



UNIT-4

Managing Tour Operations

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Discuss the strategies for developing and managing links with principal suppliers
- ✓ Describe the management of recruitment and training processes in tourism
- ✓ Understand marketing strategies for tour packages

Unit 4

Managing Tour Operations

Introduction

In this unit, which explores managing tour operations, two main topics will be discussed - inbound tour operations and outbound tour operations.

As a manager, it is your duty to design a product in accordance with market tastes and trends for inbound tour operations. A manager also has to respond to inquiries on a regular basis with the help of the latest technology, get fare quotations ready, prepare costing of packages, oversee and control matters related to vouchers/tickets and keep employees motivated to reach necessary targets. A manager also has to make available in-house training and education for employees on the different facets of their jobs. Furthermore, inbound tour operations need to deal with field operations, such as making arrangements for transfers, hotel check-ins and pick-ups, while guaranteeing simple connections for the group by road, rail and air.

Alternatively, outbound tour operations have always been the focus of appeal for most workers of an organization, due to the opportunities they provide for the frequent trips abroad, either to become more familiar with destinations or to develop relationships with the main service providers. A manager's single most important obligation is to provide employees with the most up to date product knowledge, which involves providing them with firsthand experience of outbound operations.

On one side, the manager can create its own outbound packages, or it can sell the packages of inbound tour operators of other destinations. This unit will help familiarize you with various management and operational issues associated with tour operations.

Developing and Managing Linkages With Principal Suppliers

Just like all other industrial operations, tour operations have to rely largely on sources of supply. The difference here is that the supplies can be seen by the consumer. For instance, if a company produces cooking oil, the consumer will never know who the supplier of raw material is. However in tourism operations, suppliers such as hotels, airlines, cultural attractions and malls are very visible to the customer. What's more, each of the major suppliers makes a contribution towards the overall satisfaction of the customer. Providers of these services play a key role in the success of tour operations and links have to be developed and maintained with such suppliers.

As already mentioned, there are two areas of operations - inbound and outbound tour operations. Hence, for each area, links operate in different ways as the suppliers are different. For the inbound tour operation, when the product is designed you have to not only accumulate data on what kind of travel products exist in the markets *and* at what cost, but you also have to equate the existing products with appropriate target market section. For instance, if a group of tourists approaches with interest in the

Buddhist circuit, you must make available the complete and genuine information on all aspects of this product, inclusive of all those providing the services and prices. It is only then that you can offer a better price. So here, the requirement for contact with the service providers comes in handy. It is they who can give you the accurate information you need. If possible, you could always schedule a tour to familiarise yourself before the final decision is made.

Once relations have been developed, as a manager you will be in a better position to bargain on various terms and conditions. Main suppliers can be made up of hotels, airlines, insurance companies, transporters, health service providers, conference and convention organisers, mall owners, shopkeepers/shopping and numerous others, which depends on the characteristics of the product to be produced.

Alternatively, in the situation of the outbound tour operations, these kinds of links focus on overseas suppliers who are also seeking distributors for their merchandise. You may have come across endorsements of Indian tour operators selling destinations like Malaysia, Singapore, Bangkok, Switzerland, France, Mauritius, Australia, New Zealand and countless others at appealing prices. All this is possible due to good connections with tour operators among their overseas suppliers. This leads to ideal conditions for bargaining for all parties involved - i.e. If a foreign supplier provides a good price, you have to counter by providing increased volume of business. This establishes the foundations of the variation between your quotations for a given package from that of your competitor. So, having connections can be vital in making your operations successful, or ultimately leading to failure. It goes without saying that you should build connections and maintain links and contacts with your suppliers, both from within the country and at destinations abroad.

Managing Recruitment and Trained Manpower

In this unit, the focus will be on staffing and the various standards for choosing them, along with guidelines for running a successful operation of any tour operating business. Considering that the employees constitute a direct link between you and your clients, it is imperative that you choose the appropriate type of staff to reach your organizational targets.

