
AlmaTourism

Journal of Tourism, Culture and Territorial Development

Challenges Affecting the Quality Service of the Tour Guide in Egypt

Magdy, H. *
Alexandria University (Egypt)

Abstract

The research spots the light on the challenges that face the Egyptian tour guide and could affect on his service quality. Several studies were previously done on these challenges in other countries; however, this study is considered the first to be done in Egypt. The researcher depended on interviews with members of the Egyptian tour-guiding Syndicate, travel agencies, and numbers of Tour-guides. Through these interviews certain challenges are detected: the poor payment, the role conflict between the tour leader and the tour-guide, the foreign labour, feeling not appreciated from the government, renewing the licence, creation of other tour-guiding jobs.

Keywords: Tour Guide; Challenges; Quality Service; Foreign Labor; Low Remuneration

* E-mail address: heba2magdy@yahoo.com

Introduction

The tour guide was defined in the Egyptian act of the tour guiding No. 121, year 1983 as being the one who guides the tourist in the archaeological sites or the museums for a fee. The Tour guide is the human face of tourism. He is the most influential person the visitor will meet in his journey. He plays a primary role in the trip; he can make or break the tour. He is representative of his country. He significantly influences whether visitors feel welcome, want to stay longer or decide to come back. He therefore contributes considerably to the promotion of a destination. The Tour guide has a complex and multifaceted role consisting of various separate roles and sub-roles. Tour Guide is able to give travelers an understanding of the culture of the region visited and the way of life of its inhabitants. He helps to protect our cultural and natural heritage by making visitors aware of its importance and vulnerability. Tour Guide is often the only local contact for travelers, especially those from other countries. They can therefore contribute greatly to a mutual understanding amongst nations and cultures. Leadership can be considered as the most important aspects of a guide's responsibility. Most of the tour operators are often more concerned with a guide's effectiveness with people and the ability to lead groups rather than with the guide's knowledge or experience (Cohen E., 1985 ; Pond K., 1993 ; El- Sharkawy, O.K., 2007). Separate sub-roles indicate that the tour guide's role includes several components: instrumental, interactive, social and communicative (Black & Weiler, 2005).

Service quality in Tour guiding:

Service quality can be defined as the difference between customer expectations and perceptions of service (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The responsibility for achieving tourist satisfaction is mostly entrusted to the guide who is capable of approaching the tourists' individual needs and preferences (Geva & Goldman, 1991). The tour guide is expected to give the best services to the tourists so that they feel satisfied and have willing to come back. It is hoped that they can come back not only alone but also invite their friends, families, or colleagues as a proof that they are really satisfied and impressed with the tourist destination that they visit. It is suggested that the service quality of a tour guide can be evaluated through three main constructs:

- **The core service delivery:** the essence of a tour guide's service which the guide must deliver with consistency.
- **The customer orientation:** the extent the guide puts the tourists' needs and interests ahead of his own in providing superior value to tourists.
- **The communication effectiveness:** the exchange of information (Heung V., 2008).

Recently, the governments in many destinations have increasingly recognized the important role played by the tour guides in the entire tourism system. Many of them have been working on ways to enhance the level of service quality of the tour guiding profession (Black R. & Ham S., 2005). The Egyptian government took some steps on this issue, such as executing the importance of the accreditation, professional certification,

and licensing. An act was formulated as early as 1983, which is governing principles for the guides to provide professional service and to abide by law and regulations.

Therefore, the researcher will point out the challenges that face the Egyptian tour guides in their profession that affects on their service quality, and provide some recommendations to enhance this service. It's worth mentioning that there is no previous study on these challenges concerning the Egyptian tour guides; however, studies were made about the challenges of the Tour guides in other countries (Prakash M., 2011 ; Mak et al., 2010 ; AP, J. & Wong, K.,2001 ; Cimacio B. et al., 2009 ; Zhang, H.Q. & Chow, I., 2004).

