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## REBRANDING THE ZIMBABWE TOURISM PRODUCT: A CASE FOR INNOVATIVE PACKAGING

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**Abstract:** *This paper presents an analysis of the innovative packages which can be adopted by the tourism industry in Zimbabwe to make it more suitable for the 21st century tourist. Researchers have alluded to the fact that the tourist of today is more interested in the people of the country visited and more culturally related tourism products are getting favor from tourists. In Zimbabwe, the traditional tourism products included the Victoria Falls which is the major tourist attraction and one of the seven wonders of the world, wildlife or safaris, monuments for example the Great Zimbabwe monument as well as other traditional products like boating and sailing. These products are less experiential in nature and limit the interaction between the tourists and the culture of Zimbabwe. New models of packaging tourism in Zimbabwe are suggested and possible prospects and challenges discussed.*

**Keywords:** *cultural tourism, live-in- tourism, packaging, innovative, sustainable, Zimbabwe*

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## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

The major selling point for tourism in Zimbabwe has been traditionally on wildlife, historical monuments like Victoria Falls and Great Zimbabwe ruins as well as other traditional tourism products like boating and sailing (Manwa, 2003). Generally tourism in Zimbabwe has relied heavily on natural and heritage resources. The political upheavals of the year 2000 saw a drastic fall in tourist arrivals resulting from travel bans issued to tourists in their countries of origin (Mkono, 2010). In 2009 a Global Political Agreement was signed between political parties in Zimbabwe and after then, tourism has started to gain momentum. However, a challenge facing the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) which is the major marketing body for Zimbabwe as a destination is that of being able to attract higher spending tourists. This is aggravated by the changes in tourist tastes and expectations. Authors agree on the fact that the tourists now want to have a more intimate relationship with the communities in the countries visited. Destinations therefore are coming up with newer methods of packaging the tourism product in order to lure this new type of tourists. Against that background this paper proposes new and innovative methods of packaging the tourism product in Zimbabwe.

## **PURPOSE/OBJECTIVES OF THE ARTICLE**

The purpose of this article is to suggest newer and innovative methods of packaging and promoting tourism in Zimbabwe.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Zimbabwean tourism, since independence in 1980, has been based on what Mieczkowski (1995: 459) called mass tourism. Mass tourism is described as conventional standard large scale tourism consisting of organized touring groups focusing on wildlife, heritage sites, scenery and other natural resources. This traditional approach is no longer competitive. Given the changing tourists tastes and expectations. There is need for a paradigm shift in the way the Zimbabwe tourism product is packaged. The Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) has noted the need to rebrand the tourism product as a way of promoting Zimbabwe as a tourist destination (ZTA, 2012).

## **TRADITIONAL PACKAGING OF ZIMBABWE TOURISM PRODUCTS**

Tourism products in Zimbabwe have been packaged traditionally. The traditional major tourist attractions are Victoria Falls, Great Zimbabwe ruins as well as the abundant wildlife

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and scenery. Although Zimbabwe has promoted the traditional products successfully in the past, the changing tourist tastes call for the need to re-brand the tourism products by including attractions related to culture and community involvement. The traditional /conventional packaging of tourism products has distanced the local communities from the tourists. For example, a tourist visiting Victoria Falls will not have any chance to meet the rural local people of Victoria Falls. A tourist on a safari in the Hwange National Park never gets to meet the rural people of Lupote which is just adjacent to the National Park.

ZTA has noted that a number of creative and innovative packages of the tourism product that takes into account local culture and community involvement can be developed. The only product so far proposed is township tourism although it is biased towards the political history of the townships promoted.

### **CHALLENGES WITH THE TRADITIONAL APPROACHES IN ZIMBABWE**

There are a number of challenges that are brought about by the basically nature based, conventional/ traditional packaging of tourism products and these include the following:

1. Nature based conventional tourism packages are not sustainable because they are detrimental to the ecology (Manwa, 2003 and Mkono, 2010).
2. Conventional tourism packages, though successful in the past, are susceptible to political instability. Zimbabwe has received negative publicity in the last decade due to political instability that the country was experiencing resulting in most traditional markets like France, Germany, and Britain in Europe and in America issuing travel warnings to their nationals describing Zimbabwe as an unsafe destination. Against this background insurance companies would not cover travel to Zimbabwe. This resulted in a significant drop in tourist arrivals (Mkono, 2010). This renders the international market unstable.
3. Although Zimbabwe could fall back on domestic tourism, the low income levels of the majority of Zimbabweans do not render the option economically viable.
4. The nature based traditional tourism packages can easily be substituted (Mkono, 2010). Wild life is abundant in neighboring countries such as South Africa, Botswana, Zambia and Mozambique. The major attraction, Victoria Falls, is being marketed in neighboring countries like South Africa, Botswana and Zambia with tour operators providing just day trips to the Victoria Falls. This has deprived Zimbabwe of income



from tourism with tourists making day trips and actually not spending nights in Zimbabwe.

