ECOTOURISTIC MARKETING STRATEGIES IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

STRATEGII DE MARKETING ECOTURISTIC ÎN STATELE UNITE ALE AMERICII

SMARANDA SIMONI[1]

[1]University of Pitesti, Faculty of Economics, Pitesti, Romania; tsmaranda@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The objectives of the US national parks are to provide quality services, to protect the environment, to share the environment knowledge, and to educate the tourists to the ‚eco' or ‚green' direction. The implementation of some alternative strategies as a more aggressive marketing on the internet, a new design of the web sites that are more interactive and provide more information on the parks, on-line guides, on-line programs for the low season, original and connected ecotourism activities, will increase the number of ecotourists up to 62 millions in 2010 and 2011.*

Key words*: ecotourism, marketing strategies, the United States of America*

INTRODUCTION

The U.S.A is the world leader in ecotourism arrivals and receipts, having reach and various ecotourism resources (367 protected areas, out of which 58 national parks organized for ecotourism and nature tourism), advanced ecotourism services, substantial funds for investments, diversified and ecological infrastructure, environment education and high incomes of the American ecotourists.

The U.S.A. has the most advanced ecotourism services. The U.S. national parks are administered by the National Park Service, Xanterra Parks and Resorts, and concessionaires. There are ecotourism societies in the following states: Alaska (Alaska Wilderness Recreation & Tourism Association), Arizona (La Ruta Sonora Ecotourism Association), Hawaii (Hawaii Ecotourism Association), Virginia de Vest (Sustainable West Virginia) and Virginia (Virginia Eco Tourism Association). In some states

(Virginia de Vest or Wisconsin) there are ecotourism policies whose purpose is to improve local people' life, by means of a sustainable ecotourism economy, or by testing some ecotourism programs that reduce the impact of hotels and tour-operators on environment and protect the natural areas.

The environment education is crucial in ecotourism development, since 66 % of the U.S. adults are interested in environment responsible travels and hotels with a responsible environmental attitude. The profile of the American ecotourists is as follows: they are middle-age to elderly (35-54 years) and 82% of them have higher education. They would pay for an ecological travel an average of 1000-1500 $ (including the stay in a hotel with a responsible environmental attitude), which is much more compared to the amount for the mass tourism.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In drafting this paper, we analyzed and interpreted the statistical data provided by the National Park Service (www.nps.gov), we used the information and photographs from the tour guides of some U.S. national parks (www.nps.gov), as well as some studies in this field regarding the economic impact of ecotourism (Stynes, 2009). The theoretical research is based on the papers mentioned in the references below.

RESULTS AND DISCUTIONS

Ecotourism Impact on Local Economies

The U.S. national parks are not organized as some non-profit organizations; on the contrary, they are organized and managed as companies that bring benefits to the local communities, while the mission of their administration is to provide quality services, protect nature, share environment knowledge, educate tourists toward an "eco" or "green" spirit.

There are detailed statistics of the National Park Service (NPS – Social Science Program) and some studies in this field (Stynes, 2009) regarding the economic impact of ecotourism that estimate the economic regional loss in the absence of the respective national park.

The $ 11.56 billion receipts from ecotourism have the following economic significance (effect): $ 14.1 billion in sales, $ 4.9 billion in labor

income, and $ 7.6 billion in value added. Visitor spending supports about 227,000 jobs in local regions. Total effects may be: direct effects resulting from the businesses of selling goods and services directly to park visitors, and secondary effects resulting from the circulation of this money within the local economy (Stynes, 2009).

The largest American national parks (Great Smoky Mountains and Grand Canyon) cash from ecotourism hundred thousand dollars, and their employees exceed 10,000 each. The local economic impact includes also the salaries of the national park employees. In 2009, the National Park Service hired 24,954 persons with $ 1,203 million total salaries and $ 313 million salary benefits. The combined impact of ecotourism receipts and park employees' incomes is estimated as follows: $ 6.3 billion in salaries, $ 9 billion in value added, and 241,442 jobs for the local people. Every two jobs created by the National Park Service results in another new job generated by the employees' expenditures within the local economy.

Ecotourism Strategies in the U.S.A.

The number of ecotourists in the American national parks exceeds 60 millions yearly. The value decreased in the period 2007-2008 due to the effects of the economic crisis in the U.S.A. The strategy was to continue investments and increase efficiency of these national parks: for the top 10 parks, the forecasts show how the ecotourists' number increases for the period 2010-2011. On the other hand, in case of smaller national parks with less visitors, the investments were small, the funds were more difficult to attract, and the forecasts are reserved.

Park administration had to implement alternative strategies to deal with the economic crisis, as a more aggressive marketing on the internet, a new design of the web sites that are more interactive and provide more information on the parks, on-line guides, and on-line programs for the low season.

Among the ecotouristic marketing strategies, those based on original and connected ecotourism activities have the most impact on the potential visitors. The ecotouristic programs and services provided by the top 10 national parks (according to the number of visitors) are representative:

- Extending activities in the low season, special programs for the winter in Yellowstone National Park: winter trips with rangers, "talking with Grizzly", or winter tale at Mammoth Hot Springs.

	
● „Yellowstone Wildlife Olympics", a special program for families with children	
● Conducting wedding ceremonies and other types of ceremonies in Rocky Mountain National Park	
● Introducing ecologic shuttles with predetermined routes, that transport rapidly and free of charge ecotourists through Rocky Mountain National Park, to the most important objectives and souvenir stores. They provide facilities for disabled and old people, children, persons who could not get to these places otherwise.	

