

TOURISM & MORE'S "TOURISM TIDBITS"

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Accepting Tourism Responsibility, Doing Due Diligence and Setting Standards of Care.

One of the most frequently heard complaints in the world of travel and tourism is that when things go wrong, few people accept responsibility. Instead visitors are forced to hear a jet stream of excuses, or simply see a shrug of the shoulders or are simply ignored. In today's world travel and tourism are hard, and when travel and hospitality professionals simply look the other way or ignore a problem, a hard situation becomes both stressful and often intolerable. Taking responsibility is more than merely providing good service. Taking responsibility is the ability to attempt to fix the problem or to find reasonable alternatives to travel and hospitality problems. Remember that the only person who is satisfied with an excuse is the person who makes it! To help you deal with problems when things go wrong, here are some ideas for your consideration.

There is another aspect of tourism responsibility, the industry's responsibility to provide a sustainable industry that does more good for local communities than it does damage. That means thinking about tourism social and economic impact, how it changes the culture of a locale and what the industry needs to do in order to assure that a beautiful or culturally special location is not overwhelmed by not thought-out growth.

-Empower your employees. One of the most frustrating things about tourism is when an employee cannot make a decision, then and there! For example, many hotels now provide a small budget for their employees so that they can solve issues on the spot. Not only does such a program lower tourism frustration, but also it serves as an excellent method to transform a negative situation into a positive one.

Know what is the industry's standard of care. All too often tourism and travel business do not know what the proper standard of care is for any particular subject. For example, where does a tour operator's responsibility lie, what is a hotel responsible for, or how liable is a travel agency. It is a good idea to consult a lawyer so that you are sure that you are operating within the proper standards. Remember that these standards are not set in stone. They liable to change, so update your information on a regular basis.

Consult experts not only in your own country but also in the countries in which you do business. Travel providers and travel agents, tour operators and travel insurance

companies all need to know for what and to whom they are responsible both within their home country and within the countries in which they are doing business. That means taking the time to know not only what the legal things to do are, but also what is both moral and ethical. Remember that tourism is a business that can only be credible if we go beyond the letter of the law. Good customer service is all about treating our guests with more than respect, but rather it is about treating them with a sense of responsibility and care.

Take the time to consult national and international organizations to know what is expected of you. There is a great deal of information and standardization in places such as the World Tourism Organization, and national professional organizations. Take the time to ask insightful questions and to learn what is expected of you, then go beyond these standards and become a model for best practices.

Make sure you have check-off lists regarding standards of care. Then consult non-tourism and travel professionals whose expertise may impact your business. For example, you are not expected to be an expert in fire safety, but you are expected to consult those who are experts. Ask your local fire department what may occur and how you need to be prepared. Request that first responders inspect your locale from the perspectives, for example, of safety, security, health, and air quality standards.

Try to envision problems and then prevent them from occurring. The best way to solve a problem and to prevent a crisis is to stop it before it happens. It is essential to remember that when we travel all problems are seen as crises. The problem may be a small problem to the travel professional, but to his/her client it is not a problem but a crisis. Never forget that in tourism time is always of the essence. Thus the faster you solve a problem the less chance it has of becoming a major crisis in the eyes of your customer.

Remember you are responsible not only to your customers but also to the tourism community in which you work. Responsible tourism means taking the time to think about the impact of your tourism product on the host community. This means that tourism officials must consider the economic and social impact on the host community, what are the negative aspects of tourism and how does tourism act as a responsible agent within the total context of the community.

Being responsible means that tour operators need to provide full information, be that information about the environment or be it about safety and security. A major problem in tourism is that people need to be given full details. Tourists and visitors assume that there is someone else looking out for them. Often our guests do not even know which questions they are to ask. Being responsible means not only caring for

the environment but also not leaving out information or finding ways to say something in a manner that no one can understand it.

Being responsible also means that it is our job not to tolerate irresponsible behavior.

Tourism cannot afford either from a moral or financial perspective to allow criminal behavior to become part of the industry. When human trafficking, child abuse, use of illegal substances enter into the tourism system the system is bound to collapse.

Tourism officials must always be upright when dealing with their customers, local customs and laws, and insist that to be responsible is to respect both our fellow citizens and the planet upon which we dwell.