Methodology

Personal interviews with members of the Egyptian Tour guiding syndicate, owners of travel agencies and tour guides were done to solicit views regarding the subject matter. A set of open ended questions was used to guide the respondents. In most cases a respondent was as to list two or three responses. In some cases it was open to the respondent to give their opinions. These responses helped in generating the lists. The method was chosen because it gives the chance of seeking clarification and explanations (Finn M. et al., 2000 ; Creswell W., 2009). The researcher was capable of reaching to some challenges that could face the Egyptian tour guide in his profession. This study has taken a qualitative case study as the researcher seeks depth over breadth and attempts to learn the subtle nuances of the topic of investigation. As the goal of this study is to provide a clear understanding rather than to generalize findings, purposive samplings were used as the sampling procedure in selecting the tour guides whose insights would be relevant to the issues being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, a small sample size was adopted. The sample size of qualitative inquiry isn't determined by the number of the interviewees, but with the data saturation, when no new information is discovered on the study phenomenon (Patton M., 2002). Analyzing the data identified the following challenges:

1. The low remuneration

The Egyptian act No. 209, year 2011 mentioned that the fees of the tour guide should be 300 Egyptian pounds per day and 200 Egyptian pounds per half-day. The Egyptian Code No 121 (1983) defined the day-work with 8 hours. However, the interviewed tour guides confirmed that the travel agencies didn't abide to the previous code, as their fees were mostly below what was mentioned because the travel agencies have to keep their quoted package tour prices as low as possible. Moreover, there is a lot of seasonality of demand in this trade and guides are at times out of job for almost 4 to 8 months in different cases. There is always a fear of the poor tourist season.

Actually, this low remuneration could affect the service quality of the tour guide. The tour guide has financial commitments that should be paid, because he didn't gain much from his job, he had to figure out another way which is the commissions, although it was restricted by Act 121 (1983), precisely in article 2:

Article 2: “the guide mustn’t work in any other profession or in trade. He is prohibited from taking any commission from the shops”.

Most of the tour guides confirmed that they took commissions. In this case the tour guide finishes his explanation on the site quickly to save time in getting the tourists to the Gift shops to receive his commission. The guide here is transferred from a person who is responsible for explaining the history and the civilization of his country to be a salesman (Heung V., 2008). This practice inevitably downgrades the quality of the tour and is likely to be detrimental to both tourist satisfaction and the perceived service quality of the tour guide. Moreover, the poor payment led some tour guide to abandon this job and search for another job that could provide him with affordable fee.

2. Role conflict

In most cases a conflict occurred between the role of the tour guide and the tour manager. The researcher had previously defined the tour guide and his role; while the tour manager is the person who administers and regulates a tour. He meets the entire group upon its arrival in the city, helps in coordinating all attractions, meals and hotel check-ins and remains with the group until it departs. The conflict between the two roles occurred because of the travel agencies that want to cut the costs, therefore instead of hiring the tour guide and the tour manager, they hired only one and assigned him the work of the other. This practice increased after the revolution of the 25th of January 2011, that affect the tourism industry in Egypt.

Sometimes, the travel agencies sufficed with the tour manager and assigned him to provide historical and archaeological explanation to the tourists. In this case, the information provided by the tour manager is shallow because he is not qualified to do this job. Moreover, the act No. 121 (1983) precisely in Article 2 and 28 prohibited the tour manager from playing the role of the tour guide:

Article 2: “the practice of the profession of tour guides should only assign to those who had obtained a licence from the Ministry of Tourism, and registered in the syndicate of the tour guides”.

Article 28: “in order to register a member in the tour guide syndicate, he must hold a licence to practice the profession of tourist guides in accordance with section I of this Act.

It is not permitted for any travel agency to deal with any tour guide who is not a syndicate member, unless he will pay a sanction not to exceed one hundred pounds”.

It seems that although the act is very clear, it didn’t deter the travel agencies because the sanction is very low. In other cases, the tour guide was the one that was assigned to do the role of the tour manager. This of course affects negatively on the quality service of tour guide whose load was doubled.