5. Leakages in income derived from tourism happen when private operators, usually unregistered, sell tours and get paid outside the country. The tourists arrive in Zimbabwe and are taken on traditional safaris or private game parks with no income to the state even in the form of levies.

The above challenges call for a paradigm shift in the way tourism products have been traditionally packaged. There is need to develop alternative packages which are more eco-friendly, sustainable, not easily substituted and responsive to current tourism tastes and preferences.

### **ALTERNATIVE TOURISM PACKAGES**

Mieczkowski (1995) proposes a number of alternative tourism packages which are not the conventional, standard large scale products which that are nature based. These alternative products include: cultural, educational, and agricultural tourism packages among others.

Educational tourism is one where people travel to other countries for purposes of learning Agricultural tourism refers to tourism on the farms and which enables farmers to diversity their activities while enhancing the value of their product (Cabrini, 2002). Cultural tourism, also known as heritage tourism focuses on the rich past of people or areas as preserved and portrayed in monuments, historic sites, architecture and artifacts (Cabrini, 2002).

This paper proposes that cultural tourism has better prospects than the other alternative packages.

### **CULTURAL TOURISM**

Cultural tourism is tourism that focuses upon the rich past of people or areas as preserved and portrayed in monuments, historic sites and culture (Cabrini, 2005). Kaillor (1995) notes that people do not visit a country for its airports, hotels and the recreational facilities but for culture. The author goes on to mention that a growing number of visitors are becoming special interest travelers who rank the arts, heritage and or cultural activities as one of the top five reasons for travelling.



## **JUSTIFICATION FOR CULTURAL TOURISM**

Cultural tourism is considered as a good alternative to nature based traditional tourism for a number of reasons.

1. Cultural tourism is more sustainable than the conventional tourism package (Manwa, 2007, Zeppel and Hall, 1992). The writers have established that cultural tourists are higher spenders than other types and can be instrumental in the development of local communities. Beyond developing local communities, cultural tourism can be instrumental in fostering national identity and nostalgia (Palmer, 1999). The writers suggest that cultural tourism is one aspect of non-substitutable product which Zimbabwe can promote in a bid for sustainability.

2. Mkono (2010) further suggests that the adoption of a community-based approach such as the CAMPFIRE project would encourage participation of local and rural communities. This move would reduce what Manwa (2003) called the tag-of-war that exists between the rural people of Zimbabwe and wild-life based tourism promoters. A number of creative models could be adopted by the destination promoters.

3. Cultural tourism is eco-friendly. The need for a destination to come up with products which are kinder to the environment can never be over-emphasised. A number of authors on ecology and tourism have extensively researched on the impact of nature-based tourism on the environment and concluded that the traditional nature based tourism packages were detrimental to the environment. Horob and Long (1996) link the concept of sustainable tourism to the broader issue of sustainable development. Altney and Hussain (2005) also note that sustainable tourism denotes the application of sustainable development principles to particular context of tourism. Eccles, (1995) concurs and notes that sustainability has become a buzzword in tourism academic circles. The concept of sustainability and the greening of the tourism industry have changed the tourists' attitude towards those destinations whose product is nature-based while those destinations promoting culture and the interaction of tourists with the people are being favored more and more.

4. Mkono (2010) notes that culture is the only product which cannot be substituted and which can be successfully differentiated for competitive advantage. The author goes on to note that Western tourists expect authentic experiences which are personalised and offer a high quality service delivery.



5. Customer tastes and preferences in tourism packages have changed. Gray, (1970) notes that cultural tourism signifies a shift in the evolution of tourist behavior from mass tourism. Butler, (1990) concurs and adds that tourist tastes have changed. Destinations offering eco- friendly products like cultural tourism are likely to be patronized more by tourists than destinations offering conventional/traditional nature-based tourism packages. Cultural tourism offers local communities an opportunity to show case their culture (Mkono, 2010).