● Acadia National Park offers ecotouristic programs for every day of the week, organized as schedules with suggestive and attractive titles; in addition, there are carriage trips, cruises to Baker Island and bird watching.	**Sundays** 7:00 Acadia's Birds 9-noon Peregrine Watch *9:00 Super Sand Sleuths* 9:00 Carriage Road Walk 10:00 Frenchman Bay Cruise 10:00 Islesford Scenic Cruise 10:30 Cadillac Summit Talk 11:30 Secrets of the Summit 2:00 Otter Point Walk *2:00 Wicked Good Wonders* *2:30 Wild Things* 3:00 Beech Mountain Hike *3:30 Wicked Good Wonders* 7:30 Blackwoods Early Show 9:00 Seawall Late Show **Mondays** 8:00 Acadia's Birds - Beginners 9-noon Peregrine Watch *9:00 It's a Small World* *9:00 Waypoint Acadia* 9:00 Great Head Hike *Varies* Tidepool School 10:00 Frenchman Bay Cruise 10:00 Islesford Scenic Cruise 10:30 Cadillac Summit Talk 11:30 Secrets of the Summit 2:00 Otter Point Walk *2:00 Wicked Good Wonders* *2:30 Wild Things* *3:30 Wicked Good Wonders* *Varies* Knowing the Night 9:00 Blackwoods Late Show
● Cuyahoga Valley National Park offers varied ecotouristic programs, according to the moments of the day: music and art in the morning, horse riding and recreation at noon, nature and history in the evening; in addition, the tourists may choose between biking and a period train walk.	
● Grand Canyon National Park offers „Cell Phone Audio Tours”, that are tours of the Grand Canyon accompanied by short vocal messages on the mobile phone, explaining different aspects regarding the canyon, from geology and local Amerindian history to the starry arch description during the night. In addition, there are painting exhibitions showing the Grand Canyon, and horse or mule back rides.	

● There is a sizable natural ecosystem restoration in Olympic National Park this summer: Elwha River will be restored by removing two dams, and ecotourists all over the world are invited to join this action.	
● On-line advertising, by installing webcams in the areas with rare landscapes or rare animals.	
● Customer fidelity may be achieved by subscribing them in ecological clubs and volunteer actions, or by offering them small bonuses and presents.	
● The on-line brochures are very suggestive, easy to read and show attractive images.	
● Various services: emergency calls (fire brigade, police, salvage team), information on weather, roads and traffic, events, self-guiding, first aid kit, ecologic toilet, and other on-line information.	
● Niche services: religious ceremonies, dentistry, non-stop medical emergencies, anonymous alcoholics (Yosemite National Park).	
● There is special care for disabled persons: parking place, camping grounds.	
● Volunteer ecologic activities in Yosemite National Park, opened for people all over the world, entitled Yosemite Facelift.	
● There are quarterly or yearly publications, specific for each national park: Beaver Log for Acadia National Park, or The Guide for Grand Canyon National Park (available in many languages).	

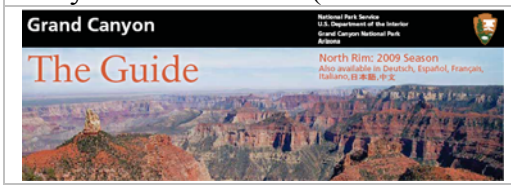




Image source: national park guides www.nps.gov

CONCLUSIONS

The United States of America is the world leader in ecotourism, having reach and various ecotouristic resources, advanced ecotouristic services, substantial funds for investments, diversified and ecological infrastructure, environment education promoting, and high incomes of the American ecotourists.

Ecotourism tradition and know-how of the U.S.A. are remarkable. For example, the employees of the national parks are well trained and educated in the field of ecotourism, and they are also polyvalent (tour guides, mountain rescuers, orators, pedagogues, specialists in local flora and fauna, alpinists, etc.).

The environment education begins early, within the family and then the elementary school, creating a strong ecotouristic mentality: the Americans are thought from childhood to love and protect nature as a patriotic duty, to do sports and experiment outdoor activities (e.g. junior scout camps).

Domestic demand for ecotourism results in a high quality of this activity: an American ecotourist asks for a high quality standard of the ecotouristic services, and this request determines an according answer of the ecotourism operators. The U.S. national parks are strong competitors, especially those located in the same state. Their purpose is to attract a higher number of ecotourists. This competition is extremely benefic for service quality, infrastructure investment, innovation, and new ecotouristic program development.

The U.S. national parks are not organized as some non-profit organizations; on the contrary, they are organized and managed as companies that bring benefits to the local communities, while the mission of their administration is to provide quality services, protect nature, share environment knowledge, educate tourists toward an “eco” or “green” spirit. The competitive success is connected with the success in the related industries: the U.S. national parks prefer local suppliers, so that construction, transport, small commerce, food and accommodation companies developed nearby. All these related and supporting industries contribute to maintaining a high ecotouristic flow in the U.S. national parks.

In order to maintain a high number of ecotourists, park administrations had to implement alternative strategies to deal with the

economic crisis: a more a aggressive marketing on the internet, a new design of the web sites that are more interactive and provide more information on the parks, on-line guides, on-line programs for the low season, original and connected ecotourism activities.

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