Chapter XII

Digital Imaging Trek: A Practical Model for Managing the Demand of the Digitally Enabled Traveller

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Abstract

This chapter introduces the concept and activities of the digitally enabled tourist and the impact such as tourist has on the travel and tourism industry. It summarizes the existing and emerging technical environments that encourage the use of hand held digital recording devices and personal Internet communications. Additionally, it looks at ways tourists publish and exhibit digital visual and written artifacts of their travel experience. The chapter introduces general types of digital communication infrastructure to be considered by the industry to create an experience to support this type of tourism. The authors hope that further understanding of the digitally enabled tourist will inform travel professionals to better facilitate commerce and practice in the industry.

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Introduction

Technology has had a great influence on the tourism and travel industry. In recent years digital communication platforms and technologies have evolved and become accessible to a wide mainstream audience of tourists and travelers. Organizations engaging in travel and tourism commerce need to understand this wave of innovative behavior among their customers. From cell phones to high speed wireless Internet connection to the variety of creative ways customers have applied digital technologies—the travel and tourism industry is being widely affected by these emerging trends in information and communications technologies (ICT). Is the digitally enabled traveler the wave of the future? How will companies and services shift business models to optimize the experience of people with digital devices? Are there commercial opportunities embedded in these? What does a traveler need to know to keep current with changing technologies? It is critical that services providers and travelers alike stay informed, because one thing is certain, technological innovation and change will be a constant companion for the travel and tourism industry.

This chapter provides insight into technology trends that will be helpful to the practitioner, student, educator and the tourist-travelers themselves. Being prepared to meet the new demands of customers will provide rewarding experiences for parties on all sides of the tourism equation.

Background

Since the wide spread use of the telephone in the 1920s, information and communications technologies (ICT) have had a great influence on the industry of tourism. In the 1990s, the wide spread use of powerful desktop computers, enterprise wide systems, and the World Wide Web (WWW) continued to transform the way business was conducted in all facets of the travel and tourism. While ICTs have had a dramatic impact on the mechanics of tourism business practices, the virtual explosion of new inexpensive digital communication technologies is transforming the experience of tourism from the traveler’s point of view.

The new generation of hand held mobile technologies, the expansion of wireless (WiFi) networks and the surge in digitally hosted social interchange services present new opportunities for engaging all sectors of the tourism industry. This new generation of technologies also presents new challenges to the industry to structure services with the digital service users in mind.

New services that provide online collaborative and social interaction through the World Wide Web now shape and influence vast communities of millions of online customers. Traveler-centered mobile technologies are increasingly used for many
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