When recruiting and selecting a workforce for your tour operation business, you have to be extremely cautious – after all, the business needs a highly professional method of making quality services available. For instance, if you have created a fantastic product but the operational staff-force is not capable of delivering it in the way promised, it can leave a gap in the service and lead to dissatisfaction with the tour operation business. So, before hiring staff you have to make certain preparations.

In other words, before you even consider inviting people to apply for a job, you must establish what *kind* of people you want to invite, the type of personality they should have etc. You need to define “job specifications” for every position that needs to be filled in the organization.

This can be inclusive of varying physical specifications, mental capabilities, emotional and behavioural outlooks, etc. For example, if you are seeking an individual to take care of pick-up and transfer, the most appealing characteristics would be good communications skills, smart appearance, dedication to work

and someone willing to work long hours and while always remaining patient. Likewise, if you need someone to do costing/fare construction, the best characteristics would be a strong academic background, knowledge of world geography /international tariff regulations and a mathematical or finance background in the tour operating business. Job stipulations can vary according to the area of operations.

For instance, for inbound tour operations, the staff needs might include:

- Supervising of transfers and pickups;
- Airport representatives;
- Reservation assistants;
- Domestic ticketing executives;
- Accounts executives;
- Drivers & chauffeurs;
- Escorts/guides

Every single one of the above mentioned jobs will need a different skill set. For example, the supervisor has to have sufficient experience to be able to explain and train his/her staff on considerations relevant to pickups and transferring to hotels. This stipulates that he/she should be able to converse successfully with his/her staff and only then will the objectives of the organization will be met. As already stated, an airport representative needs to be a sharp, dedicated worker, capable of working unconventional hours – in many places, the majority of international flights land after midnight. Hence, candidates who can also work during the day as office assistants may be given preference.

Accounts workers need to hold formal qualifications and have experience, because tour operation businesses are based on credit and on-time settlement of payments. This requires constant, focused attention or you may end up losing your business. Accounts executive are also answerable for vouchers intended for transit providers (pickups and transfers) as well as for hotels. Drivers and chauffeurs need to have sound driving records and be knowledgeable of routes and signalling patterns. They should also have good communication skills and if possible, they should possess some knowledge of the local tourist attractions. Finally, they must be polite, courteous and ideally have a sense of humour to make the trip more enjoyable. Escorts and guides play a critical role in the running of inbound tour operations. The escort's duty begins the moment a group lands at the airport. Beginning with the greeting at the airport throughout the whole conduction of the tour, the escort represents the company. Essentially, he/she is the company's walking image.

Recruitment and selection of staff in outbound tour operations is approximately the same as that of the inbound operations. The main difference with outbound operations is that the recruits must be appointed under the acknowledgement that a majority of the staff will have to visit the destination they will be marketing. Ideally therefore, it is necessary that they have an acceptable knowledge of one or more foreign languages. Skills required may be associated with the field of international ticketing, construction of fares/calculations, preparing itineraries etc. When choosing a candidate in this area, one

with familiarity of destinations and geography should be sought along with know-how of the tourist attractions of popular destinations.

In conclusion, it can be said that a systematically planned and implemented method of recruitment and a careful selection process in tour operations can be critical for an organization. If the right types of individuals are chosen and trained for appropriate positions, the results can prove to be beyond expectations. Care should be exercised to place the right person in the right position at the right time.

The Operations Department

As previously mentioned while introducing this Unit, operations of tours is the heart of the trade. Such operations are implemented mainly in both inbound and outbound fields of tours. It is the manager's job to make certain that the workforce carries out all tasks efficiently.

Inbound Tour Operations

Usually, you and your staff will spend weeks and at times, even months, securing business and administering it on behalf of your clients. When the tourists are ready to arrive, you need to make certain that you are able to deliver everything you promised during the negotiating process for the handling of the group. This is the time to live up to the expectations and prove your company's worth, and that your country as a destination was the correct vacation choice.

A first good impression will go a long way to put everyone in the right mood and contribute towards the total success of the tour. Make one mistake and the opposite will occur. The group may regret choosing this country as a destination and will anticipate nothing but problems with their stay. This can translate to complaints even over the most minor of issues and can lead to the refusal to purchase extra services, which in the long run contribute to the financial gains of your company. Thus, a carefully planned, prepared and effectively carried out transfer of groups can contribute to a smooth and enjoyable start.

