis figure forty years before! Likewise a report had it that: “Disagreements between the United States and Panama made tourism drop 7% during the first eight months of 1988.” (Schlüter, 1991, p. 24). Several nations, especially in the more developed world, have issued warnings for their citizens discouraging them from visiting countries they consider hostile (Reisinger and Mavondo, 2005). Hence, governments of Latin America and the Caribbean should follow a policy of good bilateral and multilateral relations with their foreign source markets. Before these governments take a stand on an issue with a country, they should consider the impact(s) on tourism flow from such country.

5. Strategies to manage the inflow of tourists

Following the concept of tourism “carrying capacity” (Canastrelli and Costa, 1991; Lumsdon and Smith, 2001), as governments of Latin America and Caribbean region encourage inflow of tourists, they should also plan ahead to *manage* this projected inflow to achieve the most good. This is because while international tourism has a lot of promise of economic development for developing nations, it is not without its problems (Lumsdon and Swift, 2001). Such problems include the social and environmental costs of tourism; destruction of the eco-systems and the architectural heritage; land pollution; sea pollution; and overcrowding of

physical infrastructure. For example, in Mexico, resorts such as Acapulco deteriorated so much in the 1990’s that even tourists abandoned them (Lumsdon and Swift, 2001). The United Nations Environmental Program has reportedly estimated that tourists produce an average of 2.2 pounds of solid waste per tourist per day! (Awake! 2005). Equally disturbing would be contamination of social-cultural values, structures, and beliefs, as well as moral degradations including child prostitution by tourists doing things abroad that they would otherwise not do back at home.

Often, governments are preoccupied with encouraging inflow of tourism that as Sirakaya, Jamal and Choi (2001, 411) noted: “...many destinations have been caught off-guard in dealing with the adverse impacts of tourism on natural, social, and cultural resources.” The keyword in that statement is being “caught off-guard”. With adequate planning ahead, this does not have to be the case with countries of the Latin America and Caribbean region.

5.1. Anti-social behaviors. While not all the negative impacts of tourism could be avoided, adequate policies and marketing strategies could help alleviate some. For example, in combating anti-social behaviors, such as sexual molestation of children, governments could have a policy of screening visa applicants to be sure they are not child molesters. A way to do this would be to put in a question on the application form specifically asking if applicants have ever been convicted of child molestation. The application should then be sworn to and notarized by applicant before being issued a visa. Any convicted child molester would be denied visiting visa, unless he/she agreed in writing to be monitored during his visit to the country as is often done with such convicts even in their home countries.

5.2. Erosion of cultural values. Programs of public education should also be in place to warn the citizens of negative social impacts of tourism and how to resist them. For example, radio and television broadcasts could put up acted dramas showing the folly of abandoning one’s long held social-cultural values and beliefs because of brief close contacts with some foreign tourists! How to resist such tendencies should also be the subjects of play act dramas in the media. Likewise, how child molesters and child traffickers operate should be exposed to put citizens on guard.

5.3. Facility maintenance and repair. With an increased inflow of people into the region, wears and tears of tourist attractions could be expected, and should be planned for ahead of time. A policy of

contracting out the maintenance and repair of these facilities to efficient private firms would be better than leaving such to some governments' departments of works, or Town Councils. Profit-oriented private firms could be better trusted to be more diligent in caring for such tasks, especially if the renewal of their contracts (annually or otherwise) depended on their prior performance, which they should.

5.4. Overcrowded facilities. Likewise, overcrowding at tourist attraction sites could be anticipated and planned for. Effective differential pricing strategy could be used to even out demand to avoid concentration of tourists at only a few places during the same time of the year. Higher prices could be charged to visit the most popular sites known to be overcrowded during some particular periods of the year, while less prices (or even no prices) are charged for the less visited ones. In addition to this pricing strategy, adequate marketing communications should be launched at source markets whereby potential visitors are educated about other tourist attractions in a country apart from the one, or ones, the country is popularly known for. For example, instead of just promoting tourist attraction *sites*, events and festivals in a country should be equally promoted heavily in the source markets. This would reduce congestion at tourist attraction sites back at the destination when the tourists do visit since they would have alternatives with which to occupy themselves.

5.5. Environmental degradation. Environmental regulations would be necessary to combat environmental degradation by tourists. For example, although well-defined laws against littering exist in the more developed countries of the world and are enforced, such may not be the case in many developing countries. Thus, it is now time for governments of Latin America and Caribbean

countries to start debating and formulating laws against such things as littering with reasonable fines as penalty for violation. Of course, in order to support such measures, adequate receptacles (trash cans) should be generously provided around tourist attractions for the use of tourists. This would eliminate indiscriminate disposition of refuse reducing land and sea pollution.

Conclusion

The realization of the full potentials of Latin America and the Caribbean region in international tourism depends on pursuing adequate public policies and marketing strategies. Several of such policies and strategies were suggested in this paper.

Rapid growth in international tourism is not without its detriments including such things as environmental degradation, overcrowding of physical infrastructure, traffic congestion, as well as social problems and moral decadence. While not all of these could be avoided completely, adequate foresight and planning would minimize their negative impacts. The paper highlighted several of these problems, and gave suggestions for policy and marketing measures to lessen their effects in the Latin America and Caribbean region. In so doing, this paper makes valuable contributions to marketing of international tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean region. Some countries, like Mexico, are establishing tourism development programs with long-range plans up to the year 2025 (WTO, 2001). Contents of this paper would therefore benefit several interest groups involved in such programs including: government policy makers, as well as marketers in the international tourism industry, such as wholesalers, tour operators, local ground handlers, travel agents, and travel trade associations in the hospitality and transportation sectors of the economy.

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