

Developing a Road Map for Engaging Diasporas in Development

**A HANDBOOK FOR POLICYMAKERS AND
PRACTITIONERS IN HOME AND HOST COUNTRIES**

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Chapter 11: Diaspora Tourism

Global tourism is a dominant economic sector in many developing countries. In 2010 international tourist arrivals numbered 940 million and tourism receipts generated \$919 billion.⁴¹⁷ While France remained the world's number-one tourist destination, China became the world's third-biggest tourism spender. In the first four months of 2011, international tourist arrivals grew by 4.5 percent despite turmoil in certain regions of the world, notably the Middle East and North Africa, which experienced 7 percent and 11 percent decreases in tourist arrivals respectively. Some regions achieved double-digit growth in tourism; South America experienced a 17 percent increase, South Asia a 14 percent increase, and South-East Asia a 10 percent increase.⁴¹⁸

For many developing countries, tourism serves as a primary source of foreign exchange earnings, fuels job creation, and stimulates other sectors, such as natural resource conservation, that are important for development. In fact, the share of international tourist arrivals in emerging and developing countries has risen over the past two decades, from 31 percent in 1990 to 47 percent in 2010.⁴¹⁹ The average annual growth in international tourist arrivals between 2000 and 2010 was 5.6 percent among emerging economies, a much higher growth rate than the annual 1.8 percent among industrialized economies.⁴²⁰ In 1990 emerging economies had 139 million tourist arrivals compared to 296 million among industrialized economies, but by 2010 the gap had decreased dramatically: emerging economies and advanced economies had 442 million and 498 million tourist arrivals, respectively.⁴²¹

Diaspora populations can play a unique and important role in opening markets for new tourism destinations as well as markets for goods produced in and associated with the cultures of their countries of origin. Tourists from the diaspora are more likely than other international travelers to have or make connections with the local economy. They may, for example, opt to stay in small, locally owned accommodations (or with relatives), eat in local restaurants, and shop in locally owned shops rather than go to enclave tourist destinations that are isolated from the local culture and economy.

1 Policy and Program Options

Given the unique role that diaspora populations can play in helping developing countries expand their tourism sectors, some governments and organizations have already begun to encourage and promote tourist visits from diaspora communities. The National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students, for example, has for the past ten years organized a yearly “visit your country” trip to Eritrea to foster long-lasting ties between the home country and the diaspora. Many Eritreans abroad have purchased homes in Eritrea with a view to retiring in their homeland.⁴²²

At least three major types of tourism attract diaspora visitors: medical tourism, business tourism, and above all heritage tourism.

A. Promoting Medical Tourism

A number of countries and regions market themselves as destinations for medical tourism by offering high-quality medical infrastructure, expertise, and services at competitive prices. The Philippines, India, Taiwan Province of China, and Cuba, for example, all have strong medical tourism campaigns that raise awareness among and seek support from diaspora members regarding their medical services. As a result, many diaspora members have invested, volunteered, or made philanthropic contributions to the medical sectors of their home countries. In general, however, it is difficult to grasp the scale of diaspora investment and participation in medical tourism, since investments are not disaggregated by population. Countries including the Philippines, Colombia, and Estonia have also made medical tourism a focus of their overall strategy for attracting tourists but could do more to connect to their diasporas.

B. Promoting Business Tourism

When diaspora groups or individuals visit countries for business, including for occasions such as corporate retreats, they inevitably utilize conference facilities and hotels. Governments, in partnership with private companies, market such conference facilities and accommodations to business leaders and professional associations through websites. To court high net-worth members of the diaspora, governments and local companies can work in tandem to actively promote and introduce business opportunities to potential investors or entrepreneurs, combining

information sessions and site visits to local businesses with tourist excursions to local attractions. Establishing good relationships with potential business partners can serve as a key strategy in attracting long-term investments to fuel sustainable growth in the tourism sector.