To achieve this, train staff members to put themselves in the clients' shoes and see how they would feel after having travelled long distances. They will be exhausted, not to mention perhaps dehydrated due to the physical effects of the flight and consumption of alcohol along the way. They may also be struggling with the climate changes between their home country and your own. A North European visiting South Asia in January can experience a difference of forty five to fifty degrees, which of course takes a little getting used to.

Frequently, the visitors will be nervous due to fear of a foreign culture, food and people of varying races and colours. They could fear getting lost, ill or being robbed, in addition to a variety of other things. Naturally, these fears can also be seen in a positive light and may be considered to be a part the excitement and challenge of travelling to a different country. In any case, the clients did exercise the option to come to you. As such, you have to train the staff to assure the tourist's comfort and safety. Upon achieving this, even the noisy and hot airport bureaucracy, discourtesy of many immigration and customs officials, luggage delays and the lack of trolleys will most likely be quickly forgotten. At this point, the client expects you to do the following:

- Make them feel secure and safe;
- Satisfy their physical needs;
- Ensure that their status is recognised;
- Provide a feeling of belonging.

Every plan before, during and after the transfer has to focus on the completion of these above-mentioned needs. You need to keep in mind whether your clients really need you to carry out the transfer on their behalf. They may not, as a majority of adults are fully able to find their way to the places where they want to go. It might take more time, especially where there are language issues; it might not be as comfortable, more costly and slower when they do it on their own. As such, some will feel they need your services as you can do it faster, at cheaper rates and in greater comfort than they can organise themselves. Additionally, you can provide all the personal touches mentioned above. If you cannot manage this, then your service is only as good as the tourists arranging it all on their own. Clients will realize this very quickly and your business will disappear.

Now let us consider the steps you need to take as a manager to make certain that all proceeds smoothly and the clients' wishes are fulfilled. In effect, several days before the arrival day you must go through a cross-check:

- The kind of vehicle needed/requested for transport has been booked, i.e. the booked vehicle is appropriate for the purpose;
- Ensure that the staff is using the most appropriate type of transport for the client. For example, the client may have opted for an air-conditioned vehicle or a large vehicle if there is a lot of luggage (this is especially critical for special interest groups like climbers, campers, divers and trekkers);
- The transport used by your staff is mechanically fit, safe, properly maintained and clean. The driver has to be directed to the exact location of the transport within the airport and the escort should be able to locate it.
- Find out if there is a need for a transport voucher and remember that the hotel has to be booked well in advance.
- Make certain all the required vouchers are prepared in advance and at the agreed upon rates.
- If cash is required for paying a porter or other needs, acquire the needed amount and have it ready.
- Make sure that the staff knows about the transport company, how many pieces of luggage there are and any other relevant details;
- Being a good manager/supervisor means it is your job to make sure that the hotel room types and the number needed are available upon the arrival of guests. Also, inform the hotel front office and housekeeping about the time of the client's arrival, so that housekeeping is ready to receive them (particularly important in situations of late or early arrivals). The staff should also be made aware of any other specific needs the clients have.

You always have to brief the escort to gather and record information on:

- Flight number;
- Name list;
- Transport details and voucher;
- Hotel name, address, list of rooms and hotel voucher;
- Any special details/instructions, such as the nature of the group, difficulties with mobility and VIP status, etc.

They must also take a greeting/sign board with the individual tourist's name, country of origin or the company he/she is associated with, etc.)

In cases where the transit between airport and the city is long, it is customary to have one representative to meet the clients at the airport and despatch them to the hotel, where another representative should meet them to settle them in. In a situation like this, the tour operator has to arrange both representatives. They both receive a similar briefing, except the representative who greets clients at the airport has to have the transport vouchers, while the one who meets them at the hotel will have the hotel vouchers. In this system, proper communication between the two representatives is essential. They have to have each other's mobile numbers so they can keep updated about the client's movements. It is up to the manager/supervisor to have a system of checks and rechecks in place among the staff. For example, before the arrival at the airport, calling the airline to check the actual time of the flight's arrival. The exact time of arrival can only be determined once the flight has departed from the previous stop; staff should be warned not to depend on the scheduled time of arrival as it can vary widely, due to many technical and non-technical reasons.

