Restart Tourism: "Take the need for an eco-friendly, sustainable tourism more serious!"


What can be learned from the Corona crisis and what would have to happen now, so that tourism does not return to exactly the same (unsustainable) business as usual after the lifting of the lockdowns?

Different scenarios need to be taken into consideration in order to answer this question.

A first scenario would be that international flights will be suspended for a longer period of time and that the cost of the flight tickets will increase. Nevertheless, after being confined and in isolation for weeks, people will want to come out. Therefore, the people will more likely turn to destinations nearer to their home. A consequence of this more domestic tourism will be not taking the airplane to travel, but turn towards other means of transports, such as train, bus, car etc. Slow tourism is a keyword. The transport will already be part of the experience, and not the destination is the goal. The central idea of slow tourism is to collect some quality experiences, reduced in number, and avoid holidays where the emphasis is on quantity. The aim is to increase the quality of the holidays. The main characteristics of slow tourism are as follows: Holidays with shorter trips and longer stays; use of means of transport other than airplane; building a deeper connection with the local population due to the slowing down of the holidays; gaining experience already during the trip to the destination and not only locally. It is therefore a question of slowing down at the expense of speed, so that the journey to the destination is already a relaxing time (Dorin-Paul, 2013). So, international tourists may not come back fast to India, but domestic tourism will probably increase. This is a good time to promote sustainable and community-based local tourism by the Indian population itself.

Another scenario would be that people want to compensate all the time they spent locked inside their homes and want to travel more around the world. The flight companies might sell the tickets at a lower price in order to quickly make an income. It is more complicated to approach this scenario in a sustainable way. As a sustainable tourism company, it is important to have the right communication. Why would people want to travel to destinations like Wayanad? Some of them would like to come and experience the nature in a recreational way. Others will come from a health perspective, wanting to experience Ayurvedic treatments and yoga. In order to not fall back into a business as usual unsustainable tourism, we must include all three dimensions of sustainability.

For the environmental dimension, the CO2 from long distance flights must be compensated. Activities in the nature can be offered, such as tree planting, waste cleaning, farming etc. Tourists shall also stay for a longer period of time in one place, go for longer trips. Here Active
tourism/Active leisure can be a keyword. The aim is to create a link between the tourists and the society living there. For example, act in a theatre, take a yoga week course, etc. So, the tourists not only stay longer in one place, but they also benefit from something rather than just enjoying. COVID showed people what isolation is. Interaction is important and should be highlighted in tourism. Instead of a consumerist form of tourism a more interactive form of tourism should be envisaged. Tourism should help to bond with nature, with new cultures and with other people. It is about getting out of your normal environment.

For the social dimension, tourism should interact more with communities, get more involved with communities, and see what their needs are. This can also be to see how these communities cope with the current situation. How did these communities cope with COVID? People have varied ways of dealing with crisis. It can be interesting to learn from the basis, developed over centuries: indigenous, traditional knowledge. They have innovative ideas of living, with food habits etc. Traditional knowledge can and should also be seen as something innovative.

For the economical dimension, the focus should be laid more on small or medium sized, local companies instead of MNCs. Support local initiatives, local homestays, and community-based tourism. If you support the small players of the tourism sector, the lower section of the society is supported. This is where networks become more important.

Another approach can also be the Sustainable Development Goals. They should be taken into consideration even more after a global crisis. The SDG’s that shall be used by sustainable tourism companies after a crisis like this one and create a more conscious form of tourism, are the following:

1. No poverty
3. Good health and wellbeing
8. Decent work and economic growth
11. Sustainable cities and communities
12. Responsible consumption and production
13. Climate action

Overall, it is important to take need for an eco-friendly, sustainable tourism more serious. With the COVID crisis, it should be linked even more to the climate movement and the focus should be more on small players who make sure that the benefits, including financial benefits are disseminated amongst the community and lower economic segments of society. A good communication is important, mostly in a time where social media plays such huge role in our lives. The social medias can be used as a good communication tool for information, influencing, protection and inspiration.