Eco-Museum Based Eco-Tourism from an Experiential Marketing Perspective – A Case Study of Taipei County’s “Bali Left Bank” Zone

Abstract

In the past few years, regional development initiatives in Taiwan have begun to attach more importance to eco-tourism, and have adopted the concept of the “eco-museum” to help preserve the special characteristics of local communities and support community development planning. With the additional boost provided by the government’s Local Cultural Museum project, in the future it can be anticipated that more and more local communities will seek to develop their own eco-museums. This study forecasts the emergence of a new wave of eco-museum based eco-tourism in Taiwan over the next few years.

It is clear from a review of the literature that, in the new era of the “experience economy”, experiential marketing offers an effective means of creating value for tourists, thereby boosting tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty, and helping to attract more tourists to the regions concerned. The present study adopts an experiential marketing viewpoint, examining the perceived experiential value, satisfaction and loyalty of tourists participating in eco-museum based eco-tourism to formulate experiential marketing strategy recommendations for eco-museum based eco-tourism. It is anticipated that the adoption of these suggestions will help to increase the value that tourists gain from their experiences, and that in so doing they will help to strengthen tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty, which in turn will stimulate the further development of eco-museum based eco-tourism; the revenue from tourism can then be used to support sustainable development at the local level.

The “Bali Left Bank” zone was the first museum-centered local development project in Taiwan to be completed, and the first eco-museum complex (built around a core museum) to actually begin operation. Bali Left Bank therefore has immense significance for the development of eco-museum based eco-tourism in Taiwan, hence the decision to focus on Bali Left Bank as a case study. Using a questionnaire survey and statistical analysis, the study examines the experiential value accruing to tourists that visit the Bali Left Bank zone. An experiential marketing grid based on that developed by Bernd Schmitt is then applied to the empirical results obtained in the survey, using a grid of seven “experience providers” (ExPros) and five “strategic experiential modules” (SEMs), to develop experiential marketing recommendations for the Bali Left
Bank zone.

The experiential marketing recommendations – structured in terms of ExPros and SEMs – are presented for the reference of government agencies when developing eco-museum based eco-tourism marketing strategies for Bali Left Bank or other areas in the future. It is anticipated that the recommendations may also be applicable to the development of other categories of eco-tourism marketing.

1. Experience providers (ExPros):

   (1) News stories and advertising relating to travel and leisure activities (“communication” provider): It is suggested that more effort should be made to increase the degree of TV exposure for the area. In addition, an online membership system could be established, with members receiving travel and leisure information messages. Given the limited funding and manpower resources available, this scheme should initially focus on high-income married couples in the Taipei County and Taipei City area.

   (2) “Bali Left Bank” naming strategy (“signage and verbal identity” provider): It is suggested that the names given to tourism destinations should emphasize the area’s distinctive local character, while also possessing cultural significance.

   (3) Integration of individual sites within the zone into a network (“product presence” provider): It is suggested that each major tourist site within the zone should have digital signboards erected to emphasize the linkage between the various sites in the zone. Efforts should also be made in the provision of guide and explanatory services, and in ticket issuance, to encourage tourists to experience this linkage aspect of the zone.

   (4) Co-branding with business enterprises (“co-branding” provider): It is suggested that product placement could be employed, making tourist destinations available as sites for corporate activities and as backdrops for the photographing of products, thereby providing an indirect boost to the local tourist industry. There should also be scope for joint marketing in association with conservation and cultural preservation organizations, helping to show visitors the efforts that are being made to protect the natural environment and local cultural traditions.

   (5) Tourist destination facilities construction and landscaping (“spatial environment” provider): It is suggested that an ecology education
center should be established, to be responsible for introducing the local environment and the efforts being made to conserve and maintain it; the center could also undertake planning of suggested itineraries and routes that would help visitors get closer to nature.

(6) Shihsanhang Museum of Archaeology multimedia services, e.g. explanatory systems and website functions (“electronic media” provider): It is suggested that a discussion or community function should be added to the Museum website, while at the same time the multimedia explanatory system used to introduce the Museum’s collections should be modified to make it more lively and fun, and provide greater opportunities for interaction. Information about online explanatory services should be provide on both ordinary Museum entrance tickets and Bali Left Bank one-day tourist passes.

(7) Strengthening service personnel’s knowledge of the area and ability to provide visitors with effective assistance (“people” provider): It is suggested that a comprehensive guide/warden system should be established, and that a systematic program be implemented to cultivate volunteers. Guides should be on hand in fixed time to provide explanations and assistance at every site within the zone.

2. Strategic Experiential Modules (SEMs):

(1) “Sense” module: In this module, the emphasis will be placed on making the content of explanations and descriptions (whether given by human staff or by multimedia systems) as lively and interesting as possible, presenting the information in a variety of different ways.

(2) “Feel” module: In this module, the emphasis will be placed on the construction and planning needed to preserve local character and implement effective environmental protection, thereby improving visitors’ experience of the spatial environment in the zone.

(3) “Think” module: In this module, the emphasis will be placed on the interaction between service personnel and visitors, with the aim of sparking visitors’ interest in the content of the explanations, and providing discussion.

(4) “Action” module: In this module, the emphasis will be placed on creating spaces and routes that give visitors an in-depth experience of the zone and enhance their understanding of its special features, making the overall experience of visiting the area a more meaningful and personal one.
(5) “Relate” module: In this module, the emphasis will be placed on strengthening service personnel’s knowledge of the area and ability to provide visitors with effective assistance. By ensuring that explanations and assistance are provided in a friendly, approachable manner, visitors will be able to appreciate, in a relaxed atmosphere, the efforts that have been made to preserve the local natural and cultural landscape. Visiting the area will thus provide visitors with spiritual refreshment to help them achieve relaxation from the stresses and strains of their busy urban lifestyle.

Key Words: experiential marketing; experiential grid; experience provider; strategic experiential module; eco-museum; eco-tourism