If the difference in scheduled time and actual arrival time is great, make sure the staff knows to inform the transport company and the hotel of the new timings. Also, the transfer staff has to be at the airport before the arrival of the client, so they are waiting when the passengers come out of immigration. Using your own experiences, inform the staff about how long the clients will take to come out of immigration. If possible, provide your staff with an airside pass, so they can enter the customs hall to help and greet the client.

In some airports this is not allowed due to security issues - you need to make certain that your staff knows this and they do not commit to something they can't deliver. In this case, they have to position themselves in the public area just outside the customs hall with a placard detailing the guest or group leader's name.

- This is the time to gain the first impression for your company - there are no second chances of repairing damage caused by a bad first impression;
- Your staff should be well groomed, clean and tidy (make use of the personality factor);
- The staff member should be identifiable by a worn badge, which indicates to your clients that he/she is a member of your company and responsible for the clients;

- If at all possible, have your staff wear a uniform, since it allows them to be identified with ease and establishes trust between the worker and the tourist.

The person sent to the airport for transfer should be equipped with the following materials:

<u>EQUIPMENT FOR AIRPORT TRANSFER STAFF</u>	
Badge	Transport vouchers
Uniform as prescribed	Hotel vouchers
Greeting board	Welcome packs and/or gifts
Name list	Hotel registration cards
Clipboard and pen	Smile of the escort
Mobile phone or phone card or coins	Hotel vouchers
Tips or voucher for porters	

Table. 4.1

Some other factors that need to be looked after include:

i) Passengers' Identification:

You have to train the staff to greet tourists warmly and give them a brief welcome, before moving on to check them off their list individually (for the needs of security and status) and asking them to wait in the waiting area so all members of the group can assemble in one place.

In cases where someone is missing from the list, immediately request the airport information service to make an announcement detailing:

- The missing passenger's name,
- Name of tour group,
- Place of group's origin,
- An easy to identify meeting point,

Always make sure that the announcement is made in the language the passenger speaks.

On the off chance that the passenger does not show up, the staff must be trained with the correct steps to follow and immediately check with the airline to make sure that the person was on that flight. If they were not on board the flight, there is no need to go on waiting. If they were on the flight, then the announcement has to be repeated. In addition, leave a written note at the information desk giving instructions on how to once again catch up with the group. Your transfer staff should be instructed to wait a minimum of 30 minutes and only then they should proceed with the transfer.

It is recommended that at every stage of the tour, the staff keep all passengers up to date with information about delays, if there are any (this shows them that you care about each their experience). If there is loss or damaged to baggage upon receipt in the customs/baggage area, the staff should be properly trained to complete all paperwork for tracing/replacing the lost baggage. In this case, an airside pass will be very helpful. Your staff has to know to be very reassuring at this point, as the passengers may feel frightened, frustrated and understandably upset. Ensure that the airline provides copies of all forms filled out and that these are securely kept by the clients, as they will be needed for claims to be made. It is the responsibility of the airline to find and forward the lost bags - a fixed rate of compensation is also payable to aid with the cost of toiletries and other essential items, in any case where bags are lost or delayed. If the need is there, then your staff must offer to take the client shopping for essentials. In case your staff member has to leave the clients to take care of some other essential matter, he/she must leave a "signpost" to let the waiting clients know.

This lets the clients know where the tour representative has gone and why. Not doing this can create confusion among the other group members.

Examples of messages to post could be something, such as, "please stay here, I am going to check on the coach" or "I will be back in ten minutes, I am helping with a damaged luggage issue."

When the staff has gathered all of the passengers and has made sure that all of their belongings are accounted for, he/she can lead them to the vehicle with a welcome notice held high so they can see it clearly and follow through a crowded area. Proceed gradually, so that everyone can keep up, and converse with the passengers in a welcoming tone about their journey etc. It is recommended that you drill your staff to look after the group members at road crossings. Prior to vehicle boarding, your staff should ensure that every visitor is asked to identify their own bags being loaded. Normally, the loading itself will be done by the porters or the drivers, but they can't possibly know which bag belongs to whom and if all bags have been loaded.