3. Foreign Labor

The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates the number of migrant workers at 105 million worldwide, and their share within the tourism industry, particularly the hotel and restaurant sector is growing rapidly (Baum, T. Et al., 2007 ; Joppe M., 2012). The problem here in Egypt is that this foreign labor works not only in the hotels and restaurants, but they interfered in the tour-guiding. The head of Egypt's tourist syndicate and the tour guides said that they found a threat in the work of the foreigners in tour guiding. It is worth mentioning that the foreign labor in the tourism field is not authorized. This labor came from different countries as tourists and stays in Egypt and work in promoting the internal trips. This foreign labor is getting high salaries from 3000 to 5000 \$ or 1000 to 1200 Euro. This of course affects the Egyptian labor that faces the unemployment. Moreover, the foreign tour guide hasn't well known the Egyptian history or the customs and traditions and could manipulate the country's history. He could also interpret a certain custom wrongly according to his own belief which could leave a bad image about Egypt.

This phenomenon started in 2001 when there were not enough tour guides in certain languages. This occurred precisely with the opening of the Japanese tourism Market in Egypt, as there were only 6 or 7 tour guides speaking Japanese. Therefore, the Ministry of Tourism had to seek for the foreigners to work as interpreters in some languages such as: Korean, Japanese, Russian, and Hungarian. Those interpreters were allowed to accompany the local tour guide and interpret what he says. This interpreter had to get an interpretation licence from the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism. Later on, the Travel agencies hired those interpreters and assigned them to work as tour guides.

Lately, the number of the foreign labor in the tour guiding increased. The travel agency in this case uses a local tour guide to accompany the foreign interpreter in his tour in order to avoid the legal accountability. However, the local tour guide is a silent guide while the foreign interpreter is the one who explains our history and customs.

Although the Egyptian Labor Act No 485 (2010), Article 17 prohibited the foreign labor from working in the tour guiding field and impose severe sanctions; this doesn't happen in the real world. Moreover, the Act of the Egyptian Tourism Ministry required the existence of 5 tour guides in the desired language in the same government (Ex: 5 tour guides speaking Japanese in Luxor), unless foreign interpreters will be hired. It means that even if there are 5 tour guides speaking Japanese scattered all over Egypt, the Egyptian Tourism Ministry will continue issuing Japanese translation permits for foreigners because the available tour guides are not centered in the same government.

4. Creation of more tour guiding jobs

All over the world, there are so many types of tour guide (Lansangan Z., 2008):

- a- Urban guides:** They are those who take pleasure in telling the story of a city or region. Some of them are step-on guides who stepped into a motor coach and conducting a small segment of a tour that is supervised by a tour manager.

Others work as a tour manager who meets the entire group upon its arrival in the city, helps in coordinating all attractions, meals and hotel check-ins and remains with the group until it departs. Throughout the tour, the guide is also expected to give extensive commentary on the region.

- b- Driver guides:** They are those who drive a vehicle with passengers and at the same time interpreting a region and interacting with passengers. At that time the driver-guide is restricted to what he can explain to passengers from the roads.
- c- Business or industry guides:** Several corporations hire guides to conduct tours of their facilities to educate visitors, promote their business or industry and uplift the image of their company. These guides are trained by the company to speak about certain objects such as the company philosophy or mission. In these cases, the guide serves as a salesperson and a public relations tool.
- d- Adventure guides:** They include mountaineering guides, bicycle guides, fishing guides, and rafting guides. The work of an adventure guide develops from a serious devotion to a sport or activity.
- e- Docents:** They are the volunteer guides who used to be found in most every city and town, at visitor centers, museums, historic houses, churches, and other places that people usually visit. Sometimes the museums offer educational programs for the docents, in exchange, they require a commitment in both the number of hours or days per month a docent will work.