C. Promoting Heritage Tourism

Heritage tourism centers on history, culture, and identity. The term is often used to refer to visits to cultural heritage sites, such as those designated as World Heritage Sites by the United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In 2011, 48 percent of all UNESCO World Heritage Sites were located across 50 European and North American countries, while 9 percent were found in 30 African states, 7 percent in 16 Arab states, 22 percent in 31 Asia-Pacific states, and 14 percent in 26 Latin American and Caribbean states.⁴²³ Such sites attract many international tourists every year and serve as an important development resource for poor countries as they attract international funds for their restoration and preservation in addition to regular tourist revenue.

1. Genealogy Tourism

Heritage tourism also takes other forms that specifically involve diasporas. Genealogy tourism, for example, enables members of the diaspora to research their family trees and ancestry in their countries of origin. A few public-private initiatives have helped diasporas locate documentation on and the graves of their ancestors. “Discover Ireland,” organized by the National Tourism Development Authority of Ireland, for example, has a “Tracing Your Ancestors” section on its website that suggests relevant background information that diaspora members can gather to make their next trip to Ireland even more worthwhile.⁴²⁴ Similarly, Visit Scotland’s AncestralScotland also offers a Research Your Roots service through its website and helps diaspora Scots to retrace their ancestry.⁴²⁵

In an effort to boost philanthropy and tourism in India, the Indian government offers a program through its Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) that allows persons of Indian origin, particularly those who are descendants of slaves or indentured servants in the Caribbean, Mauritius, and Fiji, to apply to have their roots traced in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.⁴²⁶ Finally, African diaspora tourism or “Roots” tourism is a subset of genealogy tourism targeting African Americans who wish to discover more about their ancestry in Africa. UNESCO, for example,

supports the development of the African Diaspora Heritage Trail (ADHT), an initiative launched by the government of Bermuda in 2002 to preserve and explain the artifacts of slave life and the slave trade.⁴²⁷

2. Cultural Celebration

Governments can also attract attention from both within and outside their countries when they support and celebrate national anniversaries or cultural heritage through annual celebrations or festivals. The Scottish government, for example, organized Homecoming 2009, an event that attracted 72,000 visitors from outside Scotland to assemble in the country to celebrate Scottish culture, heritage, and contributions to the world. Of the 72,000 visitors, 23,000 cited the Homecoming event as one of their reasons for traveling to Scotland. Total expenditures for the event were £53.7 million, and the return on investment was 1:9.8, exceeding original expectations of 1:8.

According to a survey of event organizers, 67 percent highlighted new marketing activities as a benefit of the event, while 84 percent pointed to being able to target new audiences as a plus.⁴²⁸ While a March 2010 government review of the event stated that Homecoming 2009 had a positive impact on local tourist initiatives, others pointed out that the campaign did not generate as much money as organizers had expected, and many vendors and service providers went unpaid. From the perspective of engaging the Scottish diaspora, the share of diaspora visitors was relatively low. Only 8.6 percent of visitors to Homecoming 2009's funded events and 4 percent of all visitors came from overseas, while the remainder came from local areas elsewhere in Scotland or elsewhere in the United Kingdom.⁴²⁹ Homecoming 2014 has been confirmed and will coincide with the Commonwealth Games, Ryder Cup, and the 700th anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn.⁴³⁰

3. Religious or Faith Tourism

The number of individuals visiting destinations around the world for religious or spiritual reasons is on the rise. North Americans alone spend over \$10 billion annually on religious tourism, traveling as groups or individuals for pilgrimage, missionary, volunteer, or fellowship purposes. Every year, approximately 2 million Muslims visit Mecca in Saudi Arabia for the Hajj, an estimated 70 million Hindus visit the Ganges River each year in January and February,⁴³¹ and many migrants visit the shrines of

local Sufi saints. Other tours involve visiting birthplaces of major religious figures, such as Pope John Paul II's home country, Poland.

