

**FESTIVALS – A TOURISM INVITATION  
TO THE WORLD**

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### **A CALLING BY CANDLELIGHT**

Throughout the year, across the globe, people of diversely different countries and cultures share one common habit – they mark special days on their calendars when candles and evening skies light up with festival lights!

From Eid to Divali, Christmas to Carnival, Hanukkah to Hanami, Stampedes to Sopot, Mardi Gras to Maslenitsa, and so many more special occasions, festivals act as fabulous magnets for the spirits of millions. Across generations, timezones and technical locations a world of people come together to celebrate.

Literally thousands of festivals take place across the world each year. Annual celebrations of nations, regions and communities inspire a pause of the people to pay respect to their beliefs. Be it to celebrate the seasons of life (literally and/or figuratively), or the traditions and religions of both ancient and modern time, festivals bring people together to share who they are, what they believe in, what they love, what they are grateful for, what makes them a proudly united community.

What better time to invite the world to enjoy a destination than festival time?

### **A UNIQUE MARKETING OPPORTUNITY**

Today's Travel & Tourism (T&T) industry is fiercely competitive. Destinations – those well established and those well on their way as emerging stars – are all fighting for airtime, artistic stand-out, awareness, appreciation and booking action. Promises of experiences, emotion and endless possibility for pleasure abound. Some destinations sparkle, some are magical, some are breathtaking, some are simply incredible.

Through all of the competition and campaigning, there is one edge that every destination across the world has at its easily accessible disposal but is so often overlooked – a competitive advantage that can so powerfully boost a

destination's ability to break through and attract travellers in a truly unique and engaging way. That something special is its festivals.

Extending a unique form of invitation to the world's travellers, festivals bring to life the energy, engagement and emotion of a destination like few other experiences can.

Take Divali for example. Once a year India, and Indians around the world, celebrate the festival of light (both Hindus and non-Hindus, interestingly). Inspired by the story of Rama and Sita from the epic 27,000 verse Sanskrit poem *The Ramayan*, Divali is a time of celebration of good over evil, of light over darkness, of virtue and purity and faith. From cities to villages, homes to hotels, Divali is a spirit which connects India from north to south, west to east. In true Indian style the occasion takes place over several days. As Divali nears days and nights become filled and focused on decorating and gifting, friends, family and feasting. Floors become canvases for paints and petals creating brightly coloured shapes reflective of the season – oranges and pinks and whites and yellows burst onto sidewalks and entranceways, accented with tiny candles and diyas (oil lamps) burning a gold light to add a magical glow to the colourful sight. And finally, when Divali actually arrives and prayers are said, the night sky lights up with an array of sparkling, popping, colour-splashing fireworks much to the delight of children running about with their sparkler sticks. Infectious music, oh-so-delicious food, divine sweets, generous amounts of embraces and laughter, and a pageant of magnificent fashions and jewels from across India's radiant style spectrum send a clear message - this is *incredible India!*

The same applies to thousands of other festivals around the world inspired by religion, tradition, nature and history. Each and every occasion holds within its celebrations a rich, unique expression of the destination's people, culture and spirit – bringing the concept of experiential travel to life in ways which are deeply touching, deeply memorable and deeply inspiring.

### FULFILLING THE MANDATE THROUGH FESTIVALS

Festivals are powerful marketing opportunities. Incorporating festivals into marketing strategies is not, however, simply the addition of a vehicle to the marketing mix. The value of festivals to destination building – Brand and metrics – is far more strategic than that.

Importantly, festivals offer a destination the opportunity to achieve a number of strategic imperatives central to T&T sector growth and development – imperatives which, technically speaking, exist within every Tourism & Economic Development mandate across the world.

These include:

#### 1. INCREASING YIELD:

Travellers bring undeniable value to a destination. Quantitatively, when the Tourism community 'counts' the value of travellers we often default to the metric of number of *Arrivals*. Growth in numbers of Tourism Arrivals does not, however, mean growth in Tourism *Receipts*. As an example, a destination which cut prices on links in the experience chain may successfully increase Arrivals but may in fact weaken total tourism Receipts.

The goal is to increase the value of *Receipts* of each and every traveller – the amount of money which each traveller injects into the economy through various aspects of their visit, be it accommodation, meals, transport, attractions, gifts purchasing, etc. Number of Arrivals x Receipts per Traveller = Yield.

Festivals have the ability to increase the *Yield* of travellers, increasing not only the quantity (Arrivals) of visitors to the destination but also the quality (Receipts) of visitors.

### **2. INCREASING LENGTH OF STAY:**

Festivals create time-framed, culture-intense, stimulus-soaked experiences for travellers to plan for, schedule around and partake in. Often a motivation in their own right, or as an extension to planned journey to a destination, festivals can become a fabulous bow on top of a travel experience. As a result, festivals have the ability to increase the length of a traveller's stay, and therefore increase yield. And, of course, festivals, like Megaevents, create a good reason to 'go now', creating a sense of urgency to undertaking a planned holiday.

### **3. YEAR-ROUND VISITATION:**

In peak holiday periods people of the destination directly and indirectly employed by the Tourism economy are busy busy busy transporting visitors, serving meals, selling goods, making beds, performing, touring – doing all the things which a destination needs to offer meaningful traveler experiences. As the high season slides down into the low season, there are significantly less visitors to host. Employment within the industry drops off, creating disturbing troughs in economic and social activity.

One of the most valuable aspects of festivals, strategically, is that they have the ability to spread travellers throughout the year. Traditional low seasons can be meaningfully and sustainably boosted by showcasing a festival to attract inflows of tourism activity and therefore keeping the Tourism economy switched on and in a healthy operating hum, flattening seasonality curves.

### **4. INCREASING DISTRIBUTION OF TRAVELLERS**

Similarly, festivals are a powerful way of spreading travellers across the destination, moving them out of the gateway cities and into further places and pockets of interest. As a result activity and benefits of the Tourism industry and economy are

able to be shared across the destination as opposed to held in traditional, often iconic traveler nodes. Opportunity is created to showcase lesser known aspects of the destination – different peoples, different cultures, different traditions, different histories, different environments.

And of course:

### 5. REPEAT VISITATION

What better reason to return to a much-loved destination than to experience a much celebrated festival?

### FESTIVALS - WORTH CELEBRATING

In the same way that tourism products and experiences are put under the spotlight to act as shining examples of what the destination has to offer as expressions of culture, history, art, tradition and future focus, festivals act as beautifully packaged little sound bytes of the spirit, energy, creativity and aspects of pride of a destination.

For this very reason Destination Development and Marketing Strategies should take into consideration festivals which they have to offer as powerful, meaningful destination-building sparks.

Festivals, with all their energy, excitement and anticipation, add inspiring and highly enticing news value to destination campaigns, and most importantly, they intensify the sense of pride and spirit of welcoming amongst the people of the destination.

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