

GUIDEBOOK FOR TOURISM CONGESTION MANAGEMENT AT NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE SITES , A NEW PUBLICATION BY THE WORLD TOURISM ORGANISATION

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Introduction

The twin objectives in managing tourism congestion at natural and cultural sites are to improve the visitor's enjoyment and appreciation of those places, thereby contributing to the long term viability of the tourism industry, and to ensure the long term conservation of the natural and cultural heritage contained in those sites, by protecting them from the degradation that can arise from over-use. Long term protection of sites will assist in maintaining the long term quality of the visitor experience

This paper will outline the structure and contents of the new *Guidebook for Tourism Congestion Management at Natural and Cultural Heritage Sites*, published in January 2005, by the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) in Madrid. It is available from the WTO on-line bookshop at www.world-tourism.org.

Heritage places inevitably attract high levels of tourism interest and activity. World Heritage listing is almost guaranteed to result in a huge increase in tourism interest. Tourism pressures represent one of the greatest threats to the settings of monuments and sites. The *Guidebook* represents a major new international tool for the management of tourism activity and the related tourism infrastructure that can easily degrade the setting of a monument or heritage site. (Fig1)

The *Guidebook* was prepared at the request of the international tourism industry, arising from their concern that increasing tourism congestion was adversely affecting the visitor enjoyment and appreciation of heritage sites. The WTO commissioned a team of heritage site experts to prepare the publication, providing a unique opportunity for the heritage industry to develop recommendations for the protection of monuments and their settings in the context of high levels of tourism activity. The team was managed by Jean Louis Luxen, former Secretary General of ICOMOS and comprised Anne Vouc'h and Valery Patin from France,

Hector Ceballos-Lascurain, from Mexico, Anya Diekman from Belgium and Graham Brooks, Chairman of the ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Committee, from Australia.

The Need for the Congestion Management Guidebook

One of the long term keys to success for the tourism industry lies in the quality of the visitor experience delivered to the customer. Excessive delays, poor coordination or crowding at destinations and sites spoils the visitor's experience. They discourage people from making a return journey or recommending the trip to their friends and colleagues. Tourism congestion has become a major factor for both the tourism industry and those who manage destinations and sites. It has direct economic and social impacts for all concerned and must be managed or minimised if tourism is to be sustained to places of natural and cultural heritage.

Many destinations and their associated natural and cultural sites are already overcrowded, with many suffering serious congestion in peak periods. Other places and sites are affected by increasing tourism numbers to such an extent that congestion has become a permanent or consistent factor in everyday management. Natural and cultural heritage places around the world are a major source of tourism attraction. They are particularly vulnerable to tourism congestion, which can cause serious degradation to many of the special values and characteristics of these sites.

The future of the tourism industry is intimately linked with its ability to produce, market and deliver high quality travel packages and activities. Congestion can affect the long-term economic, environmental, cultural and social sustainability of tourism. Careful management practices and productive cooperation between stakeholders are necessary to reduce or avoid tourism congestion and ensure the conservation of these sites.

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Congestion arising from high levels of tourism activity has major implications for the tourism industry, host destinations and site managers. All three groups of stakeholders share an overall responsibility to minimise congestion and its negative effects on the visitor experience.

- **For the tourism industry**, including tour operators and local tourism service suppliers, congestion results in operational inefficiencies, greater competition for scarce resources, increased business costs and loss of profits. It can reduce customer satisfaction, adversely affecting long-term economic prospects.
- **For the responsible authorities in the host destination**, congestion results in disruption to the local community, and excessive pressure on infrastructure, reducing the welcome extended to visitors and adversely affecting local political support for tourism.
- **For the managers of natural and cultural heritage sites**, congestion can adversely impact the long-term conservation of a site, negatively altering the biodiversity of a natural site or physical fabric and significance of a cultural site.

Tourism congestion at destinations and particularly at natural and cultural sites can suffer from an accumulation of impacts, resulting in:

- A major reduction in the visitor's enjoyment and appreciation,
- Damage the flora, fauna, scenic values, physical fabric or special values of the place,
- Adverse Impact on conservation or presentation programmes,
- Reduce opportunities for visitors to spend money locally,
- Generate stress on the local community through competition for local services,
- Increase litter and pollution,
- Strain the capacity of local infrastructure, and/or
- Reduce the efficiency of tourism services.

Damage from tourism activities can occur incrementally, and over a considerable period of time. The rate of deterioration is likely to increase with excessive tourism pressures and physical congestion in restricted places. Sites with natural values sometimes have a potential to restore themselves if the damage is not excessive. Historic buildings, structures, human settlements and archaeological sites cannot be regenerated without significant intervention.