6. Cultural tourism offers tourists something new to look forward to as well as creating a nexus between the locals and the tourists.

### **INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO CULTURAL TOURISM**

Zimbabwe can package its cultural tourism product in several innovative ways to differentiate it from competitor packages and to create authenticity to meet the modern tourists tastes and expectations. Innovative cultural tourism packages include township tourism and the proposed live-in-village tourism, live-in-stone sculptor, pottery-making and basket- weaving tourism. These innovative tourism products are described below.

#### **Township tourism**

Township tourism is an alternative form of culture tourism which emerged in the 1990s in the metropolises of developing counties. Essentially this type of tourism involve a visit to the most disadvantaged parts of cities and see how the local people live. Township tourism has been practiced successfully in Calcutta, Mumbai, Delhi, Rio de Janeiro, Cape Town and Johannesburg (Ranchander, 2007).

The advantage of township tourism is that the tours are explicitly presented as being 'authentic' and as possessing interactive features. Tourists can interact with the local people. Ranchander ( 2007) describes the tours as 'off-the –beaten path'. This means that such kind of tourism is new and not substitutable. The tours are educational in nature because the tourists, in interaction with the local community, learn the culture of that local community by experiencing it first-hand. Although some authors have described township tourism negatively as 'poverty tourism', Burns and Norell (2007) argue that it is the interest in the culture of the local community which is the the major driving force behind the success of township tours. This argument is supported by Bruns and Norell (2007) applaud the uniqueness of township tourism. They argue that whilst most tourism products, which are



defined as attractive, are characterized by beauty and repose, township tourism, although lacking beauty goes beyond the dictates of daily life. They realise that the search for beauty and repose definitely does not explain why tourists go to townships. It is culture which is the dominant pulling force or attraction, of township tourism (Pott 2007:107).

South African Online Travel guide (2003) notes that township tourism is designed to help tourists reflect past and present human experiences and see the 'real' people, witness their daily life and experience their present developments and cultural heritage. The essence of township tourism is education. Chapman (2003) notes that tourists who participate in township tourism leave with a very different impression from the one with which they arrived, having gained new insights during a tour in the townships.

The uniqueness of township tourism can benefit Zimbabwe in that whereas wildlife-based tourism can be substituted by visiting South Africa or Zambia, no two townships in two different countries can look exactly the same and exhibit the exactly the same culture. Zimbabwe's move towards the introduction of township tourism, if supported fully with the tourism industry and government, is likely to be a resounding success especially if it is organised to benefit the poor residents of the townships where tourism is taking place. In Cape Town and Johannesburg, the poor residents of Soweto and Cape Town have economically benefitted by establishing traditional food restaurants and bed and breakfast lodges. This adds a competitive flavor to the product.

Latherwick (1999) suggests that township tours need to be orderly, with well selected areas being part of the tour, for example, the tour could take tourists to a few carefully selected people in their homes, ranging from a small shack to a room in a hostel, a day care center, where tourists can get a cultural performance, a short walk through a series of designated streets under the watchful eye of a guide, a 'safe' shebeen etc (Ramchander, 2004).

Although most authors believe that culture can be better experienced in the rural areas. CNN Travel Guide (2003) suggests that people in townships hold their customs and traditions dear despite urbanisation, displacement and modernization.

### **Live-in village tourism**

Village tourism is a product where tourists get to live with the locals in their rural homes to learn their culture and lifestyle as well as to experience their customs, traditions and culture. Mafunzwaini and Hugo (2005) observe that rural tourism is a new, vibrant and



viable tourism product that is internationally recognised and promoted. In South Africa, live-in cultural villages have been promoted and have proved successful as is the case with the cultural village in KwaZulu Natal. In this cultural village, tourists get to eat traditional food, sleep in traditionally constructed huts and enjoy traditional music and dance as well as story-telling. The concept of staged authenticity is applied to contain the possible cultural impacts of close interaction between tourists and locals.

A variation of the village tourism is what has been called home-stays in Asia (ref). In Asian countries like Nepal, home stays are a common rural tourism product where tourists come to live in a real rural home and take part in all the traditional life and customs observed on a day to day basis. The concept of homestays has helped in alleviating poverty among rural people thereby empowering them economically. It instills a sense of pride and cultural identity within rural folk.

