

Business innovations in a recession: A meso perspective of inbound tour operators

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Recent downturns pose challenges to many industries and businesses are constantly searching for ways to improve and stabilize their returns. Most tourism and business literature concerning inbound tour operators tends to focus on market specific and the positive relations between inbound tourism and economic development (Cortes and Pulina 2010), factors affecting inbound tourism (Phakdisoth and Kim 2007, Saayman and Saayaman 2008). This paper in many ways fills the gap in tourism literature where seldom the element of recession is mixed with inbound operators' challenges. The harsh reality of a business dependent on inbound tourist arrivals demands a high degree of versatility and adaptability to seasonal travel patterns and economic volatility. While most tour operators specialize in external and domestic markets, there are few who extend their reach beyond standard operations. This research investigates a travel agency's, (Singapore Sightseeing Tour East), experience of the 2001-2003 recession and the innovative steps taken to circumvent the recession and its continued relevance to contemporary economic situations. Based on this Inbound Tour Operator's challenges and innovative turnarounds, this paper will present successful strategies for penetrating and creating markets. Using case study analysis with archival evidence of the company's records and interviews, the research adopts a qualitative method to understand the tour operator's initiatives. The study, though limited to Singapore's specific context, has wider implications for inbound tour operators in similar situations elsewhere.

Biography

K. Thirumaran is a faculty member of James Cook University, Australia (Singapore Campus). He has worked in various capacities ranging from middle and upper management. These included the Financial, Computing Education, Travel and Transport and Food and Beverage sectors. Currently, he lectures in Tourism and Business with research interests in Cultural Tourism, Destination Marketing and Vandalism.

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