



**Standing Committee
for Economic and Commercial Cooperation
of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (COMCEC)**

Tourism Product Development And Marketing Strategies In the COMCEC Member Countries



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TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING STRATEGIES IN THE COMCEC REGION

The analytical study entitled *“Tourism Product Development and Marketing Strategies in the COMCEC Region”* has been commissioned by the COMCEC Coordination Office specifically for the 2nd Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group, to be held on October 3rd, 2013 in Ankara, with a view to enrich the discussions during the aforementioned Meeting.

Defining Tourism Product Development

At one extreme tourism product development can be defined as embracing all elements with which the visitor to a destination comes into contact. This includes infrastructure (e.g. transport, utilities) the service personnel, places of lodging, attractions and activities, facilities and amenities. At the more focused level, tourism product development can be defined as comprising only those attractions, activities and facilities that are specifically provided for the visitor. The Study defines tourism product development as *the process by which the resources of a destination are shaped to meet the requirements of international and domestic customers*. This covers everything from man-made facilities or attractions, to activities requiring varying levels of physical input, and organized events such as festivals and conferences.

Key Findings of the Study

Situation Analysis

The survey undertaken for the Study indicates that COMCEC Member Countries place strong emphasis on sustainable and responsible development, caring equally for their natural and socio-cultural resources. They are keen to broaden the range of tourism products and experiences offered and, by so doing, attract tourists from a greater number of source markets. Countries with major tourism sectors look to broaden their tourist seasons and spread tourism developments around their destinations increasing the numbers of tourism centers in the country. They place high priority on innovation and authenticity in their tourism product developments. Countries in the early stages of tourism development focus on small scale developments with an emphasis on community

involvement. All countries engage in full stakeholder consultation and recognize the importance of attracting investment.

The ten broad tourism product categories that the various COMCEC Member Countries are seeking to develop are: nature/eco-tourism, cultural heritage, community-based/rural, sports and outdoor activities, urban/city tourism, business and MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions), medical, health & wellness, events & festivals, cruise and inland waterways, and beach & marine.

The Survey also indicates that COMCEC Member Countries are actively seeking to diversify their tourism markets with increased focus on China, the Middle East/Gulf States, India and other Asian markets, and within Africa for Africa region members. The focus of COMCEC tourism destination marketing activities is moving from advertising and other “above-the-line” campaigns to “below-the-line” activity such as public relations and social media.

Challenges

The COMCEC Member Countries face a series of challenges to the growth of their tourism sectors. Many of the difficulties stem from a lack of government support for new tourism product development. Many countries have limited technical know-how to plan, manage and operate their tourism sectors, with the result that tourism strategies and plans can be inconsistent. They are hampered by shortages of funds for tourism-related infrastructures, product investment and marketing and promotional campaigns. The prevailing western consumer perceptions that travel to a number of countries in the COMCEC region are negative because of border formalities and unsafe also represent impediments.

The challenges facing COMCEC Member Countries that have greatest relevance to destination marketing are: inadequate market knowledge (which necessitates greater investment in market research and exchange of information between COMCEC countries), source country market control (which can be overcome through close collaboration and partnership with travel organizers in tourism markets), and market image and perception (which requires strategic image management founded on the

principles of being valid, believable, consistently used by all destination interests, appealing and distinctive).

Key Lessons

The key lessons from the 19 case studies included in the Study identify the importance of: creating awareness, stakeholder support and collaboration, technical expertise, regulatory management, cross-administration cooperation, commitment to implementation, maintaining the momentum of plans through active investment programmes, and the role of outside agencies in supporting development. The case studies confirm the critical importance of market research and a detailed databank as a prerequisite to the process of market: product matching. The need is for a flexible and dynamic approach to destination marketing embracing modern technological developments, using the full range of audio-visual methods, and third party endorsement. E-marketing is a tool of growing importance and effectiveness – it brings the destination to the target customer through sound and sight, it is instant, it facilitates

targeting, and it represents relatively good value-for-money.

Recommendations

A series of recommendations are outlined for COMCEC Member Countries stressing the importance of effective institutional structures for tourism, comprehensive and integrated planning systems, and clear tourism product development and marketing strategies, implemented through a range of funding sources, the creation of appropriate infrastructure and tourism products, the facilitation of tourist movements into the country, and the adoption of modern marketing techniques. Separate recommendations are made for COMCEC Member Countries with large/rapidly developing tourism sectors, and for the LDC Members of the COMCEC.

For the details please see ***“Tourism Product Development and Marketing Strategies in the COMCEC Region”*** which is also available on the COMCEC Website: www.comcec.org