Tourism Congestion at Heritage Sites

1 The Analogy of Flowing Water

The process of tourism congestion management adopted by the *Guidebook* can be readily understood by comparing it to the flow of water through a channel. It likens the tourism process to a linear journey from the initial decision to take a vacation to the actual site visit.

The majority of visitors move through a destination and its associated natural and cultural sites in a relatively consistent manner or along relatively well-defined routes. Congestion occurs when physical obstructions block the natural flow or narrow passages cause the flow to slow down. "Flooding", or Congestion, can also occur when the flow, or the number of visitors, is excessive in relation to the capacity of the destination or site to accommodate that flow. Blockages need to be cleared quickly, diversions prepared in advance or extra capacity applied to relieve the pressure of excessive volumes of people. If the flow is too strong or congested, there will be insufficient time to absorb the local context. A sustainable tourism industry depends on an effective management of tourism flows at and through destinations and sites, giving the visitor time and opportunity to appreciate and enjoy the local culture and the values of the places being visited.

The dynamic nature of tourism or visitor flows is thus a key factor in the management of congestion at natural and cultural sites. This concept supports the development of the Model for Congestion Management. The Model places the Visitor Experience at the core of the management of tourism congestion. The Model for Congestion Management was specifically developed to create a useful framework for the *Guidebook*. Although congestion occurs elsewhere in the vacation journey, The Model identifies the three major stages of the tourism process that must be carefully managed to minimise congestion:

- The choice of a destination and timing of travel (Demand Management)
- Experience of the Destination town or city (Destination Management)
- Experience of the Heritage Site (Site Management)

Target Audiences for the Guidebook

Understanding tourism congestion is an important step in the development of suitable management approaches. Congestion can be a permanent feature of a destination or site that has grown in popularity, or may only occur on a seasonal, weekly or daily basis. Each form of congestion requires particular responses if it is to be managed

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successfully.

The new *WTO Guidebook* is aimed a variety of users, both within the tourism industry and for people who welcome and manage visitors to their destination or site.

For the many different people in the **Tourism Industry** it provides a background discussion on the nature of the relationship between destinations and sites and the way that visitors react to them. It stresses the need for the tourism industry to recognise that good management of their activities at destinations and sites is in their interest and provides recommendations for how they might positively contribute to the minimisation of tourism congestion.

For **Destination** and **Site Managers** it stresses the need to firmly but cooperatively manage tourism activities within the locality or site for which they are responsible, in order to ensure that the special conservation values of the place are protected while being communicated to the visitor. It provides a range of recommendations for managers to build a well informed understanding of their places and their visitors, and provides recommendations for upgrading the operational and physical capacities of their areas to handle high levels of tourism activity.

The *Guidebook* has been written to provide very practical ideas. Some users will be familiar with many of the recommendations and will already have implemented them in their day-to-day activities. Others will find new information or suggestions that they can apply as appropriate to their circumstances.

Structure and Contents of the Guidebook

Part A of the Guidebook examines the nature of tourism congestion, identifies the stakeholders in the tourism process, the characteristics of natural and cultural heritage sites, and sets out some universal tourism management principles. This section is aimed at all stakeholders in the tourism industry and the tourism process generally.

Part B of the Guidebook contains detailed recommendations for managing tourism congestion at the three major stages of the travel experience, initial Tourism Demand, the Destination and the Site. It encourages stakeholders to analyse the particular influences that affect their situation and recommends a range of actions to manage congestion in specific circumstances. This section is aimed primarily at the managers of Destinations and Sites who must also understand how the influences on Tourism

Demand cause fluctuations in visitor flows.

Part C of the Guidebook contains a number of detailed case studies that illustrate how congestion has been managed on selected sites.

Part D of the Guidebook contains recommendations for further reading material.

How the Guidebook was Prepared

In response to a growing recognition of the problem of tourism congestion the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) commissioned the preparation of a “Guidebook on Tourism Congestion Management at Natural and Cultural Sites”. Within WTO, the project was managed by the WTO Business Council in conjunction with the WTO Sustainable Development section.

Competitive tenders from a number of organisations were called and the contract awarded to CHEDI, a cultural heritage management organisation run by Jean Louis Luxen, the former Secretary General of ICOMOS. M Luxen assembled an expert team comprising Anne Vouc’h and Valery Patin of France, Hector Ceballos-Lascurain from Mexico, and Graham Brooks, Chairman of the ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Committee, from Australia. Anya Diekman, from Belgium, was appointed as the research assistant. Graham Brooks became the principle author within the team.