From all of these types mentioned before, the urban tour guide is the only type known in Egypt; which is the urban tour guide. However, the government could open other job opportunities for the tour guides in other types precisely those that could fit with the Egyptian environment, such as: the driver guide. This type can be hardly executed in the Streets because Egypt suffers from the traffic jam; however, it can be performed in the Nile cruises or even in Sea Trips. The adventure guide could also be created in Egypt, especially that Egypt is characterized with its beautiful mountains precisely that of Sinai that is already near the archaeological sites. The docent can also be created especially that we have a number of faculties of Tourism and Hotels that graduated tour guides that could be appointed in the Museums to enhance the quality service in these Museums precisely that there are number of visitors that went to the museums individually and ask for a tour guide to explain the pieces there.

5. Determining the work city

When the tour guide joins the syndicate, he got a working licence in which the work city is determined; ex: one works in Alexandria, other in Cairo or Luxor..... etc.. If this guide wanted to move to another city with a group of tourists, he had to go to the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism to get a permit to work outside his determined work city. This can be noticed in act 121 (1983), Article 11:

Article 11: "the guide shouldn't work outside the city mentioned in his licence, unless he got a written permission from the Ministry of Tourism after paying the fees which will not exceed 10 pounds".

There is also the decree of the Minister of tourism No 39 (2006), Article 13:

“The Ministry and its offices are allowed in certain cases and according to certain rules, and after paying the fees to:

- 1- Give a temporary permit to a guide to work in another city differs from the work city mentioned in his licence.
- 2- Give a temporary permit to anyone wants to get a train in this job”.

This procedure negatively affects the tour guide who exerts more effort in order to be capable of pleasing his tourists who wants him to accompany them in their travel to another city, especially that the tour program can include visiting more than one city. Therefore, this procedure was cancelled by issuing act No. 2 (2007) that allows the guide to freely move from one city to another; however the licence is still till now carries specified work city.

6. Feeling not appreciated

Many of the respondents were not happy with the respect that tour guides get in the society and in trade. This is often reflected in the treatment they receive at tourist sites, government offices and at the hands of tour operators and travel agencies. They take pride in being called ‘cultural ambassadors’, but they do not get the kind of respect they expect. Government and its agencies and media do not promote awareness about job and dignity of guides. Local civil authorities and administrators at monuments treat them shabbily.

According to the law, the guide has to renew his licence every 5 years, while this doesn’t happen in other jobs such as the engineers and the Physicians whose licence is valid for life. This is mentioned in Act 121 (1983), Article 5:

“The validity of the licence is for 5 years and it has to be renewed in the last two months of the validity period”.

Moreover, the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism had used to ask the guides to pass a training course before renewing the licence. However, the tour guiding syndicate succeeded in cancelling these courses in 2011. Furthermore, the procedures that the guide has to pass till he get his new licence is humiliating, for example when dealing with the insurance office, the employees there don’t know the meaning of being a tour guide and ask him to fulfil some papers such as determining the location of his office. In this case, the guide has to explain the nature of his job and he doesn’t have a fixed office to get his papers.

The law also mentioned that if the tour guide didn’t renew his licence or didn’t pay his insurance in the determined dates, his licence would be cancelled. This of course doesn’t occur in any other job. This act led 1500 tour guide to lose their licence, and have to request for having a new licence.

Conclusion

The tour guide plays a primary role in the trip and gives the tourists an image to the country he represented. Thus, it’s very important to enhance his service quality. Certain challenges seemed to affect the tour guide. Some of them were already

recovered by the government, such as the suspension of issuing permits for the tour guide to work outside the city already specified in his licence. This of course makes the tour-guide more free in his work. However, there are still a number of challenges that have not been recovered such as: the low remuneration, the foreign labor, the role conflict between the tour-guide and the tour-leader, creating more jobs for the tour-guide, and feeling unappreciated from the government. The research findings of this investigation point to a number of policy recommendations which, if accepted and implemented, might assist in improving the work conditions of tour guides and thereby contribute towards creating decent work in this section of the tourism industry.

