

Feature Article

Managing educational tourism in higher education: A Guam case study

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Introduction

Over the last several years, the tourism and travel industry has been recognized as one of the fastest growing industries in the world. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), international tourist arrivals grew by 7 % in 2017 to 1,323 million, the industry generated US\$ 1.6 trillion in export earnings and the UNWTO forecasts international tourist arrivals to reach 1.8 billion by 2030.⁽¹⁾ Due to the size and scope of the tourism industry, tourism is now an important source of revenue for many countries.

Tourism has been categorized into many groupings depending on the purpose for which it occurs, such as heritage tourism, mass tourism, medical tourism, media-induced tourism, dark tourism, sports tourism and many more. One of the categories of tourism that has great relevance to a wide range of tourism suppliers as well as public and private institutions of higher education is educational tourism. Educational tourism has its roots in the ancient world and it is now one of the fastest growing areas of travel and tourism. An increase in educational tourism, particularly from international source markets, can be attributed to the growing popularity of attaining knowledge and technical competencies from world's best destinations. Although the growth rate is expected to slow due to various factors primarily related to demographic trends, according to a report by ICEF Monitor, the number of students studying abroad at institutions of higher education experienced a 15-year average growth rate (from 2000 to 2015) of about 5.7 %.⁽²⁾

Unfortunately, educational tourism is too often overlooked by tourism professionals and marketers. In addition, research in educational tourism has not kept pace with the development of the tourism industry and thus deserves further examination. This paper will focus on educational tourism involving non-credit bearing students from international markets to overseas destinations that are institutions of higher education. The paper presents a Guam case study to help identify key lessons that can be utilized by other institutions that wish to capitalize on the growing trend of educational tourism from international source markets.

Methodology

It is important for any institution of higher education that is considering adopting a strategy to target educational tourists from international source markets that their stakeholders refer to current research available in this field. They should acquire as much information regarding the experiences of other institutions that have pursued a similar strategy, specifically with international markets. This paper provides a brief case study of the University of Guam's Professional and International Program's (PIP) successes and challenges faced in the management of inbound non-credit seeking international students, mainly from East Asian nations, such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and China. This case was selected due to the University of Guam's proximity to the major source markets in Asia, its standing as an accredited US institution located in the Western Pacific, and its recent experience in the field of educational tourism with international markets. Field studies, literature research, and extensive interviews were conducted with key personnel associated with educational tourism at the University of Guam. Data from the University of Guam PIP office was also collected to present the case below. This paper draws on documentary review and historical narratives of the development of educational tourism at the University of Guam. Findings and a discussion including lessons learned for implementation follow.

Global trends

Educational tourism, a sub-sector of the tourism industry, is gaining popularity as more and more people in industrialized nations have time and financial resources to travel abroad for self-improvement, relaxation, and fun. While educational tourism can be carried out in an informal setting incorporating relaxation, fun, and self-improvement (such as educational cruises and seminar vacations), there can be the more formal type of educational tourism setting that involves carrying out research activities and knowledge acquisition in traditional venues. Institutions of higher education are currently offering both the formal as well as the informal settings for educational tourists that travel to their institutions.

Because of the country's efforts to encourage educational tours, conduct quality research and maintain superior educational facilities, the United States is considered a favorable destination for tourists to pursue education. Universities in the United States offer various programs, such as student exchange programs for university credit, as well as other non-credit bearing programs that provide "an experience" as well as a certificate of completion for those participating. East Asian countries, such as Japan, South Korea, and China, have been important source markets for these programs not only in the United States, but also in the United Kingdom, Australia, and other developed nations.

One of the reasons for the popularity of educational tourism programs, particularly in English-speaking nations, is the demand from students for furthering the development of English language skills. With English now commonly accepted as lingua franca in the international business world, it has become very common among students and business executives to seek programs to enhance their skills in a very competitive environment.⁽³⁾ Educational tourists may include those not in employment as well as business managers involved in a variety of sectors, such as tourism, retail, technology, law, finance, military, or aviation. Japan was one of the first countries in East Asia to generate large numbers of international travelers to pursue an education in English language destinations, resulting in the establishment of English language institutes opening on many university campuses around the world.