Once seated in the vehicle, welcome the group again, say your name again clearly, and check to make sure that all passengers are present and accounted for. Before the driver starts moving, he should introduce himself, as well, and state the hotel's name, in addition to stating roughly how long it will take to get there.

ii) Departure Transfers

Visitors who arrive at a destination in groups or individually have to go through the process of transferring a second time - when they are ready to leave. It is important for the company's image that the experience of visitors who are leaving a destination is just as good as it was upon their arrival.

The process of transferring for a departure has to be handled in the most professional way by the staff. Similar to the arrival process, it has to start a few days beforehand. Not later than 72 hours after arrival, all the seats that have been scheduled for the next portion of the journey must be reconfirmed. This means that the staff has to collect all the tickets on behalf of the clients. Keep in mind that some airlines have different requirements like "reconfirm within 72 hours of departure" and not doing so may cause

clients to lose their seats. Understand your local regulations to the letter. You need to behave in a professional way while handling/supervising these kinds of transfers. For example, every single client has to be notified in writing one day prior to their scheduled flight the time, date and pick-up from hotel. This can be done by placing a notice on the tour notice board, or alternatively you can leave a letter for every client at reception. (If this is not done in writing, and a client misses the flight, you could be blamed). Any departure tax details should also be included in this letter.

Once again, you will have to reconfirm the voucher and transport procedure with the transport company and recheck to ensure that there is no change in the departure time of the flight. You will have to determine and inform clients exactly how long before departure they need to settle their surplus bills at reception. Hotel computerised accounts can normally be issued just prior to departure, especially if the group is large. However, some hotels prefer that this is cleared the night before departure.

On the day of departure, advise your staff to use a checklist (provided below), which is more or less the same as that of the arrival transfer. Do not forget that the clients still have the same needs, you're your undivided care attention. They may once again be nervous and uncertain, but by now some trust will have developed between you and they will probably be easier to direct.

Departure Transfer Checklist

- In advance, inform clients in writing;
- Inform hotel and porters to be prepared;
- Get to the hotel before the given time;
- Find out from reception if everyone has made the required payments;
- Have clients assemble in one place and call those who are missing;
- Load bags and have each client confirm;
- Remind clients to do the following things before departure :
 - Pay any extras,
 - Return keys,
 - Clear out safe deposits,
 - Ensure passports and tickets are in hand and that their luggage is accounted for
- Load passengers;
- Leave for the airport;
- On the way, outline the procedure for the airport;
- Inform about the facilities that are available (for example, toilets, post offices, duty-free or cafés),
- Drive up as close as possible to check in area;
- Before disembarking, wish everyone a safe and happy journey home and that they will come back soon. Do it in a sincere and friendly way;

- While saying goodbye some passengers may offer small tips and gifts. Thank graciously for these but NEVER ask for them;
- Help out with collecting trolleys;
- Arrange porters if necessary;
- Assist with check-in procedures/airport taxpaying, etc.;
- Walk with them to security and passport control;
- When all have gone airside you can leave but not before;
- If there is a delay, before the clients have gone airside, you remain responsible for them.

iii) Other Areas for Supervision in Inbound Tour Operations

Tourism is sensitive industry, since it deals with people and their vacation time. In prior parts of this unit, we outlined different factors that are required for making the client feel comfortable. There are however, some other factors that should be taken into consideration:

