

How to Have an Authentic Experience

APRIL 9, 2008

What is Authenticity?

With an increases interest in cultural tourism, many people seem to be going out of their way to look for an “authentic experience”. The question biggest question is what is authenticity? Authenticity is something that seems real or genuine. So, when applied to cultural tourism, it is an experience that seems more real and genuine. The problem with having an authentic experience when traveling is that everyone has a different opinion of what Authentic is. This makes it hard to create cultural tourism that will please everyone.



Authenticity comes in two forms, goods and experiences. Goods are the things that can be physically bought, such as jewelry, pottery, paintings and other commodities that can be physically brought home with you. An experience would include performances dances, feasts and plays that the visitor can watch and maybe

3 Reasons People Look for Authenticity

Having an authentic experience is becoming more and more important to tourists. Here are three reasons why authenticity is being hunted for

1. **People are unsatisfied with their society and see it as fake. Having an authentic experience appears to be something real.**
2. **Authenticity has this image of being “unspoiled”, either culturally, spiritually or naturally, and tourists want to find these areas**
3. **People think that if they have an authentic experience, than they have a complete understanding of the world.**



Staging Authenticity-What's Real and What's Not

With increasing interest in cultural and indigenous tourism, many places are trying to stage authenticity. Staged authenticity is when a host community may take something, whether it would be a person, place or thing, a recreate it into something that reflects the traditional values and customs of the people. This could include performances, feasts or even just everyday life. There are some reasons why authenticity is recreated. One is the host communities wish to share their traditional practices with guests. However, these practices may not be used as often any more. Another one is to keep visitors out of areas that the host communities do not want them to go, such as schools, homes, places of worship, etc. The question is, if staged authenticity is becoming more popular, how can you tell if your having a real experience or not?

4.



Front Stage vs. Back Stage Authenticity

This idea gives people a better understanding of what authenticity is. Think of this like a concert. The front stage is where all of the excitement happens and it is their specifically for outsiders. But many people want to make their way back stage and see what it looks like behind the scenes and what everyone looks and acts. This can be the same for tourists as well. They may enjoy their experience in the “front stage” world but wish to travel to the “back stage” and see what the people and culture are really like. In many tourists opinion, this is the only way that they



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can have a truly authentic experience. But be warned, if you do manage to travel into the backstage, your opinion of authenticity may be different what it actually is.

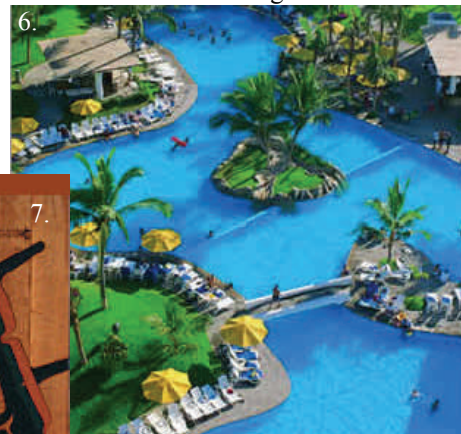
The Stages of Staged Authenticity

There are many levels of staged authenticity. They show the stages change from a “front-stage” setting to a “back-stage” setting. It’s best to look at each stage and decide which one you enjoy best.

1. **This is the “front-stage”. This includes places such as theme parks and resorts. This is the stage that tourists attempt to travel beyond.**
2. **This is a front stage region that has been completely reorganized to look like a backstage region. This could be a historical village that has been organized to look exactly like how the tourists would vision it. The best organized ones will convince tourists that it is authentic.**
3. **This is the back stage region. It is where the homes, schools, businesses of the people who work in the front stage are. This is the destination that the tourists was trying to reach. However, it may not be what they are expecting.**

Examples of what each stage could look like. Which seems most authentic?

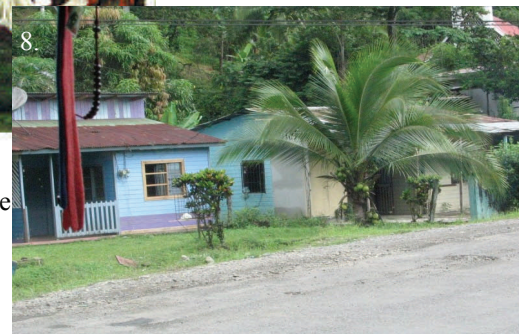
1. Front Stage Resort



2. Front Stage Reorganization-Traditional Village



3. Back Stage Village



Forging Relationships to Make an Experience “Authentic”

While it may be hard to have a truly authentic experience while traveling, forging relationships with the local population could help make a front stage experience seem more authentic. There are many types of scenarios in which you can build a relationship. If you are lucky to gain access to the backstage, make friends with the residents who live there. These people aren’t concerned with the tourists and can give you valuable insight into their culture and society. If you tend to stay in the front stage areas, try to make friends with those who work there. Who knows what you might be able to learn from the bartender or the maid who work at the resort your staying at.



Here is a picture of other tourists interacting with people at a resort

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