Ever since Japanese overseas travel was liberalized by the Japanese government in 1964, the country has long been a source of steady inbound travel into the United States. However, not much attention has been given to the educational travel sector despite the size and potential of this source market. Because of the Japanese tradition of school organized student trip, known as *shugaku ryoko*, students at both public and private schools are accustomed to taking such trips from an early age. These trips, organized by the schools, are considered part of the curriculum and typically start as early as elementary school

and continue through high school. Participation in school trips is in most cases is compulsory since such trips are considered part of the school curriculum.⁽⁴⁾ While not all of these trips are to international destinations, there is a growing trend of choosing foreign countries for school trip destinations, especially among private schools. (see Table 1)

For Japanese overseas high school trips in the United States, the popular destinations include Hawaii and Guam, mainly due to the proximity to Japan. Geography appears to be an important factor as Singapore and Taiwan also rank high in popularity. The popularity of international destinations is also influenced by diplomatic relations and the perception of safety. Safety issues resulting from terrorist attacks, political and economic crises, and natural disasters have a direct impact on international tourism as a whole and have an even greater effect on school trip choices. It is widely acknowledged that destinations perceived as safe by potential tourists have a significant competitive advantage in the global tourism market, and particularly in educational tourism involving school trips. In 2016 and 2017, the University of Guam's educational tourism program experienced a number of challenges, including those concerning the issue of safety due to a political crisis. This paper will address the issues and how they were addressed, followed by some lessons learned and concluding remarks.

Guam case

This case study highlights the program offered at the University of Guam, also known as UOG. UOG is an open-admissions, semester-based, U.S. land-grant public comprehensive university offering 15 master's degree programs and 25 bachelor's degree programs in both onsite and online course offerings. These programs are administered by the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences ("CLASS"), the College of Natural and Applied Sciences ("CNAS"), the School of Business and Public Administration ("SBPA"), the School of Education ("SOE"), and the School of Nursing and Health Sciences ("SNHS"). In addition, continuing education unit (CEU) classes, professional development training, and English language training are offered through the Office of Professional and International Programs ("PIP"). The most recent student enrollment figures stood at 3,917 as of 2017.⁽⁵⁾ The University of Guam has conferred over 17,500 degrees over the past 66 years. The University of Guam is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) Senior College and University Commission.

The work carried out through the Office of Professional and International Program (PIP) is the focal point of this case study, as it is the only office at the university that manages, among other professional programs, international activities between UOG and other universities. (There is no International Student Office at UOG as seen in typical US universities that traditionally manages strategic relationships between schools, advises students, coordinates international student exchanges, etc.) Although PIP had been involved in educational tourism

Table 1: Japan's top ten destinations for *Shugaku Ryoko* in 2015

Rank	Country/Region	Number of Students	Number of Schools
1	Taiwan	36,356	224
2	Singapore	20,792	147
3	Australia	17,527	116
4	Malaysia	16,572	117
5	Guam	15,827	107
6	Hawaii	13,174	84
7	United States (mainland)	6,778	54
8	Canada	4,732	31
9	Vietnam	3,698	25
10	United Kingdom	3,383	33

Source: Educational Tour Institute (2016).

with international students to some degree over the last 2 to 3 decades, 2008 is considered the year when significant growth began to occur. That year, 289 students from three academic institutions overseas traveled to Guam to participate in non-credit bearing activities at UOG. By 2011, forty-two academic institutions were regularly sending students to UOG for English language programs on campus in both short-term (1-day) and long-term (2 to 4 week) programs. The majority of student groups visiting UOG during this period were from Japan; however, over the years, the source markets of overseas student visitors changed. The growth in the Korean outbound market, as well as the Taiwan and China markets, have contributed to the diversification of educational tourists to Guam.⁽⁶⁾

In reviewing the number of overseas students participating in educational tourism programs at UOG, the numbers experienced steady growth, except in 2011 due to Japan’s triple disaster, from 289 in 2008 to peak at 8,434 in 2015 (see Figure 1. Educational Tourists to the University of Guam, 2008-2017).