- 1) Tour operators have to be able to manage their finances well;
- 2) Tour operators also have to have good product knowledge. You must have clear understanding of the workings and roles of different organizations (like airlines, hotels and surface transport, governmental departments such as Archaeological Survey and Ministry of Environment etc.);
- 3) You must also analyse multiple options available and have emergency plans in place;
- 4) You and all of your staff in the tour operation company must always be ready to act in case of any unforeseen developments (strikes, health problems, political unrest, hotels not available or airline seat problems etc.) and control the situation. Your staff should be trained to make immediate decisions and provide effective solutions;
- 5) The use of technology has significantly altered the nature of operations management. However, computers and fax machines, as well as telephones, do break down (e.g. in times of power loss, etc.). So, your staff should also be trained in the use of manual systems as they are essential in times of crisis;
- 6) Market Research, market segmentation, comprehension of tourist markets, profiles of tourists, etc. are all essential if the tour operator business is to be a success. The tour operator has to pay close attention to these factors. Also, appropriate links must be established with principal suppliers. Preparation of attractive brochures, taking part in travel conventions and constantly promoting what you do can help tour operators in enhancing their business. Many tour operators opt for direct selling to customers by placing advertisements in print and electronic media.

Outbound Tour Operations

This division is specialist as it offers services and facilities only to passengers intending to travel abroad. To be able to carry out a variety of jobs, it can be subdivided into smaller departments as given below:

I. Documentation Department

To be able to travel abroad, one must be in possession of a number of documents and complete a set of formalities. This department focuses on the formalities and documents needed for any type of foreign travel. Any individual wishing to travel abroad will have to contact the documentation department of the travel agency/tour operations division. After inquiring for the reasons of travel, you can advise him/her about the documentation required for getting the necessary visa of the country of destination or other approvals like RBI or Income Tax Office. The formalities and documentation necessary for travelling abroad vary according to the purpose of the visit. The reasons for travelling abroad can be very different - tourists for higher education, business, medical treatment and permanent immigration etc. In each situation, the formalities and supporting documentation differs from country to country.

II. Visa Department

This division maintains all the information for the formalities pertaining to getting a visa for different countries. The staff has to collect and endorse passports on behalf of the customers and deliver them back to the customers, well in advance of the journey date.

III. Reservation Department

This is another important department that handles the reservation of transport and hotel lodgings. The staff in this division has to be well-versed with airline timetables, fares for the varying destinations, hotels and various types of tariffs at the most frequently visited locations at the destination. After gathering all of the details of the programme, the information is recorded on a specially designed document. After which, a suitable travel plan is designed giving appropriate flight connections with arrival/departure timings and locations of stay. It also comes up with an approximate cost for the stay and fares.

Once the plan is approved, a final typed copy is drawn up and provided to the passenger for reference. This is called the itinerary. Upon approval of the itinerary, the reservation department contacts the relevant airlines and requests seats according to the itinerary. The relevant airline will also be provided with a copy of the total programme of the passengers' plans, since it will need to send reservation messages to the relevant offices for onward flight confirmation in accordance with the programme. Once all confirmations have been obtained, the airline will inform the agent that all is ready.

When the information is received by the agent, he issues a voucher for the airlines, requesting them to issue tickets on behalf of the passenger in accordance with the details of the flight given in the voucher.

Some vital contents of a voucher can include:

- a.** Name of the Passenger,
- b.** Place to be Visited,

- c. Date,
- d. Flight Number,
- e. Time,
- f. RBI Permit Number,
- g. Passport Number,
- h. Applicable Fares,
- i. Agent Code Number.

After getting this voucher, the airline goes ahead and issues the ticket. The ticket is then passed on to the agent, who will cross-check it and only if totally satisfied with the details, the agent will forward it to the passenger. As can be seen, you have to make available several services for the passenger for which there are no extra charges. The passenger has the benefit of assistance and service from you. You must recognize the fact that if you were not there, the passenger may end up wasting a lot of time, energy and money. Another aspect of outbound tours is the sale of packages of inbound tour operators in different countries. Some bigger companies develop their own outbound packages - products in these packages are inclusive of all steps necessary in developing a tour package. Keep in mind that when you sell on behalf of others, make certain that whatever the package actually provides in services is in line with what is promised. Connections and experiences can help in this regard. This precaution is necessary as it is you who is doing the selling to the tourist. If things go wrong, you will be held responsible by the tourist as well as in a consumer court.

Managing the Marketing of Tour Packages

The marketing of tour packages and application of the principles involved varies from inbound tours to outbound tours.

