

CHAPTER 4

RECORDING AND ANALYZING VISITORS

Statistics are a planning tool that help to forecast the future. All the forms that travelers fill out along the route to their destinations provide a wealth of factual information. From visa applications, airport landing cards, customs declarations, hotel registrations, visitor surveys and other documents, tourism authorities compile statistical profiles of proven and reliable accuracy. The British Travel Authority may know something about you just from these numbers. Are you one of the out-bound people who left Heathrow Airport in an economy class seat? Did you purchase your ticket from a travel agent? Is it your third trip to Asia and are you between 50-60 years old?

If you are, the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board knows what you will do after you, an in-bound statistic from the United Kingdom, land at Changi Airport. You will stay three nights in a five-star hotel, spend S\$148.00 on souvenirs, S\$249.00 on food and purchase S\$55 worth of duty-free items at the airport. You will take two half-day city tours, go to the zoo and the bird park and visit two museums!

By collecting data from visitors, site administrators can similarly come to know who to expect, what they will do and what they will most want. This chapter looks at the different kinds of data that can be collected, how to do so, and how to use it in the management of World Heritage Sites.

On Site Data Collection

Statistical information about visitor activity at the site over different spans of time is useful for planning purposes. A site administrator can collect and maintain data for the following time units:

Hourly - How many visitors enter and leave the site each hour? The entrance and exit figures will provide an indication of what is the minimum, maximum and average time a visitor spends at the site. The figures will also indicate the busiest and most quiet times. It may not be necessary to collect hourly data on a full-time basis. A periodic sample -- for example, collecting data on Tuesday morning and Saturday afternoon -- may suffice to provide the necessary data.

Daily - How many visitors enter the site each day during the total number of hours it is open to the public? The hourly data can contribute to answering this question. This daily data will serve as the basis for weekly,

monthly and yearly statistics. The data will indicate the days of minimum, maximum and average numbers of visitors.

Weekly - How many visitors enter the site each week during the total number of days it is open to the public? The daily data will translate into the weekly data. The weekly data will serve as the basis for establishing visitor patterns over the course of the year. It is useful to know what are the weekly periods of lowest, highest and average visitation.

Monthly - How many visitors enter the site each month during the total number of days and weeks it is open to the public? The daily and weekly data will translate into the monthly data. The monthly data will serve as the basis for establishing visitor patterns during tourism seasons. What are the months of lowest, highest and average visitation?

Yearly - How many visitors enter the site each year during the total number of months it is open to the public? The weekly and monthly data will translate into the yearly data. The yearly data will serve as the basis for establishing visitor patterns over the course of a year. This yearly data is commonly used in public annual reports and serves as the most common public statistic for site visitation. Make some footnote on how long the tour operators allow for their stop at this site and relate fluctuations to bus or airline arrival and departure schedules.

Collection Techniques

There are several means and techniques to collect visitor data of varying levels of accuracy. Among the most common means are:

Admission Tickets - The numerical data provided by daily ticket sales serves as the most common form of data compilation where an entry fee is charged. Admission tickets should be numbered by type, i.e., adult, child, student, senior citizen, etc. The beginning and concluding stub numbers can easily provide an accurate record of daily data.

Automated Vehicular Traffic Counters - For sites where visitors arrive commonly in vehicles, electronic traffic counters -- commonly a sensor cable placed across the entrance roadway -- can count the number of vehicles entering the site. This method can provide good data if the statistical average of the number of occupants per vehicle is determined at regular intervals.

Automated Visitor Counters - An electric-eye counting device can record the number of people passing through an entrance gate. Accurate data depends upon making statistical adjustments for double-counting.

Turnstiles - An entrance gate using a machine turnstile can maintain a count of the number of entries made. This method can provide highly accurate data as movement goes in only one direction.

Hand-held Counters - Guards or attendants stationed at entrance points can count the number of visitors through the use of hand-held mechanical counters. The data is reasonably accurate.

Visitor/Guest Registers - Usually maintained at the entrance or exit, registers are signed by many visitors who like to leave a record of their presence. This technique for recording visitors is most useful at small sites where visitors can be invited by a guide or hostess to sign a register. Guests are not under an obligation to sign, so this method can be unreliable. Still, the comments and names and addresses can provide interesting and useful reading, more revealing than mere numerical counting.

Parking Lot Surveys - For sites having restricted parking lots, a regular periodic count of the automobiles and buses in the lot at given times, can provide reasonably accurate data. The vehicular count has to be adjusted by accounting for an average number of people per car.

Formal Visitor Surveys - For sites where it is not possible, to collect and record visitor data as above, formal visitor surveys can be conducted according to a predetermined schedule. Such surveys might be done once or twice a month or each quarter of the calendar year.

Off-Site Collections

Statistics collected off the site by other authorities can also be useful. A site manager can compare data collected at his or her cultural site with broader statistical data from the area compiled by other authorities. Chambers of commerce, highway departments, airports, railways, city tourist information centers and service businesses (hotels, restaurants and local commercial tour authorities) often compile their own statistics.

Use of Collected Data

The data collected can be useful for a variety of purposes. These include:

Staffing-needs projection - The number of staff needed is directly related to the number of visitors that go to a site. A manager can plan how many staff people are needed, when they are needed, and for how long.

Fiscal income projection - By charting the flow of visitors to a site, a manager can also track an anticipated flow of income. When will income be heaviest? Lightest? Average?

Private funding proposals - Potential donors, investors and contract service concessionaires will want to know the recent, current and projected levels of visitors to the site.

Public funding - Departmental and ministerial fiscal officers will want to know the recent, current and projected levels of visitors to the site. Site administrators need to have documented figures to maintain funding levels and/or justify increases.

Public relations - Statistics are useful for press releases, promotions and announcements made throughout the year.

Special site promotions - Visitor statistics can tell administrators when the fewest number of people will visit. During these times, special promotions can attract more visitors. Conversely, statistics can indicate when, during peak periods of arrivals, no public advertising or special promotions may be necessary.

Assessing Services and Infrastructure - Knowledge of the fluctuation in the numbers of visitors also enables the site manager to assess the appropriateness of the site's existing services and infrastructure, and to program for their maintenance and expansion.

Visitor Analysis

In addition to surveys of a strictly numerical nature, it is also important to collect qualitative data. Are visitors' expectations being met? Is their knowledge of the site's significance deepened? This information will enable the site's management team to evaluate the success of the didactic mission and will yield new ideas for interpretation, exhibitions and other opportunities that may be absent from the site.

A simple, though sporadic method for collecting data can be in the form of "comments" and "suggestions" cards made available to the visitor at the end of the site visit. Pencils and a depository box must be readily available to encourage the use of the cards.

More sophisticated methods to collect qualitative data involve profiling visitors and interviewing them randomly. Professional assistance is usually necessary to develop the adequate profiles and questions to conduct meaningful polls.