The numbers show an upward trend over the seven-year period between those years, only to drop significantly in 2016 and 2017 due to external forces, in this case, mainly due to geopolitical events.⁽⁷⁾ Various other external forces have contributed to the challenges of educational tourism programs at UOG, such as exchange rate fluctuations and domestic economic issues, but the perception of safety has proven to be a critical component in the decision-making process, particularly for Japanese schools.⁽⁸⁾ This is not only true for schools, but also in general, for tourists from Japan when selecting a holiday destination.

Revenue growth had also been trending upwards with the number of overseas students increased through the period 2008 to 2015. Although the number of students slid significantly during the period 2016 to 2017, PIP officials aggressively sought other markets and had the greatest success with South Korea, to make up for the lost revenue from the Japan market (see Figure 2). This was accomplished through relationships estab-

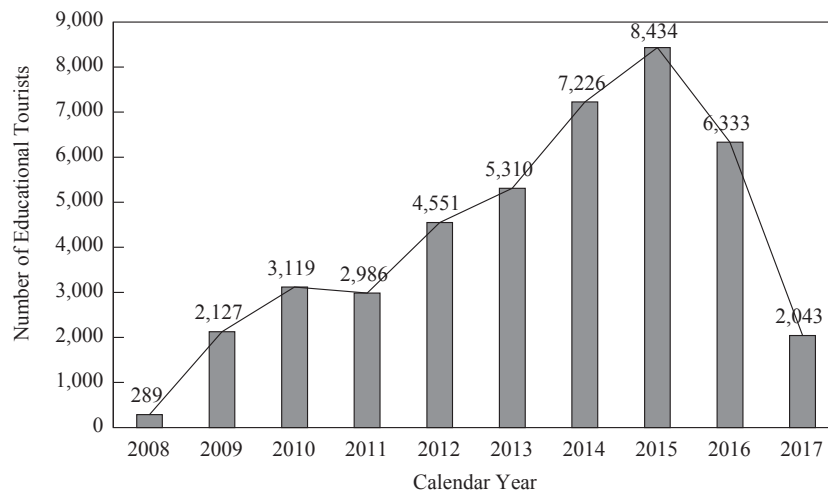


Figure 1: Educational tourists to the University of Guam 2008-2017
Source: University of Guam, Office of Professional and International Programs (2018).

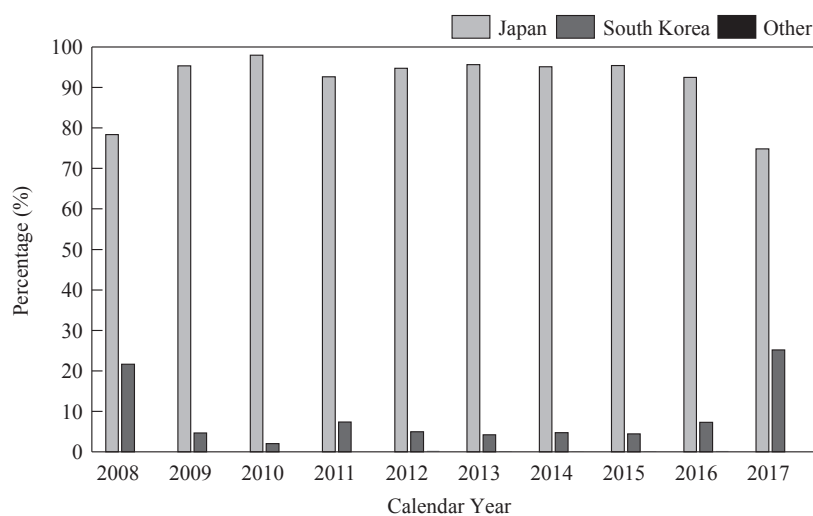


Figure 2: Educational tourists to the University of Guam percentage by source market, 2008-2017
Source: Office of Professional and International Programs, 2018.

lished with South Korean schools, which ironically were not as affected by Japanese schools by the North Korean threat.⁽⁹⁾

Understanding the type of programs and activities preferred by each of the source markets is important in the educational tourism industry just as it is for other forms of tourism. While Japan and South Korea remain the two largest source markets for UOG’s educational tourism market, there are distinct differences in the preferences of these markets, particularly in the choices for the length of the educational program. The Japan market shows a greater preference for short-term (1-day) programs, while the South Korean market tends to favor the long-term (2 to 4 week) programs (see Figures 3 and 4). For the other smaller markets, such as Taiwan and China, their preferences lean toward the short-term programs.

