

**CITY TOURISM:  
LIVING LOCAL VALUE AND VALUES**

**DATE :                      MAY 2016**

You can sense it. The moment you arrive, you can sense it. Even if arriving at night, when the city's sights and sounds are asleep.

It is instinctive, unavoidable, invaluable.

For any traveller, first impressions are critical to understanding a new place. They feed one's feeling of centerdness, of safety, of security, of welcome. Driving into the city centre, soaking up every second of sensory information, a visitor recalibrates their thinking around the place, and its people.

Does it feel clean, or does it feel uncared for? Does it feel open, or closed? Is it green, or is there no room for nature? Is it engaging? Is it a city of work, work, work, or one of work and play? Does it feel as though the city is proud to show off its past, share its present, excited about the future?

Whether day or night, can the city's energy be felt? Do the streets speak, extending messages of all that is happening, all that there is for visitors to discover? Or do the streets simply let you pass through, nothing to say, no welcome to express? No interest...

As simple as these first moments of exposure to a city's streets may seem, they form opinions that shape the time ahead, influencing interest, inspiration and interactions, embedding lasting impressions.

Through a city, especially its centre, is found a showcase of a destination's value, and values.

Through city tourism, what the city's inhabitants value is able to be shared. Visitors and residents, side by side.

### **CITY TOURISM – CELEBRATING LOCAL LIVING**

As short breaks and quick escapes continue to offer tourists the chance for travel more frequently, and easily, the attraction of city tourism continues to grow. Whether seeking the best of a city's shopping or culinary sensations, soaking up its culture, perhaps some spa pampering, a bit of sightseeing, or simply getting away to get back in touch with oneself or one loved, city tourism offers the perfect solution to the growing need to take time out.

Now representing one of the global travel & tourism sector's great sources of opportunity and inspiration, city tourism is also a powerful example of the symbiotic relationship that exists between tourism and local life, each shaping and inspiring the other, benefits shared.

City centres – a place where culture, commerce and community come together, create hubs of daily life. As a result they become, for tourists, a rich collage of local experience and engagement, a living theatre. With their ability to immediately immerse a visitor, city centres are, in many ways, a stage, busy with activity taking place regardless of new actors entering left or right,

making it easy for visitors to find a way to feel connected. Open spaces become windows into another's world, tourists able to touch local life, understand its pace, its special places, pulling up to strangers on a park bench or at a café table, feeling nothing strange at all, feeling nothing but the beauty of the 'here and now'.

This is the magic of city centres - their natural offering to tourists being their ability to instantly provide a canvas, one already painted upon, onto which they can add their own colours while admiring the art already present, with its own history, its people's own stories.

### **THE CHALLENGE OF SAME**

Still, as much as there is blessing in a city centre's ability to encapsulate the uniqueness of a place's history, embedding a distinct identity, the future is bringing with it global brands which bring the world to the locals. The challenge of 'found everywhere, could be anywhere' is real.

Leading global cities – Hong Kong, London, Sydney, Shanghai, Paris, Tokyo, Bangkok, NYC being some of the world's most iconic – know that there is a way to find the sweet spot between the local past and the global future. Sameness need not steal from identity. It can, and should, form part of the city centre's identity, weaving global presence into over-arching local infrastructure of history, culture and commerce, as done masterfully in the heart of Beirut where mosques, churches and synagogues stand alongside chic, global brand boutiques offering the world's finest bling and shiny banking institutions.

For a destination, the ability to communicate to visitors through infrastructure should never be underestimated. Nor the power of carefully managed coexistence of history and future, local and global, to bring a destination to life for both locals and visitors.

With tourism growth and impact causing the sector to feature prominently on the agenda of policy makers, investments into city tourism must take a holistic approach, creating, by implication, benefits for locals, through not only the tourism experience, but the living experience. Enhancements to public spaces, transport systems, marketplaces, whatever the case may be, while they may be made in the name of tourism, are there, first and foremost, for locals to make the most of. Never should people of a city feel a sense of 'for tourists only;'

In city centres, as in all areas of tourism development, ROI comes when it is not only a high return on investment, but a high rate of inclusion of both tourists and locals alike.

- ENDS -