

5

Planning

Learning objectives

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

- The importance of planning for interpretation
- Research for a guided tour and sources of information
- The concept and importance of interpretation goals
- The issues in designing the interpretive plans
- How to develop the tours (products)
- Nuances of a tour guiding career

A tour guide typically appears to be a light-hearted, cheerful extrovert who engages with guests and maintains an upbeat tempo throughout the interaction. However, this high-spirited interaction has to be meticulously planned and executed. A tour guide's job is a professional performance with fine detailing. This chapter will discuss the prerequisites and the planning process for interpretation. What appears to be a spontaneous tour guide response usually has inputs from careful planning and rigorous homework. While a good interpretation is often considered an art, it requires methodological planning. Much research and planning go into designing interpretive themes and last-minute improvisations. Tour guides must be aware of the local resources – both natural and built. They must understand the psyche of their visitors, the travel motivations and the demographics of the key segments. They must also address the interests of other significant stakeholders – the community, the local government, and the company if they are representing one.

Effective interpretation is not by chance. It is thoroughly planned. The plan is developed around a few fundamental issues – What do the destination and each attraction offer visitors? What kind of people (age, background, nationality, etc.) visit these places and why? What do they want to know, or what do they want the guide to help them with? What are the constraints (time, money, effort, etc.)? Moreover, are the tour guides' meeting the guests' expectations?

Planning is the act of thinking about the course of action to achieve the desired goal. It is deciding beforehand what is to be done, when and how it must be done and by whom. It is about anticipating situations and preparing for them. This requires logical thinking and rational decision-making. Planning will begin with setting interpretation objectives and targets by assessing the resources at the destination, the limitations, and the potential demand for tourism products. Having a fair idea of what is to be achieved, the next step is to have a plan to attain the same in future. Planning is followed by implementing the plan and monitoring to ensure that interpretation is carried out as per plan and to the satisfaction of the patrons. Planning of an interpretive programme thus involves five steps: research, setting interpretation goals, designing the product, product development, and monitoring.

Figure 5.1: Planning the interpretive programme



Research

Any business is essentially matching demand and supply. Who demands and what is demanded? What can be offered? Thus, the design of any interpretation programme deals with two components: the destination resources that can be offered as products and the target audience for whom interpretation has to be designed and developed. The first step in any planning exercise is research. Research about the destination and attraction – the vital information about it; and research about the targeted segment of visitors to this place – who visits and what are they interested in.