By discerning the preferences of the South Korean market through consistent post-visit evaluations, PIP officials were able to better manage the downturn in Japanese arrivals and partially recover lost revenues from the Japanese school cancellations. Although the overall number of students had decreased in 2016 and 2017 to less than one-third of the previous year (from 6,333 to 2,033), the revenue for 2017 decreased less than

9 % from 870,803 to 794,873 (see Figure 5). This is attributed to the fact that the yield per student from the South Korean market was much higher than the Japanese students due to the market’s preference for long-term programs. Thus, increased revenue per student was realized during this period as a way to offset losses from the Japan cancellations.

Despite PIP’s successes in growing the educational tourism program for international students at the University of Guam, PIP officials faced many challenges over the years and still continue to operate while working around these challenges. These include the previously mentioned perception of safety issue of the destination as they relate to world events (such as the North Korea nuclear threat in 2016 and 2017) and local crime incidents that involve tourists from key source markets like Japan.⁽¹⁰⁾

Another major challenge is the university’s lack of infrastructure, mainly in the form of adequate dormitory facilities. The University of Guam Residence Halls consist of three, 2-story buildings. Currently, there are only a total of 115 dorm rooms to accommodate the maximum number of 207 residents,

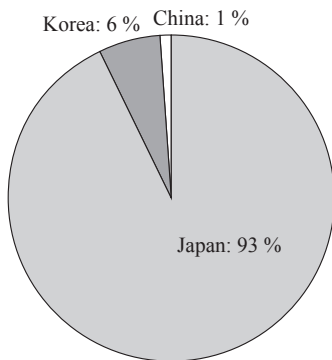


Figure 3: Participation of schools in short-term programs by country (2008-2017)
Source: Office of Professional and International Programs, 2018.

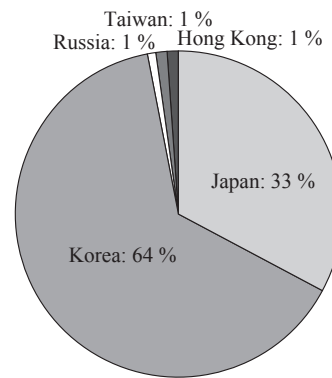


Figure 4: Participation of schools in long-term programs by country (2008-2017)
Source: Office of Professional and International Programs, 2018.

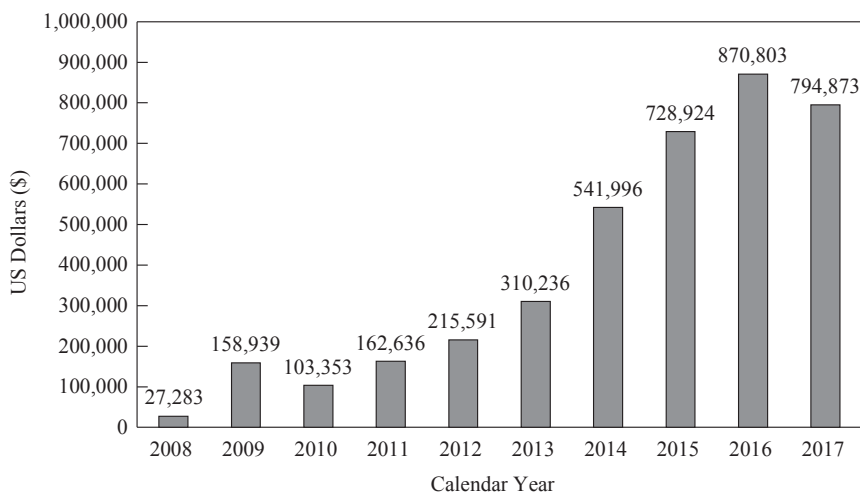


Figure 5: Gross revenue from educational tourists to the University of Guam (2008-2017)
Source: Office of Professional and International Programs, 2018.

which results in a waiting list for regular full-time students. According to Carlos Taitano, PIP Director, the university has “barely scratched the surface” in meeting the demand due to this shortcoming (personal communication, October 15, 2017). A new residence hall, with \$43USD million allocated for its construction, is being planned to meet this demand.

