

CHAPTER 1

MOVING TRAVELERS TO AND FROM SITES

From the point of view of the travel industry, two 20th-century developments have irrevocably changed the world: the invention of the jet engine and explosive population growth. These events have ushered in an era of mass travel, an era in which more people than ever before can afford to travel to distant destinations.

For the stewards of World Heritage Sites, these two recent world events have made the sites better known and more easily accessible. Yet while this increase in popularity has by one accounting been welcome, the large numbers of visitors also create new problems. Frequently, the standing walls, the doorways, the halls, the pathways and the grounds of World Heritage Sites were not designed for huge numbers of people. They have hardly changed in centuries. There are temples that were designed for a few walking scholar/pilgrims, cities that were designed for mule-trains.

This chapter considers the issues that a site administrator should consider in relation to the movement of visitors to and from World Heritage Sites.

The Influence and Opportunity of Air Travel

Air transport provides the major mode of travel for long-haul arrivals and, increasingly, for domestic travelers as well. In most countries one airport has been developed as the national hub. From it, planes fly out to the rest of the country. Even once remote areas are in this way made accessible to travelers by smaller planes, charter flights and helicopters.

At destinations, the rhythm of life is determined by the arrival and departure of airplanes; taxi drivers, restaurateurs, shopkeepers, guides and hoteliers plan their work schedules accordingly. In some areas it is still the train or the ship that sets the tempo but mainly we live in an air age.

Increasingly airlines are including short films to describe to passengers the country or city in which they will be landing. These films often include information about the airport procedures, customs regulations and available services. In addition, the films include scenes of cultural destinations. Site managers seeking more visitors can work with national tourist offices or the airline to be included in such films.

Airports have become focal points for visitor services, information, shopping and money exchange. Only a few airport managers make an active effort to present the best pre-selected handicrafts and to have pictures and brochures about the cultural attractions in the country. Site managers would be wise to cultivate their interest. Frequently a painted mural or a large

photo-mural is a welcome addition at an airport and can do much to publicize a site. The inclusion of brochures at the travel information counters, usually run by the NTO, is essential to attract visitors.

Frequently air-charter flights in small planes or helicopters are a popular way to see sites. Though they can have detrimental effects, they cannot be ignored. There will likely be civil safety regulations governing their operations, and site managers would be wise to take part in discussing them to protect their sites.

Ground Transportation

In many regions, the railroad is an important mode of travel, especially for the domestic travelers. Like airports, train stations include information counters and offer advantageous installations for paintings or photo-murals. Site locations should be clearly indicated on any appropriate maps distributed or displayed.

In many cities, street-car, bus and subway systems are connected to airports and train stations. Each of these systems usually has a contract agency that handles the advertising placards. They usually are glad to include some free institutional ad spaces. Again, this is where the marketing officials at the NTO or their advertising agency can best help you work with the contract firm to get the right design and the right message across.

Taxi drivers are important. They are usually the first real live person with whom the visitor gets to have a conversation. Taxi drivers are worth cultivating as friends. Like the tour bus drivers, they are important people. Many public transportation systems have prepared brochures of packaged tour plans along their routes. These are aimed at travelers and are successful at helping develop access to otherwise hard-to-get-to sites.

Special Site Transportation Systems

Special kinds of transportation -- such as horse-drawn carts, funiculars, boats, electric golf-carts and small trams -- reduce exhaust fumes and noise and relieve wear and tear on the site. They can help to control crowds, and visitors also like them for their picturesque quality.

To operate efficiently, such special transportation arrangements should have defined waiting and boarding areas. Local governments must maintain a licensing system, control the number of operators, and monitor the quality of service. Each mode of transport poses its own set of challenges. For example, in the case of horse-drawn vehicles, it is necessary to provide for sanitary clean-up and disposal, and to assure the humane treatment of animals.

Where horses or donkeys are used to move visitors in and out of the site, the effect of the animal hoofs on historic trail and road surfaces need to be given planning consideration. Such animal movements in hot climates can also raise a lot of dust, affecting both tourists and monuments.

Tour Operator Buses

Tour bus operators want their paying customers to be satisfied. They frequently give a mini-lecture or show video films on the bus on the way to the site. Be sure that their guides are informed about the history of your site and about your rules and regulations. Know ahead of time how long bus groups will spend at the site. Specify locations for loading, un-loading and parking, and institute an efficient ticketing procedure for group visits. Placement of the gift shop along the route leading back to the buses can help in moving large numbers of people through sites with minimal damage or discomfort.

Taxi Stand

If there is a taxi stand, the site should be well-planned. The stand should be un-obtrusive but clearly marked, provide for all-weather pick-up and drop-off. Where possible, a map of the city and official fares should be posted.

Independent Transportation

Provision must be made for the control of private automobiles, motorcycles and bicycles. Visitors who arrive independently will not have had the benefit of a guide to prepare them for the visit. Directional signs to ticket kiosks, entry gates, toilets, shops and restaurants will be helpful for this type of visitor.

Some general principles for handling private vehicles are

- Beginning at some distance from the site, install dignified and graphically clear directional signs to direct vehicles where they must go;
- Design directional signs, street and road patterns and even pavement textures and colors so that they help guide vehicles.
- Locate a convenient passenger drop-off and pick-up site within a reasonable distance of the entrance. Provide for the needs of the elderly and handicapped.
- Encourage visitors to leave their vehicles. Do not make it possible for visitors to experience the entire site from behind the steering wheel of a vehicle;
- Do not allow large concentrations of parked vehicles to physically and aesthetically intrude on the historic site. In the case of an urban historic zone, it may be necessary to provide for a parking garage well

outside the protected zone. At a large metropolitan site, a shuttle bus service can carry visitors to and from remote parking areas. In a desolate rural environment, it may be advisable to screen the parking lot so as not to have it intrude on the historic scene.

- Charge a separate fee for parking if necessary.
- Where large parking facilities are part of the site operation, provide for security patrols to prevent thefts of vehicles and/or their contents. At sites with a high and low-visitor season, create a permanent parking area and an overflow area.
- Provide for separate staff parking close to the site.

Boats

If boats provide the primary mode of transport, the site manager has an opportunity to make the trip informative and to provide a psychological break between the point of departure and arrival. Informed guides on board can tell the story of the site, provide printed information and explain the conservation efforts. They can review the rules of the site and be available to answer questions. Private boats should not be allowed to dock without paying a fee, and their crews should include guides licensed by the site manager.

Handicapped Access

Access for the handicapped has now become a world-wide expectation. Every effort should be made to provide the maximum possible access for every visitor. This does not, however, mean that your site's authenticity has to be physically damaged to solve this problem. It may well be that handicapped access will be impossible at some historic sites – entire sites or major parts thereof. There may be ancient steps, basements, caves or unpaved paths. This can be accepted but it must also be explained upon arrival. In some cases, alternatives such as books, videos or slide-shows may be provided.

Some countries are still preparing handicapped access legislation. It is important that your government ministry participate in these deliberations so that new laws do not bring damage to historic sites through insensitive requirements.