

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF 12TH MEETING OF THE COMCEC TOURISM WORKING GROUP

The COMCEC Tourism Working Group (TWG) has successfully held its 12th Meeting on September 13th, 2018 in Ankara, Turkey with the theme of “Destination Marketing Strategies in the OIC Member Countries.” During the Meeting, Tourism Working Group, made deliberations on destination marketing strategies in the OIC Member Countries in tourism sector. Accordingly, the participants has come up with some policy recommendations.

Policy Advice 1. Establishing/Empowering a central body (i.e. DMO) to position the destination at a desirable place among the competing destinations, to create the brand image of the destination, and to promote the destination through utilizing such tools as social media, digital marketing, trade fairs, public relations, and fam-trip organizations.

Rationale:

Destinations are composed of different stakeholders and posses different tangible and intangible resources. Tourist create their own experiences by interacting with these stakeholders and resources, thus every destination might offer different experiences and have some characteristics that might help compete other destinations. As dynamic systems, destinations require complex and sophisticated structures to design and implement their marketing strategies. Such a holistic view of destination marketing can be available at national (NTO) and regional (DMO) tourism organizations. In order to use their competitive advantages, destinations need a holistic approach in identifying these resources, converting them into products and unique selling propositions. A DMO can also create a marketing communications strategy and brand image for itself while matching these resources and desirable target markets.

Because the destination offers an overall experience, individual experiences with stakeholders and their marketing communications should also be aligned and consistent with the position of the destination and its brand image. Once the shared image is created it should be reinforced consistently by joint marketing activities such as Fam-trips, attendance to fairs and exhibitions, advertorial in traditional media, social marketing and web presence. Public relations activities (e.g. international news and event) should also support the shared brand vision of the destinations. In addition to their own marketing efforts, DMOs should also encourage individual marketing efforts of the stakeholders such as offering a percentage of selected marketing activities (e.g. attendance to fairs).

Policy Advice 2. Encouraging new product development (i.e. events, festivals and other suitable products) to mitigate the adverse effects of seasonality and the risks related to dependence on one product or a single market.

Rationale:

The products and services offered at the destination and their quality are major factors that satisfy or dissatisfy tourists. Considering the importance of their loyalty and their potential in promoting the destination, it is important to design the products based on the needs and expectations of target markets. Destinations should be selective in targeting rather than trying to be everything for every one. On the other hand, while doing this, destinations should not focus on only one market but rather on various suitable markets. In this framework, based on tangible and intangible resources at the destination (e.g. alternative tourism, events and festivals), the products and services provided

need to attract different tourist markets, thus the seasonality and possible negative impacts of crises can be minimized.

Policy advice 3. Managing and regulating existing distribution channels, developing new distribution channels to prevent dependency and minimize power asymmetry between destination stakeholders as well as international intermediaries, and establishing strategic alliances with external stakeholders that would create synergies for the destination and other collaborators (i.e. airlines, event organizers etc).

Rationale:

Many destinations in the OIC Region are too much dependent on international tour operators and intermediaries (e.g. booking.com). Due to this dependency and in the absence of a representative body to organize and regulate collective responses of stakeholders against these distribution channels, these international platforms can try to improve their position and profits at the expense of the destination itself. Thus, DMOs can regulate stakeholders and set price bases as well as ceilings for commission rates. Besides, DMOs would also empower local and regional intermediaries and promote direct reservations by introducing new distribution channels along with destination webpages. DMOs might also establish strategic alliances with external stakeholders such as airlines (e.g. joint promotion, lower landing fees), event and festival organizers (i.e. venue provision), production companies (e.g. movie sponsorships) to pull direct demand to the destination.

Policy Advice 4. Promoting collection, storage, analyses and dissemination of market data on visitor characteristics, seasonality, distribution channels performance, source markets, trends etc., while respecting confidentiality and privacy of individuals, to improve the marketing effectiveness of the destination stakeholders as well as DMOs.

Rationale:

Tourists provide remarkable information and data for the destination starting from the reservation process, to customs, location based services, credit card expenditures, satisfaction surveys and so on. Yet, the information collected by individual stakeholders is not usually effectively used, because majority of the OIC destinations do not provide the necessary infrastructure to upload and import these data from individual suppliers. On the other hand, this data is invaluable to create a central marketing intelligence about the characteristics of demand, the image of the destination, quality of the products, visitor loyalty and recommendation etc. Thus a central data collection and processing unit can also be suggested at the destination level.

Policy Advice 5. Utilizing digital platforms, mobile applications and allocating special attention on social media channels for improving tourist experience, information credibility and interaction among visitors in destination marketing

Rationale:

Internet has dramatically changed destination marketing, branding and image formation and rapidly emerging digital economy is challenging the relevance of the existing marketing practices. Digital platforms have become widely used instruments in destination marketing. DMOs use internet as a central part of their marketing strategy. In this respect, there is a need to adopt digital marketing approaches and improve the capacity of the relevant personnel in this new area. Social media platforms, which emerged as dominant digital communications channels as tourists increasingly engage with destinations on mobile devices, can also be utilized for this purpose.

Instruments to Realize the Policy Advices:

- **COMCEC Tourism Working Group:** In its subsequent meetings, the Working Group may elaborate on the above-mentioned policy areas in a more detailed manner.
- **COMCEC Project Funding:** Under the COMCEC Project Funding, the COMCEC Coordination Office calls for projects each year. With the COMCEC Project Funding, the Member Countries participating in the Working Groups can submit multilateral cooperation projects to be financed through grants by the COMCEC Coordination Office. For the above-mentioned policy areas, the Member Countries can utilize the COMCEC Project Funding and the COMCEC Coordination Office may finance the successful projects in this regard. These projects may include organizing seminars, training programs, study visits, exchange of experts, workshops and preparing analytical studies, needs assessments and training materials/documents.
- **OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum:** In its future meetings, the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum may elaborate on the above-mentioned policy areas and the sub-areas from the private sector perspective.