4. Birthright Programs

Birthright programs aim to deepen the ties between diaspora communities and their ancestral homelands. Most countries with such programs tend to have a strong sense of national identity that transcends territory, a closely knit transnational community, and a firm commitment to perpetuating their identity, especially among second and subsequent generations. Exposure programs offer study tours for youth, academic exchange programs, and VIP tours for business travelers and government officials. Such tourism programs are usually offered under public-private partnerships and offer intense emotional engagement with the country of origin.

Taglit-Birthright Israel. Since 1999, Israel has invited hundreds of thousands of Jews aged 18 to 26 from all around the world, who have neither traveled to Israel on a peer educational trip or study program nor lived in Israel past the age of 12, to visit Israel on an all-expenses-paid ten-day tour to deepen their political and ethnic attachment to Israel. The cost of each individual trip is about \$3,000. Taglit-Birthright trips, sponsored by the Birthright Israel Foundation, the government of Israel, and Jewish communities around the world are organized by 20 accredited organizers in North America, Central and South America, Europe, Asia, South Africa, India, and Australasia two times a year (one in summer and another in winter).⁴³² The program received over 22,000 applications for trips organized between November 2011 and March 2012, but due to funding limitations accepted only 15,000 participants from over 50 countries, 11,300 of whom come from North America.⁴³³ By 2013 Taglit-Birthright Israel aims to increase its capacity to 51,000 participants annually. The organization estimates that at the current rate, within a decade one out of every two Jewish youth worldwide will have participated in one of its trips. In January 2011 the government of Israel pledged a \$100 million contribution over the next three years, contingent on other funds raised in North America and worldwide.⁴³⁴ According to a recent study by Brandeis University's Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, participants on the ten-day Israel trips are more confident advocates for Israel, more likely to feel connected to Israel, and 51 percent more likely to marry a Jewish person than their peers who applied for but did not go on a Birthright trip.⁴³⁵

Birthright Armenia. Birthright Armenia, inspired by Taglit-Birthright Israel, is a program that offers young diaspora members internships and community service placements that last from eight weeks to a year in Armenia. Its vision is to make service to and experiences in Armenia an essential rite of passage for Armenians living all around the world and to educate Armenian diaspora youth about the social, cultural, economic, and political issues and needs of Armenia so as to contribute to its development. Eligible participants are those who agree to take on at least four weeks of volunteer work for a sponsoring organization in Armenia, are of Armenian heritage (have at least one grandparent from Armenia), have graduated from high school, and are between the ages of 20 and 32. The volunteer program promotes leadership, a shared Armenian identity, and cultural ambassadorship. Upon completion of their experiences, program alumni return to their countries of residence and participate in alumni and networking programs, acting as informal advocates of Armenia. Volunteers who participate in the program come from all over the world: 68 percent from the United States, 12 percent from Canada, 11 percent from Europe, 5 percent from the Middle East, 3 percent from South America, and 1 percent from Australia.⁴³⁶ These volunteers participate in a variety of sectors: 44 percent in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), 26 percent in government organizations, 16 percent in the private sector, and 14 percent in international organizations. The program offers travel fellowships to those eligible, makes host family living arrangements, organizes unique excursions across the country, and prepares language classes and forums. Prior to arrival in Armenia, participants undergo online Eastern Armenian language training to achieve a basic level of proficiency in the language.

Lakbay-Aral Program. Translatable into English as “travel study,” this two-week cultural immersion program in the Philippines is offered to young Filipinos over 15 years of age living overseas. Since the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) established the program in 1983, it has enabled Filipino youth overseas to appreciate their Filipino roots through lectures on Philippine history and language and guided tours to scenic and historical landmarks. Program participants also have opportunities to meet and interact with Filipino students, public officials, and members of indigenous communities as well as to participate in local festivities. CFO has conducted trips over 15 trips and selected a total of 180 participants from France, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States. In addition, in September 2011 CFO organized a nine-day YouLeaD Experience program that involved 100 young Filipino leaders aged 16 to 34 who assembled in Manila and Palawan. Selected young leaders also participated in the three-day Global Summit of Filipinos in the Diaspora in Manila.⁴³⁷