Some of the other issues related to the lack of infrastructure at the university include the unavailability of facilities for international students to use, which often shared with regularly enrolled students. There is also the lack of a reliable public transportation on the island, leaving students, especially those enrolled in the long-term programs, stranded on campus with little to no dining facilities during the semester break periods.

Despite the growth of revenue generated by PIP, staffing has not increased to keep up with the demand is limited to a core of two full-time managers and two full-time administrative workers, along with the occasional part-time student intern or work-study assistant. This has been due to the belt-tightening of the local government which subsidizes the operation of this public, land-grant institution. Because of this, faculty turnover has not always led to the hiring of replacements, making the availability of current faculty to support PIP programs even more challenging with their increased workload for traditional credit-bearing courses.

Other challenges faced by PIP are external factors and beyond the control of the university. These factors are faced by other service providers in Guam’s tourism industry, and they include currency fluctuations (i.e., JPY versus USD, KRW versus USD, etc.), air transportation costs, increased competition with other destinations due to low-cost carriers or fuel prices, and finally the decision-making protocols between the school and their parent-teacher organizations. While the PIP officials have worked to be proactive in addressing these challenges, these challenges are accepted as external factors that are not going to be entirely eliminated.

Finally, PIP officials acknowledged early on that working with diverse source markets was not going to be easy with differing perceptions and needs. However, they also had an understanding that a diversification of market was inevitable and was a challenge that had to be accepted for the future of PIP’s international programs. First, by working with the Japan market, then by expanding to South Korea, and eventually albeit in small numbers to Taiwan, China, Russia, and others, the PIP programs now have alternatives to focusing on a single market and new strategies for further expansion.

Lessons learned for improving educational tourism

A number of key points can be identified from this Guam case study as lessons learned. These lessons can be adapted by other institutions of higher education that are currently managing educational tourism programs with international students or are considering such activity as a way to enhance the experiences of both visitors and residents of the university community. Of course, not all of the lessons may be applicable

to every situation, but by being aware of past circumstances and how they were handled at other institutions, university stakeholders can be better prepared to address their particular situation.

Develop an understanding of the source markets and their educational tourists’ preferences

This involves analyzing the educational tourists’ profiles and behaviors, identifying their motivations and needs, and providing updated information so that their expectations are realistic. In order to increase educational tourism at one’s institution, one of the first steps would be to analyze the needs of students and their aspirations. The needs of target students should be analyzed to determine what can be done to attract them. Pricing is a very important consideration while deciding the destination for educational tourists and by understanding the markets, an educational institution can offer education programs at different price levels to attract the needs of the different markets.

Blend the local with the international

Because a majority of educational tourists travel to international destinations to enhance their language capabilities as well as to experience interactions in an international atmosphere, having local students participate in these programs can boost the quality of offerings. One of the ways to ensure that these interactions take place is to offer programs like the Sports Adventure Program at UOG that offer classes for both residents and educational tourists to participate in sports activities class conducted in English. This allows international students to experience the unique outdoor settings of the destination, practice their English language skills, as well as establish memorable links with residents. In order for this to happen, the educational institution must train the people involved in educational tourism and efforts should be to provide international students hospitality in such a way that they are satisfied with their experience. Safe and affordable accommodation facilities should be easily available for the students for long-term programs like these to be successful.

Utilize resources unique to the destination

In order to enhance the experiences of the educational tourists and to maximize the use of local resources, highlight the unique attributes of both the institution and the destination when offering programs to schools and students abroad. If available near the host institution, the open space offered in the natural environment is a definite draw especially to the schools situated in urban environments throughout East Asia. Opportunities to promote the educational programs being offered by the university for overseas students can be shared with key decision makers at educational fairs and sessions in countries abroad. Creating an awareness of the benefits of the programs, along with the cost and other factors, is critical to making the programs successful. In addition, higher education institutions can collaborate with local businesses or other community pro-

grams and offer a unique experience which will increase the chance of generating repeat visits.