- The Obligation of the travel agencies to apply the daily fee determined in the law, unless they will be exposed to a fine.
- There should be a control over the travel agencies in order to oblige them not to use the tour manager to work as a tour guide. Each tour should be accompanied with both a tour guide and a tour manager. If the travel agency will not abide by this decision, its licence will be suspended.
- Creating other job opportunities in the Tour guiding profession by applying other types of Tour guiding such as: the driver guide, the docent, and the adventure guide.
- The Egyptian Ministry of Tourism should stop issuing translation permits except in cases of extreme necessity. There should be certain proceedings, allowing the tour guide to report any foreigner who guides and in this case, the licence of the travel agency should be suspended and also the licence of the silent tour guide who accompanied this foreign translator should also be suspended.
- Renewing the guiding licence every 5 years should be cancelled, as long as it doesn't apply to the other jobs.
- Government and media should promote awareness about job and dignity of guides as they are considered the cultural ambassadors.

References

- AP, J. & Wong, K.K.F. (2001). Case study on tour guiding: professionalism, issues and problems. *Tourism Management*, Vol. 22, pp. 551-563.
- Baum T., Hearn N., Devine P. (2007) Place, People and Interpretation: Issues of Migrant Labour and Tourism Imagery in Ireland. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 32(3), 39 – 48.
- Black R. & Ham S. (2005). Improving the quality of tour guiding: towards a model for tour guide certification, *Journal of Ecotourism*, 4 (3), PP. 178 – 195.
- Black R. & Weiler B. (2005). Quality Assurance and Regulatory Mechanisms in the Tour Guiding Industry: A systematic review, *Journal of Tourism Studies*, Vol.16 (1), 24-36.
- Cimacio B., Pormentira D., Reside O., Nullar M. (2009). *Tour Guiding in Baguio City: Perspectives from Three Stakeholders Groups*. Philippines: University of the Cordilleras.
- Cohen, E. (1985). The tourist guide: the origins, structure and dynamics of a role. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 12, pp.5-29.
- Creswell, W. J. (2009) *Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods approaches*, 3rd edition. London: Sage Publication.
- Cruz Z. (2008). *Principles and Ethics of Tour Guiding*, Rex Bookstore, PP. 3- 11.
- El- Sharkawy, O.K. (2007). Exploring knowledge and skills for tourist guides: Evidence from Egypt. *Tourismos*, Vol. 2, No.2, pp.77- 94.
- Finn, M., Elliott-White M., Walton M. (2000). *Tourism and Leisure Research Methods; data collection, analysis and interpretation*, Harlow.
- Geva & Goldman (1991). Satisfaction measurement in guided tours, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 18 (2), PP. 177-185.
- Heung, V. C. S (2008). Effects of tour leader's service quality on agency's reputation and customers' word-of-mouth, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 14 (4), PP. 305-315.
- Joppe M. (2012). Migrant workers: Challenges and opportunities in addressing labour shortages, *Tourism Management* 33, PP. 662 – 671.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Mak A., Wong K., Chang R. (2010). Factors Affecting the service quality of the tour guiding profession in Macau, *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 12 (3), PP. 205 – 218.

AlmaTourism N. 13, 2016: Magdy H., Challenges Affecting the Quality Service of the Tour Guide in Egypt

Parasuraman A., Zeithaml V., Berry L. (1988). SERVQUAL: a multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality, *Journal of Retailing*, 64(1), PP. 12-40.

Patton, M. Q (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.), Thousand Oaks, P. 244.

Pond, K. (1993). *The Professional Guide: Dynamics of Tour Guiding*. New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Prakash M. (2011). Tour guiding: Interpreting the challenges, *Tourismos*, Vol. 6 (2), PP. 65 – 81.

Zhang, H.Q. & Chow, I. (2004). Application of importance-performance model in tourguides' performance: evidence from mainland Chinese outbound visitors in Hong Kong. *Tourism Management*, Vol. 25, pp.81-91.