Nepomak Discover Cyprus Program. In 2004 the government of Cyprus, in partnership with the University of Cyprus and the Youth Board of Cyprus, developed the Nepomak Discover Cyprus Program (NDCP) in response to the demands of young Cypriots who wanted to connect with their roots. Every July, roughly 50 successful Cypriot applicants, aged 18 to 22, from eight participating countries undertake a three-week intensive language course at the University of Cyprus's School of Modern Greek in addition to a series of excursions to museums, monasteries, and the Green Line that separates Northern Cyprus from the rest of the island. During the selection process, priority is given to individuals from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds who may have fewer opportunities to visit Cyprus and/or are unable to interact with diaspora communities. To date over 400 individuals have participated in NDCP. As a voluntary international NGO, NDCP relies on the support of its sponsors to fund scholarships that cover the cost of excursions, airfare, accommodation, and course fees.⁴³⁸

2 Challenges for Diaspora Tourism

The many forms of diaspora tourism provide a wide range of opportunities for developing countries to grow their tourism sectors and thus contribute to their economic development. However, nations must take into consideration a number of important factors that may influence the level of diaspora tourism (and tourism in general) in their countries.

A. Ensure Fundamental Safety and Security

Diaspora members are as sensitive as any tourists to the threats posed by armed conflict, lawlessness, pervasive corruption, and dangerous transport infrastructure. Governments should ensure that they are able to satisfy basic safety and security standards if they seriously wish to increase tourism levels in their nations.

B. Keep Benefits in the Target Communities/Nations

While tourism is a fun, educational, and sometimes emotional activity for visitors, it is also a lifeline and way of life for many locals. To maximize the development potential of tourism, governments and other organizations should promote programs and trips that deepen connections and relationships between tourists and host populations. Diaspora tourists bring unique benefits to the tourism industry as they are

more likely to have the linguistic skills, contacts, and general knowledge necessary to actively engage with local people and businesses.

C. Respect Visiting Diasporas

Governments and tourist industry leaders should be extremely sensitive to any trends of hostility or unwelcoming attitudes toward tourists, including those from the diaspora. For all their connections and even family members, diaspora members are perceived differently from locals; some members of the community may even resent diaspora members with whom they feel socioeconomic, ethnic, religious, or political differences. Keeping these issues in mind, governments would do well to make special efforts to court diaspora tourists, since they are likely to be involved with their homelands over the long run.

D. Address Visa and Mobility Limitations

Governments should know that limitations on mobility can affect the number of tourists in any given year. While revenues from visa fees are important, liberating and lifting travel restrictions by implementing visa-free travel regimes can encourage individuals to travel to their countries,⁴³⁹ consume local products, and use local services.

E. Cater to Generational Differences

Government and tourism industry leaders should be attentive to the different tastes and interests among tourists of different generations. First-generation members of the diaspora who fled their countries as refugees due to conflict may be averse to returning to their countries of origin. Second- and third-generation diaspora populations, however, may be more curious to discover and learn about their roots. In other cases, the opposite is true: first-generation diaspora populations maintain close contact with their countries of origin, while subsequent generations have little interest in their ancestral roots. The key for growing the tourism sector is to promote and advertise suitable tourism campaigns directed at specific populations.

F. Avoid Overreliance on the Tourism Sector

Tourism is an essential industry in many developing countries as it creates jobs, promotes infrastructure development, and provides vital

foreign exchange. However, governments should be cautious in relying too heavily on the tourism industry for spurring national development. Many commercial banks, for example, are reluctant to offer loans to countries that do not have other more stable sources of income such as heavy industries. When recessions, conflicts, financial crises, or natural disasters occur, tourism receipts and tourist visits can drop dramatically. Without other forms of steady revenue, governments can find themselves in an unsustainable situation.⁴⁴⁰