

Tourism Development Strategy (2006 – 2010)

Vision

By 2010 Linden has become a tourist destination topping 10,000 visitors per year. More than 300 beds are offered by hotels and bed & breakfast providers. Linden and Region 10 offer attractive events and particularly Linden serves as a hub for tourists to other destinations in the interior. Tourism has developed into the third biggest industry in the Region after mining and forest production. The enterprises working in the tourism sector are well-trained and developed into hospitable entities serving satisfied clients. The Region 10 Tourism Development Association (RTTDA) offers professional services, avails of a well-functioning office and counts more than 100 members. The Region 10 tourism industry is well integrated into national efforts to attract even more tourists to Guyana.

Summary

The Tourism Development Strategy centers around three axes:

1. Development of Region 10 into a genuine tourist destination (identification of destinations, creation of events),
2. Improvement of services through local enterprises (training, information),
3. Institutional strengthening of the Region 10 Tourism Development Association (organisation, coordination).

The three axes are accompanied by an aggressive marketing of Region 10 as a tourist destination (external marketing) and of the RTTDA as the major platform for local enterprises earning their livelihood from tourism (internal marketing of the association).

Logic of this strategy: the creation and identification of tourist events and destinations trigger a higher influx of visitors who will be professionally hosted and catered for by the local tourism industry to make them come back again in future. RTTDA is the institutional backbone ensuring organization, coordination, promotion and services to its members.

Target Market

Given the comparatively low attraction of Region 10 destinations and events to foreign tourists at present, focus will be laid on national and Caribbean visitors (Linden as an event city, industrial heritage, and nature). Some potential for European and American tourists is identified in bird watching possibilities, Linden as a transition to more attractive destination in Region 9 (Rupununi Savannah, Iwokrama, trips to Brazil, etc.), and in linking Linden to other cities during flight hopper tours (such as Bartica – Linden – Georgetown on a day tour).

Greatest market potential lies in the Diaspora Lindeners having keen interest in revisiting their birth town while some are expected to resettle and invest in Linden after retirement¹. The influence of this target market became clearly visible with the announcement of 300 Diaspora Lindeners visiting the Linden Town Week 2006 celebrations with the dedicated assistance of the Linden Fund/USA.

Tourist attractions (events + nature)

New tourist attractions will be created if the tourism industry is to grow. The starting point is the successful operation of singular events (such as the Kashif & Shanghai Football Tournament and the Linden Town Week). More events preferably stretched over several days will be identified to improve the influx of tourists. The Rockstone Fish Festival planned for August 2006 is the first step into this direction. Other ideas emitted so far are: Jazz Festival, Cycling race Georgetown – Linden with finish in Linden, extended carnival festivities (LICA = Linden Carnival), and regattas. It is evident that developed event ideas need to be marked by a great uniqueness.

Apart from the event attractions, other destinations and related services will be offered. Some have already been identified and will be further explored: bird watching and *Victoria Regia* on Gluck Island (*eco-tourism niche for short one-day visits, and possibilities of setting up larger tourist facilities such as a guest-house or professional boat services*), museum², fishing and hunting tours around Rockstone, visits to reclamation activities in the mined-out areas with scientific guidance, regular weekend visits of the bauxite mine, etc.

Events and nature will be accompanied by a comprehensive signage system leading tourists to and guiding them in Linden. A huge signboard at the Soesdyke-Linden junction will indicate the way to Linden. Arriving in Linden a tourist signboard with map and important destinations of relevance for tourists in Linden will be established (another one for visitors coming from the South). In collaboration with the Town Council traffic signs will be placed in Linden and on the routes to Kwakwani, Ituni, Rockstone, Lethem and other destinations in Region 10. In Linden itself, buildings of relevance for tourists (such as the waterwheel, museum, etc.) will be indicated by special boards explaining the history in brief. Differently colored sign posts will guide the tourists to these destinations.

¹ The development of an appropriate reinsertion and investment strategy might be hinted at this point.

² The museum will be an autonomous body being a member of the association; RTTDA will occupy a seat in the Board of Trustees and bring in its knowledge and experience.

Tourist services

Existing and new tourist attractions and events can only be marketed successfully if the clients' needs are satisfied. Hence, we favor competition and we welcome any investor in the tourism sector from abroad or from other areas in Guyana.