The project commenced in mid 2003 and produced the initial draft text in early September 2003. This was then reviewed by the ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Committee during its annual meeting in Rhodes.

Jean Louis Luxen and Graham Brooks presented the first major draft of the Guidebook to the WTO Business Council at a meeting in Madrid in January 2004. The initial structure of material, which had been prepared in accordance with instructions, was found to be cumbersome and overly repetitive. Two more drafts were prepared in mid 2004 as the structure and contents were reviewed and refined.

Simultaneously, a series of case studies were identified by members of the project team and of the WTO Business Council. These were progressively refined into a standard format for consistency.

The final draft of the Guidebook was then reviewed by

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WTO and then translated into French and Spanish. It was published in January 2005.

The implementation of action plans and subsequent monitoring against desired outcomes must be applicable to the specific place and its tourism experience.

How the Guidebook can assist those who protect and manage the settings and context of heritage sites and places.

1 Management of Tourism Activities is Critical for Success

All stakeholders in the tourism process, including Destination and Site Managers and all parts of the tourism industry, must accept that firm management of tourism activities is required if the negative effects of congestion are to be minimised, and the natural and/or cultural values of places protected for future generations.

It is no longer acceptable for the tourism industry to regard natural and/or cultural sites simply as places to be exploited for commercial gain, whereby Destination or Site Managers seek unlimited numbers of tourism arrivals through aggressive or loosely targeted promotion campaigns. Recognition must be given to the rights and interests of the host communities living in and near destinations and sites. Effective visitor management will protect the places being visited and the visitors themselves, from inappropriate, thoughtless or selfish behaviour, accidental injury, excessive litter, or unnecessary danger.

2 Single Authority to be Responsible for Congestion Management

There should be a single public authority identified as the primary source of responsibility for managing tourism congestion at either a Destination or a Site. At most Destinations this should be the relevant Local Government Authority with jurisdiction over the locality and the local community. For most sites it should be the relevant owner or management body charged with the day-to-day management and conservation of the site.

The responsible body should be held accountable for coordinating the activities of all necessary public agencies or related organisations in relation to the management of high levels of tourism activity and congestion. It should also be charged with working cooperatively with all relevant sections of the tourism industry, the local community and other stakeholders to achieve this objective.

3 Destination and/or Site Specific Responses are Required

The responsible destination or site manager must develop specific responses to their particular circumstances.

Every tourism destination and natural or cultural heritage site is unique and has its own combination of issues and opportunities, legal and financial frameworks and intrinsic values that must be conserved in the long term.

4 Cooperation between the Stakeholders is Required

All parties in the tourism process, and all stakeholders involved in the conservation or operational management of a destination or site, must work cooperatively together to meet shared objectives and achieve equitable outcomes. Such cooperation requires a mutual recognition of the constraints and obligations imposed on each stakeholder by the overall objective of minimising the adverse impacts of tourism congestion.

Cooperative and productive links must be developed between all of the stakeholders who are part of the tourism process. Solutions to particular issues must be worked out in cooperative manner and new policies or programs for congestion management usually need time to be implemented.

Abstract

This paper will outline the structure and contents of the new *Guidebook*, published in January 2005, by the World Tourism Organisation in Madrid. Mr Graham Brooks was the principle author of the *Guidebook*, working with an international team of experts directed by Jean Louis Luxen.

Heritage places inevitably attract high levels of tourism interest and activity. World Heritage listing is almost guaranteed to result in a huge increase in tourism interest. Tourism pressures represent one of the greatest threats to the settings of monuments and sites. The *Guidebook* represents a major new international tool for the management of tourism activity and the related tourism infrastructure that can easily degrade the setting of a monument or heritage site.

The *Guidebook* was prepared at the request of the international tourism industry, arising from their concern that increasing tourism congestion was adversely affecting the visitor enjoyment and appreciation of heritage sites. The WTO commissioned a team of heritage site experts to prepare the publication, providing a unique opportunity for the heritage industry to develop recommendations for the protection of monuments and their settings in the context of high levels of tourism activity.

The proposed paper will outline how the *Guidebook* was prepared and how its primary recommendations can assist those who protect and manage the settings and context of heritage sites and places.

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Tourism congestion management is a significant challenge for major heritage sites such as the Acropolis in Athens.(Graham Brooks, 2005)