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Communication for Tour Guides

Learning objectives

After studying this chapter, you should be able to understand:

- The process of communication with a tour guide as a communicator.
- How tour leaders and tour guides should present themselves
- Cross-cultural differences and how to handle them

This chapter focuses on the preparations that an individual needs to make to become a tour guide. A tour guide or leader must hone their communication skills at a conceptual level. Specific attributes of the tour guide will make the communication effective. We will discuss how professional tour leaders and guides should present themselves to appear credible. It is vital that the communication is contextually relevant. Often guests are from a different cultural background. For communication to be effective, tour guides must be sensitive to the cultural make-up of the guests and factor the same in their communication.

Communication

Tour guiding is essentially about communication with the visitors to help them negotiate the place with understanding and education. Effective communication is, therefore, the foundation of effective interpretation. A tour guide or a tour leader will often interpret gaze in different situations – a historical site, a walking tour, a church, a museum, or a natural setting. However, the basic principles of communication will remain the same, and a tour guide or leader must perfect their interpersonal communication skills.

According to the dictionary, communication is a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behaviour (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In the case of a visitor, the purpose of sharing information is to associate meaning to what is being seen or experienced – a gaze, an entity, an activity through a language, verbal and non-verbal,

that is mutually understood. Interpretation is, therefore, about creating and communicating meaning.

Communication has two ends – the sender and the receiver. In a touristic interpretation scenario, a tour guide is often the sender while the visitor is the receiver. The visitors must receive in totality what is communicated by a tour guide. Often some distractions and barriers distort the communication. The effectiveness of communication also depends on the receiver's needs. Multiple needs related to the visit exist at any time, and they need to be addressed by the interpreters.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Abraham Maslow was among the early psychologists to explain human motivation with his theory of a hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). His premise was that there are different types of human needs, hierarchically ordered. Needs are a source of motivation, and arise when the need at the previous level is satisfied. This argument had no scientific basis and was refuted by other scholars, but Maslow's need-hierarchy helps us point towards a hierarchy of visitor needs that the tour guides and tour leaders must take care of.

- According to Maslow, at the lowest rung of the pyramid are the basic or physiological needs – food, clothes and shelter. Basic needs are the primary physical requirement for human survival and prelude any other higher-order need.
- The next rung is the safety and security needs. Once the physiological needs are primarily addressed, safety and security needs become dominant. An individual is motivated to satiate these needs.
- The third rung is social belongingness, or simply social, needs. These include affection, acceptance, and belonging. At this level, the need for interpersonal and emotional relationships are the driver.
- At the fourth level of this need-hierarchy is esteem. Once the physiological, safety and social needs are addressed, an individual looks for respect and appreciation by others. They want their accomplishments to be recognised and direct their efforts accordingly.
- At the top of the pyramid is the self-actualisation needs. These include self-fulfilment, personal growth and realisation of one's potential. Maslow later clarified that the needs are not mutually exclusive. When a need in a deficit is more or less addressed, it ceases to be a motivator, and the individual is likely to be motivated by achieving the next set of needs.