Tourist services will be provided through the "Linden Office for Visitors"³ (LOV) as the most important entry point for client information and through individual service providers being members of the association.

a. The "**Linden Office for Visitors**" (LOV) is the executive branch of the association where contacts with clients are made. Hard copies of all promotion material are made available to incoming visitors. Email queries are answered and the association's activities are coordinated by an executive secretary. More personnel might be hired if the financial situation allows for that. The office is located in the museum; it is equipped with PC, printer, photocopier, display shelves. LOV serves as a facilitating and mediating agency linking customers to the Region 10 tourism service providers. It will concentrate on association members in the first place, hence creating a need for service providers to join.

b. **Individual service providers:** existing hotel accommodations in Linden, Ituni and Kwakwani will be inspected and rated according to existing standards. A four-tier categorization will be applied as this is currently done with the B&B providers. The rating (stars for hotels and restaurants, diamonds for B&B providers) will be officially acknowledged through specifically designed signs (size: 1x1 ft) which can be fixed on the walls of the establishments⁴. These signs carry high promotional value and may also attract other service providers to join the association. Assessments and inspections will be done on a yearly routine basis providing room for all members to improve their standards and services. Tourists can easily locate recommended establishments. While rating criteria exist for hotels and B&B providers, a similar rating system for restaurants will be elaborated and applied.

Service providers will be trained in areas common for all such as client reception, customer care, monitoring of customer satisfaction, pricing of services, importance of insurance systems, safety regulations and cleanliness issues. These training offers will be binding for the association's members in order to maintain and eventually improve their grades. Furthermore, there will be sector-specific training arrangements on a needs basis such as cooking of specialty dishes, accommodation standards and design, kitchen hygiene, etc. The needs of the different tourism sectors will be analysed during meetings with the committees to be established under the umbrella of the RTTDA (see institutional strengthening).

³ Our motto will be "We care with love!".

⁴ Only for members of the association!

Institutional strengthening

RTTDA is a certified and recognized institution under the Friendly Societies Act. However, in the past the internal functioning was based entirely on the voluntary work of dedicated members who were never asked to pay any fees.

The newly developed fees structure distinguishes between a general admission fee of \$2,000 for all and sector-specific yearly fees which have been developed in accordance with income prospects⁵. In future, only those individuals and enterprises are considered members who have paid their dues and will be eligible to vote and to decide during the internal meetings.

At the end of each fiscal year, RTTDA will conduct "Certificate Award Functions" during which members who provided excellent services and other personalities and institutions which contributed significantly to the tourism development in Region 10 will be awarded with certificates and plaques. These functions are also meant to enhance visibility of the association and the sector.

Increase in (paid) membership will be achieved through the provision of services which consist primarily of marketing (see below), training and lobbying. The services will be organized according to our members' needs and in cooperation with the regional and national bodies in which RTTDA is organized (see next paragraph). Sector-wise committees (for example: B&B providers, restaurant owners, etc.) will be established whenever desired by the members in order to make sure that specific questions can be professionally dealt with by the concerned business people. Chiefs of committees will be elected who report to the RTTDA General Assembly during its official meetings.

RTTDA will become a paying member of the Linden Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Development to ensure the best representation of its interest on the regional level. Interests on the national level will be defended through membership in THAG and close cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce (MINTIC) and particularly the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA).

We will develop special relationships to identified sponsors and donor agencies because it is acknowledged that the membership fees will hardly suffice to pay for overhead costs and association staff. A particular relationship exists with the Linden Fund representing the largest tourism target group at the time being, GTIS and LEAP which provided valuable assistance in the past. Inputs in institutional strengthening are required in the following areas: preparing requests for external assistance, internal functioning of the association and membership care, linkage to potential visitors overseas, tourist product development, assistance in design of marketing devices.

⁵ In the range of \$3,000 - \$12,000>

Marketing

The printing of the “Discover Linden” glossy magazine will serve as a starter in Region 10 tourism marketing efforts. The Linden Town Week is the catalyst to get more diversified marketing efforts on stream.

The RTTDA Web Page is the central long-term marketing tool informing customers about tourist destinations and accommodation facilities. The office in the museum building is centrally located; it will be staffed with at least one competent person who answers questions on the telephone, replies to email inquiries, links visitors to accommodation facilities, distributes tourist brochures and sells tourism articles and literature.

Brochures on the following issues are circulated per hard copy: B&B facilities, hotel accommodation, restaurant and catering services, travel-, boat and fishing tours, Linden tourist map, other tourist services such as bars, taxi and other transport services, offer of handicraft products, and a general flyer summarizing key information of interest to tourists.

To attract visitors from Georgetown, regular ads are published in national newspapers, particularly in conjunction with the different events to be organized. On very special occasions, TV ads will be made on the national TV station.

All published information material will also be accessible to interested persons at the “Tourism & Hospitality Association of Guyana” (THAG) of which RTTDA becomes a member. National seminars and workshops on tourism will be used as a platform to attract visitors and investors in the tourism industry to Region 10.