

## **Introduction:**

Tourism is considered as one of key development strategies in developing nations. Tourism brings in foreign exchange, diversifies the economy, tipping it to the service sector and when the tourism industry is designed wisely, it can empower locals to protect their environment and their culture.

Tourism is today one of the leading sectors of international trade in services and one of the top export items for many countries. Since the year 2000, developing countries have led international tourism growth and reached a current market share of 40%.

“On the whole, developing countries are the principal beneficiaries of international tourism trade, achieving a surplus in their tourism balance of payments which can fund imports of food and energy resources, development plans, or contribute to debt reduction”, said UNWTO Director of Programme and Coordination, Eugenio Yunis, at the XII United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 20 - 25 April 2008, in Accra, Ghana.

According to Yunis in 2007 international tourist arrivals reached new record figures close to 900 million, generating way over US\$ 730 billion for recipient countries from 2000-2007, international tourist arrivals in developing countries increased by 54%, reaching 360 million; tourism growth in the 50 least developed countries increased by 110% between 2000-2007 - 20% in developed countries.

At the moment, tourism is viewed in terms of the big establishments like lodges, hotels and tour operators, yet we fail to realise that tourism is a unique product and the only export product consumed at the point of production.

So often, however, the large chain hotels, resorts and tour operators are foreign owned and take income generated from this highly lucrative industry away from the local economy back to their countries of origin very rarely in developing countries.

## **Travelers' Philanthropy:**

This is fast becoming a travel trend of the millennium, is a wonderful concept whereby travelers support locally run hotels, restaurants and communities ensuring that the funds remain in the country of destination.

A number of foreign owned tourist philanthropic establishments offer jobs to people in the community and provide significant opportunities in training and development in

addition to buying locally grown products .They influence and set standards for locally owned establishments.

A lot of tour operators have gone beyond the traditional tour itineraries by incorporating interactions with social and conservation programs devoted to educating and empowering local communities.

As tourists visit the world's most famous sites they stop in at local NGOs and grassroots projects building wells, bringing books for schools and orphanages, and meeting face to face with children to sponsor for education.

Travel philanthropy ,a niche of tourism, will become increasingly in demand as globalisation continues and the tourism product becomes more and more homogenous worldwide, a bit like responsible business already has. There is a growing number of tourists who are tired of animals and landscape and want to meet and integrate with people.

Statistics vary on the number of travelers opting for volunteer vacations. But companies involved in travel, tourism, and volunteering abroad say interest is rising.

In a 2006 survey by the Travel Industry Association of America, 24 percent of travelers said they were currently interested in taking a volunteer or service-based vacation. Forty seven percent of those interested in taking a volunteer vacation falling into the 35- to 54-year-old age range.

A 2007 survey by Travelocity, an online discount travel service, found than 11 percent of respondents planned to volunteer during their vacations, up from six percent in 2006.

Discovery Initiatives, a United Kingdom-based firm that specializes in using “wildlife tourism” to fund conservation,has seen increased consumer interest in “green holidays” and socially responsible travel “products.”

### **African Homestay:**

African homestay is basically a public interest initiative to market Africa as a tourist-friendly destination with unspoilt environment, climate,wildlife,natural landscape,rich cultural and historical heritage.

It is not a dark hopeless continent full of war,povertry,famine,floods,disease and bad governance.

The idea of home stays could be relatively new in Africa but home stays, or cultural tourism, enable the gains from tourism(a multi- billion dollar industry) to trickle down to the ordinary people without incurring a lot of high costs.

It is an immense opportunity to use this as a poverty eradication tool, because it is available in remote rural areas where even the villagers can participate in it without having to fill in numerous forms and pay for numerous licences.

By the time it can begin operations, a hotel will, for example, be required to take up at least six different licences, each with a separate fee-the one factor that makes it difficult for the small and medium size enterprises to flourish in the sector.

A home stay experience gives the international visitor the opportunity to live and be exposed to African culture.

It was in March 1994(as a student at Egerton University), after a trip I made to Kita Kyushu, Japan during Ship for World Youth Exchange programme that I got into my business by accident.In Japan I lived with a Japanese family in their home and I picked the home stay business concept.