Marketing Inbound Tours

When marketing inbound tours, it is important to concentrate on making your product popular in tourist-generating countries, in order to draw in tourists. So, the focus has to be on developing marketing programmes that target this goal. Thus, so far in India, it has been normal to use the traditional ways of publicizing products through the 18 overseas offices of the Department of Tourism.

Very few tour operators have their own offices in other countries - most just rely on the marketing efforts of Department of Tourism. This method is so typical that even a medium or small-sized operator wishing to take part in international travel exhibitions and expositions, like ITB or Berlin, have to go through the Department of Tourism because they pre-book the space and sell it on to Indian participants through the International Association of Tour Operators (IATO). To be successful in inbound tour operations, you have to make the efforts required to gain direct access to overseas markets. This becomes possible once you start your marketing programme with the principles of “customer care” and/or “quality.”

The desired quality of the product and provision of customer care for tourists booked by your overseas contacts is a marketing tool for you. This is due to the overseas contact building and boosting confidence in your business. You also have to be ready to come up with packages on-demand in accordance with tourists' requests.

When products are designed with the above-mentioned goal in mind, pricing will always be a challenge in effective marketing. As traditional practice in the business, the operator providing cheaper rates would get the most business. But now, more players in the industry have switched their concentration to quality instead of quantity, when pricing their products.

Therefore, the market is divided into two parts – one that makes the budget or mass market access their goal, the other targeting niche markets where price is not an issue. It has already been pointed out that endorsement of quality products comes via word of mouth, rather than costly marketing operations as far as the individual tourist is concerned. For instance, even before the purchase of a package to holiday to an exotic destination, inbound tourists collect information from those who have already taken the trip. Due to this, when an Independent Foreign Tourist (FIT) lands at the destination, he/she will probably seek a taxi driver to take them to their specific hotel at location X. More than this, they will have an idea of the setting of the place they are staying. This is all due to word of mouth, endorsements and publicity of quality products. So, if you want to become a successful tour operator, you have to market package tours that are combinations of quality-conscious service providers in the wider business. After designing, pricing and promotion of a product with the use of correct tools, its distribution must have proper planning. You can approach the consumer directly by sending messages to foreign tourists through print and non-print media, or you can plan the marketing in a systematic way by working with other industry players. A lot of countries use their tourism offices and embassies for promoting tourism.

The marketing of inbound tour operations should focus on quality guarantees at every level of product design, development, delivery/promotion and after-delivery efforts, as all play an important role in the overall marketing philosophy - even if you don't gather feedback and analyse it. It is recommended that you employ all these and other creative activities to become a successful inbound tour operator.

Marketing Outbound Tours

Dissimilar to inbound tour operations, this segment is progressively growing and changing - especially in developing countries. In the 1970s and 80s outbound tourism in many was considered an elitist practice and only a limited number of destinations in Europe were popular - such as London, Paris and Rome. These destinations were heavily publicised in movies, though couldn't easily be reached by most people.

Regardless of the areas your tour focuses on - Singapore, Malaysia, Switzerland or anywhere - you and your marketing staff have to be familiar with these locations. It is only then that you will be able to present a true picture of the destination to your customers. Tourism is an intangible trade; therefore it is difficult to sample it. So, it is primarily your first-hand information about the destination(s) you are selling that will aid you in marketing them successfully. The most common method to achieve this target is to take advantage of familiarization tours offered by these destinations as endorsement tools.

Additionally, you and the staff can make use of the group escort facility while visiting destinations. A standard practice is to give one complimentary ticket for every group of 10-14 passengers. The same type of formula is applicable to hotel bookings. So your marketing staff can be trained by acquiring first-hand knowledge of the products they offer. Being an effective manager, you can divide the marketing department in accordance with the different destinations that you will be selling. If you plan to represent four destinations within the same continent, like Europe, you do not have to departmentalise. However, if you will be representing four destinations on different continents (which are known as TC Areas), then you need to make sure the staff is sufficiently trained and focus, which can be helped by departmentalising.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Sunetra Roday, Archana Biwal, Joshi Vandana, (2009), Tourism: Operations and Management*
- ✓ *B. Prideaux, Gianna Moscardo, Eric Laws, (2006), Managing Tourism and Hospitality Services: Theory and International Applications*