### **Innovative live – in- cultural tourism packages**

Live-in tourism packages can be developed around cultural products such as stone sculptors, baskets, pottery and cultural or traditional music also called ethnic music.

#### **Live-in stone sculpture**

Zimbabwe is rich in stone sculpture. A possible tourism product will be to use some sculpture workshops for tourism purposes. Under this model, tourists book for a stone sculpture workshop and get lessons for a fee. They make a souvenir for themselves instead of buying souvenirs which have been made by the expert sculpture, tourists get to make their own souvenir and carry it home. This experiential tourism is what many new tourists are looking for. The idea is to give the tourists a chance to meet with the locals and experience how stone sculptors are made. At the same time they would experience how it is to live with the local people in their homes. This makes the tourists more appreciative of the local customs and traditions. It also creates employment for the many expert stone sculpture. Places like the National Art Gallery in Harare can be used for such workshops initially, while rurally –based artists can also participate by hosting the tourists in their homes. The same could be done with basket weaving and pottery-making.

Basket weaving is regarded one of the most important traditional roles of rural women of Zimbabwe. Tourists have also bought pottery sold by women at markets and Arts Galleries. A product similar to live-in sculpturing can also be used by basket weavers. Under this





model, tourists can go through a one-day or two-day basket weaving class, make a basket for themselves and carry the finished product home.

### **Live-in ethno music tourism**

Music tourism is one of the growing tourist products in the world. Zimbabwe is rich in ethno-music as shown by world tours by some of the renowned Zimbabwean ethno-musicians. Some Zimbabwean ethno-groups like the Ngoma ya Buntibe of Binga Zimbabwe have toured Austria and other countries and their music and performances have received positive ratings ([www.mulonga.net/ngomayabuntibe](http://www.mulonga.net/ngomayabuntibe)). Under the live-in ethno-music package, tourists can stay with the ethno-musicians for a day or two and have music workshops, learn how to play traditional music instruments and also learn the cultural significance of the ethno-music. Johnson (2002) details his visit to Bali to learn the cultural context of Balinese music. He further observes that his experience in Bali, learning music under a Balinese ethno-musician defined the interconnectedness of local Bali to global Bali, what he chose to call 'glocal Bali'. This results from the fact that once a tourist watches the performance of traditional music in local cultural contexts, his image of the destination changes and it becomes a global view of the destination. Johnson (2002) describes the performance of traditional music as 'quixotic' as they embody cultural elements that allow it to be distinguished. The authenticity of traditional music helps to reduce homogeneity of the tourism product and attracts the new tourist who is looking for real or authentic destinations, a kind of 'antitourism', one which diverges from the beaten path of 'normal' tourism.

### **Cultural tourism- a combination approach**

A cultural tourism model would include all the above mentioned as products within the same tour package. This would give the tourist a wider choice of products to choose from and for enjoyment.

### **Challenges with alternative models**

A careful selection of hosting families in live-in- cultural tourism packages is required in order to alleviate challenges that might be brought about by language differences. Zimbabwe is blessed in that even in rural areas people understand basic English.

Certain precautions have to be made in order to safeguard the health of tourists who may not be used to local water and food storage techniques.



The way of life of most rural communities centres on seasons. Rural communities seasonal programs, especially farming can pose challenges to organizing live-in- tourism packages. Some areas are prone to malaria especially in the lower lying areas of the country.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Government commitment in planning and implementation of alternative packages**

Butler (1998) warns that without proper planning, cultural tourism can lead to the depletion of the ecosystem. Christie and Crompton (2001a) concur and suggest that African governments should play a leading role in tourism development through providing regulatory frameworks that ensure economic, environmental and cultural sustainability as well as poverty alleviation and social inclusion.

There is need to train hosting families in terms of their expectations with a live-in tourist.

## **CONCLUSION**

The traditional tourism packages on which Zimbabwean tourism has relied are dependent on wildlife and the environment. Many researchers have shown the ills of nature –based tourism and allude to the need for paradigm shift. Alternative tourism especially cultural tourism can be a viable route for a destination like Zimbabwe especially if innovative ways of packaging the product are adopted. Although viable, innovative packages need commitment from government by being included in the destination tourism master plan.

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