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Innovation in intelligent destinations

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Following-up on the intelligent destinations topic, we will now discuss innovation. Without question it is equally as important as the technology axis, and in my opinion, the great challenge of Mexican destinations, as it forces them to reconceive the tourism sector, focusing on the tourist as the central axis. This is tourism disruption. This paradigm change implies new business models, different communication plans and especially, tourist wellbeing in all aspects.

The tourism destinations that do not consider the need to innovate and that do not have the ability to adapt to this new reality will progressively lose their market position according to experts. This is a massive dilemma, as innovation assumes altering the nature of things, changing or modifying what currently exists to increase value, providing different tourism offers. Innovation must of course be profitable for organizations, which is why it must either increase the number of visitors or provide more income.

Thinking of the tourism sector, a priority of destination managers and businesses, is to increase loyalty and average spending through innovation. It is usually the norm that innovation is associated with ITC, which in turn must improve promotion, distribution and commercialization of services, with more personalized products that are aligned to what tourists want. The other side of innovation is the work processes in tourism organizations.

If we start from the definition of innovation as “any change based on knowledge that creates value”, we understand that it involves value for companies, value for tourists, and of course, value for the destinations. Occasionally innovation may result in a complex or confusing start, but a good start is to question everything, to transform, improve and change tourism products and services to create more economic, social, environmental and human value.

Some elements that determine the sense and strength of innovation in the tourism sector can be market competition and evolution. There are no more choices than to innovate, which is a route to success to consolidate a tourism destination. Specifically, I cannot foresee an intelligent destination without innovation.

Another peculiarity of this sector, in relation to innovation, is the makeup of the tourism sector in Mexico. We have large international corporations, but approximately 60% of tourism businesses are small and medium organizations, many of them family-run, with a limited number of employees and budget. Therefore, innovation arises to meet specific needs to solve day to day problems and are not a result of R&D departments or specialized teamwork. For these companies, innovation consulting is not in their agenda. However, innovation is a “must” for all organizations in intelligent destinations, regardless of the company size. Let’s remember that we must constantly reinvent ourselves into an intelligent destination.

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