My African Home stay agency links up tourists who want to Live, Study and Work in Africa with local hosts in rural villages and towns including in slums.

I started off my African Homestay Services with one client, a Japanese, after visiting their country on an exchange program.I lived in the hostels and my home was 200 miles away from the university so I took my first guest/client to my lecturer's house. He paid \$5 per day, and when he went back home, he sent nine other clients.

For this group, I had to look for homes in Nairobi. I found friends who were willing to host the guests and would pay me and I pay them (the hosts).

The number increased to 20 Japanese in 1995 and in the following year, after traveling to Canada, I hosted 22 Canadians. Nowadays, I get at least 40 clients every month,they are mostly students, volunteers, researchers, journalists and other low budget tourists.

With 40 tourists in 40 homes for an average of three weeks at an average weekly pay of \$140 ,the 40 homes get \$16,800 a month-\$420 per month per home. This is junior manager's net salary!

During the World Social Forum held in Nairobi in January 2007,I had 1,500 bookings and raked in over 100,000 dollars in ten days for 450 homes near the conference venue!

On average, clients under the program pay a minimum \$10 a day (a charge that can't buy a baby's meal in five-star hotels where food costs many times the retail price) to the host. They agree on something that is reasonable to the two parties). They will stay there, be a part of the family, cook and get assimilated. Even if they do not pay a fee, some always leave a generous token of appreciation.

### **Activities:**

Apart from **accommodation**, we train clients on tour guiding, conservation of natural resources and culture, anthropology, first aid, tourist handling, cuisine, cross-cultural communication, animal-human conflicts, geography, and history.

**Volunteering** abroad is a way of providing service, integrating with the local community, and earning a sense of personal reward while traveling. It can be in environment/ecology, social services, orphanage & shelter assistance, construction/maintenance, health, administrative, public policy, economy/business, education/tutoring, and more.

**Internships** strengthen our clients' professional and interpersonal skills. We offer placements for those starting their career and other seasoned professionals looking for a change of environment to gain practical hands-on experience work experience and learn invaluable life lessons.

### **Challenges:**

While this new trend in travel has immense potential for good, there are shortcomings. Hand-outs and charity can often hurt the self-sustainability of an area or program in need. While schools and orphanages can benefit from donations made by individuals and visits tourists can be viewed as and intrusive to the daily life of the children as well as whole families.

Income from these projects enables hosts to "modernise" their homes, losing their cultural identity.

On the other hand, if the resources gathered from travel philanthropy are managed carefully through innovative pre-screened programs rooted in goals for self-sustainability, travel philanthropy could be a powerful tool in supporting great initiatives worldwide.

Another challenge is to ensure that international standards and quality demanded by tourists are not compromised. A case in mind is the use of pit latrines versus toilets sharing of rooms and others.

**Conclusion:**

Against the background of the solid economic development potential of international tourism, UNWTO recommends the participation of local communities and other stakeholders in the reinforcement of poverty alleviation programmes and sustainable tourism- a further step towards achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals.

Home stays are increasingly turning into a serious source of revenue for many tourist agents and hosts

However homestays must always place the needs of the host community before the needs of the traveler. It must include philanthropic intent, inspiration, education and empowerment.

The program is usually 3-4 weeks; some are known to stay for as long as a year. And I consider this as one of the best ways of learning someone's culture because you eat what they eat, sleep where they sleep ; enjoy their whole lifestyle.

It is a pity that most governments and tourism institutions do not grasp this concept of locals benefitting from tourism. They are only interested in job creation , investment and tax payment but for who or what(look at the roads to tourist attraction sites like Kenya's Maasai Mara and the communities around the tourist circuits- who live in abject poverty!)

Tourists make a difference in the lives of the people they meet and their own.

Tourism must benefit the tourist and the locals. That is why I pioneer and champion homestay tourism ,cultural immersion and voluntary work concepts to help the communities along tourist circuits with homestay fees(paid to hosts),cross-cultural learning(how much of one's culture or heritage can a tourist learn in a hotel compared with staying with a Maasai family?) and other community projects where guests volunteer.

Whether you are a student trying to gain academic credit and work experience, or a professional looking for that meaningful vacation or corporate teambuilding retreat, or a

retiree that wants to revive your life in another exotic destination, African Homestay is your choice.