Engage residents to participate in educational tourism with student organization interaction and internship opportunities

As mentioned earlier, the greater opportunities for interaction with a destination's residents can significantly enhance the educational tourists' experience. With resident student involvement, this can be an opportunity to further internationalize a university campus, which can lead to participating students becoming more aware of their interconnectedness with the world. The involvement of faculty advisors for student organizations assisting with the educational tourism programs can also be of great value to all parties. In many cases, the faculty themselves benefit greatly in their professional development, as their involvement can lead to faculty becoming more sensitive to issues of multiculturalism. This is a result that moves beyond educational tourism and leads to a greater advantage for the university community.

Conclusions

Educational school trips as described in this paper, continue to serve as important events arranged by schools, resulting in significant economic impact for host destinations. While costs may be higher than domestic school trips, participation has been growing in the international arena, with large numbers coming from East Asian countries. These trips are viewed as bringing value through the international learning experiences for the students that go beyond simple classroom lectures. In addition, not only are the parents and educators encouraging these experiences, but the governments also see international travel as a positive way for students to experience the world in a globalizing society and acknowledge that international school trips help further the globalization of their citizens.

When students participate in educational tourism in another country, the students are exposed to variables that contribute to the successes or challenges experienced in other countries. This, in turn, contributes to ways of thinking that can be a force to fighting ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and cultural misunderstandings. Furthermore, the students may be transformed to make themselves agents of social change in their native countries after they are exposed to different values in areas such as equal rights.

Finally, it is easy to acknowledge that technological development that we are currently experiencing throughout the world contributes to greater interconnectedness and offers new opportunities for exchange, cooperation, and harmony in the world. At the same time, we also see an increase in conflict and intolerance, be it cultural, religious, or ethnic. Technology alone will not be the solution to challenges we face in the world today. Face to face international encounters through educational tourism opportunities described in this case are a key component to the nurturing of cooperation of people coming from different backgrounds. By learning lessons to foster the

growth of mutually beneficial international exchange programs in higher education institutions, we can not only generate revenue to support the operation of universities, but through a tourism activity, we can also contribute to an important mission common to universities around the world and that is to encourage exploration, discovery, and collaboration.

Notes

- (1) UNWTO (2018). Why Tourism? Tourism—an economic and social phenomenon. Retrieved from <http://www2.unwto.org/content/why-tourism>.
- (2) ICEF Monitor (2018, February 7). New study forecasts slowing growth in international student mobility. Retrieved from <http://monitor.icef.com/2018/02/new-study-forecasts-slowing-growth-in-international-student-mobility/>.
- (3) See Iglesias, M. (2016). The Language Tourism Market System: Conceptualising Language Tourism. *International Journal of Scientific Management and Tourism*, Vol.2, 1, pp 25-40, for a description of the changing trend from exam preparation to shorter, more practical, results-driven programs.
- (4) According to Japan School Tours Bureau (2012), school trips are a major event for every school, and approximately 98.4% of junior high schools and 97.1 % of high schools in Japan executed such trips.
- (5) See University of Guam 2017-2018 Fact Book at: https://www.uog.edu/_resources/files/administration/_institutional_effectiveness/AY2017_2018_FactBook_final_8218_wBookmarkTOCLink.pdf.
- (6) Despite the diversification of markets, numbers from Japan during the period 2008 to 2017 made up 93 % of total visitors, while predominantly South Korea and the other markets comprised of the rest.
- (7) In 2016, a North Korean propaganda channel published a video showing a missile allegedly targeting Guam. In 2017, U.S. President Trump's "fire and fury" threat in response to reports that North Korea was considering carrying out missile strikes on Guam resulted in a pullback from Japanese schools that were planning to visit Guam and UOG.
- (8) According to Hofstede's (2001) uncertainty avoidance index, the Japanese culture was labeled as one of the most uncertainty-avoiding cultures in the world. In addition, Japanese parents are often very concerned about safety issues on school trips and can have a great influence on destination decisions.
- (9) South Koreans seem unfazed by the constant threat and continue to travel overseas during such crises. According to a 2017 survey by Gallup Korea, fifty-eight percent of South Koreans do not think North Korea would actually start a war.
- (10) In 2014, a jury convicted a Guam man of murdering three Japanese tourists in a crash and stabbing rampage that hurt 11 others. See <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/chad-ryan-desoto-convicted-guam-crash-stabbing-rampage-n171861>.