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Tourism in Sandy Row, Belfast
Kelsey Marie Ang
Prof. Jennifer Ramos

Abstract:

Past conflicts, such as “The Troubles” have led to political, social and economic struggles for the city of Belfast (De Sola). One of the communities that has been affected by these conflicts is Sandy Row, a residential district of Belfast. Sandy Row was “once one of Belfast’s most vibrant hubs for shopping and city life, [but] has suffered decline in recent years” (*Historic Sandy row*). Now in a process of “rebirth” and regeneration the community is working towards a more vibrant and positive community (*Sandy Row*). Tourism has played a big part in this. Sandy Row has been utilizing tourism to boost the economy, community spirit and engagement of local residents (*Historic Sandy Row*). My project aims to generate ideas and strategies to better market the tours of Sandy Row and to boost revenue streams for the community. In doing so, my project intends to increase tourism in Sandy Row and hence the economy and engagement of the community.

Tourism in Sandy Row, Belfast

Introduction

Belfast is rich in culture and history. However, past political conflicts, such as “The Troubles”, have led to many struggles for the city. “The Troubles” was a period between 1969 to 1998 when there was an influx of riots and violence due to the conflict over whether Northern Ireland would remain part of the UK or become part of the Irish Republic (De Sola). Not only was it a time of political struggle, it was also a time of economic struggle. According to The Portland Trust, “Total male unemployment between 1978 –1987 rose from under 10% to over 20%. This compares to a male unemployment rate in England and Wales in 1987 of around 12%” (“Economics in Peacemaking: Lessons from Northern Ireland” 13).

Now that Belfast is in a period of peace, tourism has grown substantially as a way to improve the economy and the spirit of the city. According to Fiona Ure, spokeswoman for the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau, “The number of tourists visiting the city has jumped from 400,000 in 1999 to 1.7 million visitors [in 2011] ... Tourism revenue during that same period has spiked from 100 million pounds to 451 million pounds” (De Sola).

The history of Belfast has been the focal point of many recreational tours. Tourists are taken to locations significant to the political riots, where the guides give a brief history of the events that transgressed (De Sola). Belfast also features a lot of political murals that immerse tourists in the culture of Belfast and enhance their understanding of the conflicts integral to the history of Belfast (De Sola).

Sandy Row is a residential district in Belfast that is going under a process of “rebirth” with the intention of creating a more vibrant and positive community (*Sandy Row*). According to the Sandy Row tourism website, Sandy Row was “once one of Belfast’s most vibrant hubs for shopping and city life, but has suffered decline in recent years” (*Historic*

Sandy row). They have attempted to utilize tourism to not only boost their economy, but also community spirit (*Historic Sandy Row*).

Their project “Revitalise Our Heritage” is designed to place “local heritage and culture at the forefront of its revival” (*Historic Sandy Row*). As part of the project they have held walking tours to highlight their rich history of 400 years (*Historic Sandy Row*). They have been training locals to become tour guides to encourage them to take pride in the culture and history of their home and to get them “involved in bringing new life to their area” (*Historic Sandy Row*). Their aim is that “an engaged, involved community will provide the foundations for heritage-led regeneration and investment in Sandy Row” (*Historic Sandy Row*).

Goal

As an entrepreneurship major, I intend to create strategies and ideas to boost tourism and/ or bring new revenue streams into their community. The outcome of this project will be a marketing strategy or plan which I can then help them implement.

More specifically, I want to help them revitalize their marketing approaches to promote tourism for their community. I intend to help with website development, management of social media networks and the formation of new techniques to boost tourism and community engagement in the regeneration of the district.

My project will also consist of creating plans and thinking of ideas to boost revenue streams into their community. Some of the ideas I currently have for doing so are as follows. First, I want to create a plan for merchandising and souvenirs. This would involve working with local artists to design/ create souvenirs, which would not only be a successful advertising technique for tourists, but would also support the work of the community. Another idea would be to network with travel bloggers and reach out to them about visiting

Belfast. I also plan to establish connections with local entrepreneurs and work with them on how their businesses can bring vibrance to the Belfast community, boost tourism and the economy. Lastly, I could also help with web site development by creating marketing content for their web site such as travel guides for the city of Belfast. Travel guide tips would make travelling there easier and would be an insightful source for tourists planning to visit Belfast/Sandy Row.

Method

In order to market the tours and the Sandy Row community, I will need to gain a better understanding about the community and effective marketing strategies.

Prior to the Northern Ireland trip, I will meet with Professor Ramos to learn more about the Sandy Row community. I will also meet with her to gain connections to people within the community who I could work with while I am in Northern Ireland. I would also do more research on the issues the community faces to gain a better understanding of what could be done to boost tourism or community spirit. I also intend to connect with Professor Ramos to help me establish connections with local entrepreneurs who I could work with and help with promoting their businesses in order to highlight the work of the Belfast community.

Prior to the trip I would also need to research tourism on an international scale, look at how other countries across the world have benefited from tourism and how they have done this. I could look at popular places in Europe, then analyze the strategies that have been used to encourage tourism at these locations. I would also speak with a business professor here at Loyola Marymount University to get advice on putting together a marketing strategy for Sandy Row and their tours.

On the trip I plan to interact with locals to gain a firsthand experience of the community and their tours in order to gain a deeper understanding of the community and how

to better market their tours. I also plan to go on a tour. I also plan to meet with local entrepreneurs and learn about the role their business plays in the community. I will also potentially work with them to market their business to improve the economy of the community.

Conclusion

Tourism is being used in Belfast and the Sandy Row community to boost the economy, community spirit and engagement of local residents. I aim to generate ideas and strategies to better market tourism in Sandy Row and generate new revenue streams for the community. In doing so, my project intends to boost tourism in Sandy Row and hence the economy and engagement of the community.

Budget

\$2000 Stipend towards expenses incurred for project

Works Cited

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