A Study on Tourism Development of the Old Commercial District in Jinan: An Experience Perspective

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ABSTRACT

As one of the typical historic districts in Jinan, the old commercial district, the carrier of the modern history of Jinan, should be inherited and developed. From the perspective of tourism experience, this paper decides a tourism theme, and this thread runs through experience tour item design, supporting facilities optimization, and experience marketing implement to enhance the tourists’ comprehensive experience effect and revive the old commercial district in Jinan.

Keywords: Historic district, Tourism experience, Old commercial district in Jinan, Tourism development

1 INTRODUCTION

Historic districts are a special type of cultural heritage. They are important material carrier of urban history and culture, and possesses irreplaceable value in science and history. In order to inherit and continue the urban cultural context and adapt to the modernization of the city, the historic district need to be effectively protected and revived. With the cultural heritage tourism gaining more and more popularity with tourists, the tourism development of historic district has also become a research subject for many scholars. Many cities have carried out experiments, but the results differ. In the era of experience economy, new changes appear in tourism development especially the characteristic of tourism experience is highlighted more than before. Involvement and emotional experience are pursued by many tourists instead of the simple sightseeing. Thus, historic district tourism should also adjust the traditional mode and content of tourism development to the need of tourism experience.

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In 1986, Jinan was approved as a state-list historic & cultural city. The old commercial district is a typical historic district which embodies the modern history and culture of Jinan. But for many reasons, the old commercial district loses vitality gradually in the urban modernization. From the perspective of tourism experience, this paper discusses how to develop tourism to inherit, continue and revive the old commercial district of Jinan on the premise of preserving the cultural heritages in this area.

2 EXPERIENCE ECONOMY & TOURISM EXPERIENCE

2.1 Experience Economy

Alwin Toffler, the famous American futurologist, first put forward the word "experience economy" in his book Future Shock, but it didn't attract much attention at that time. The society began to pay attention to it when American economist Joseph Pine II and James Gilmore’s book Experience Economy was published in 1999 which gives detailed description of experience: experiences are memorable events that businesses orchestrate by means of goods and service to attract customers’ involvement. The most obvious feature of "experience economy" is regarding customers as "products" of enterprises, and emphasizing consumers are willing to pay for their involvement and experience in the process of production and consumption because they get emotional satisfaction in this process. Thus, the essence of experience economy is pursuing the individuation of production and consumption.

2.2 Tourism Experience

Tourism has always been a particular “holiday experience industry”. In recent years, the importance of the conscious creation of emotional tourism products has become even greater. Tourism experience refers to the experience or emotional experience that tourists get in the process of sightseeing, activity involvement and folk custom experience, which is different from the experience of daily life. Tourism activities can satisfy the tourists’ need for health, gourmet food, exotic culture and so on. Every tour will give tourists unique experience. Tourists gradually participate in tourism product development and marketing, and become the leading force in tourism activities design. To improve tourism experience will be the primary goal to the tourist destination. Historic districts become hot spots for tourists to travel for the rich experience of history and folk culture provided by its abundant historic sites which show special historic features.

3 BACKGROUND AND CURRENT STATUS

In 1904, with the approval of the Qing authority, Jinan became the first inland city in modern China that opened port. Port opening greatly promoted urban construction, economic development and ideological consciousness, and also left behind valuable historic and cultural heritages for modern Jinan, such as the small grid road pattern just like the checkerboard, lots of valuable historic buildings (group), etc. The commercial district used to be prosperous one hundred years ago, but now things change. It is not prosperous as it used to be and is no longer the economic and commercial center because of the accelerating urbanization, the change of city center, and the residents’ living demand. In the process of constructing modern Jinan, the old commercial district suffers damage; block protection doesn’t look good; the characteristic historical and cultural resources have been rarely publicized; tourism development is next to nothing.
Recently, more and more people realize the importance of protecting historic and cultural heritage in old commercial district. To protect the old commercial district and continue business port culture, the relevant departments of Jinan government and professional institutions have repeatedly made joint effort to compile "Jinan Historic and Cultural Region Protection Strategy Study", "Jinan Commercial District Conservation and Renewal Design", "Jinan Conservation Plan of Historic City" (Draft) since 2007. These documents make detailed plans to conserve and develop the old commercial district: designate port conservation area to protect the structure and cultural heritage there, and try to transform the old commercial district.

4 ADVICE ON TOURISM DEVELOPMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TOURISM EXPERIENCE

The tourism development of Jinan old commercial district is still in the exploratory stage, and need to design experience tourism projects that not only reflect the characteristics of the old commercial district but also meet most of the tourists’ demands.

4.1 Refine the Theme of Experience Tourism

The theme is the main line of historic district experience tourism. The historic cultural deposit - self-development is the feature of Jinan old commercial district which shows hundred years’ vicissitudes of business and industry. Now the old shops are no longer as bustling as they were one hundred years ago. There are abundant tourism resources - distinctive block planning, simple and elegant Chinese and western buildings, shops, and time-honored brands for visitors, but insufficient participatory and personal experience tourism activities. So the tourism theme shouldn’t be positioned simply as the restoration of architectural style or the port style shopping district, but the 100-year commercial culture through deep exploration of port culture and historic building resources in the area. In addition, tourism activity should focus on relaxing, recreational and widely appealing activities according to characteristics of the current mass tourism market needs, and enrich the old commercial district "stage" with the lively and vivid experience tourism projects. Therefore, this paper sets “Continuing Commercial District Culture and Experiencing Old Traditional Flavor” as the tourism theme of the Jinan old commercial district.

4.2 Design Experience Tourism Projects

Designing appropriate experience tourism project, building the scene and atmosphere for tourists to feel the cultural connotation of commercial district, and integrating all the blocks into a big "stage" which is consistent with the tourism theme can help tourists get an integral tour experience and feel the charm of Jinan old commercial district. The following are detailed steps:

(1) The design of appropriate ornamental tour routes should base on the special road landscape and historic buildings, and allow visitors to appreciate hundreds of years of commercial district culture.

(2) Reproducing period of "flourish culture" one century ago, and allowing visitors to listen to Jinan traditional folk art contribute to the wonderful aural experience.

(3) Exploring traditional food culture, and developing time-honored restaurants, such as Cao Bao steamed stuffed bun and Ju Feng De can give tourists unforgettable taste experience.

(4) Develop popular and participatory activities for visitors so that they can feel the old commercial district features. For example, Hong Ji Tang (a pharmacy) museum can initiate a project letting tourist make medicine sachets by themselves under the guidance of the staff during their tour which can help visitors to get a deep knowledge of different herbal medicine.
Rui Fu Xiang silk shop can design a kind of semi-finished product and visitors can make it finished product under the guidance of tailors. Folk art show center can also consider setting up a venue for visitors who want to perform.

4.3 Optimize the Supporting Facilities for Experience Tourism

The level of supporting facilities in the old commercial district will also affect the overall feelings of tourists because tourism experience is comprehensive. In the matter of catering, we should focus on developing special diet and infusing port culture into catering service. About accommodation, the new hotel should meet the requirements of century commercial district planning and be consistent with the overall environment. We can scientifically transform the original old buildings into lodging facilities. As regarding to the traffic, the small grid pattern of the roads in old commercial district is not suitable for driving, so it is necessary to improve the public transport facilities, such as tourist buses, shared bike and adequate parking spaces for tourists. As to shopping, we should combine the design of shopping activities with port culture which can arouse tourists’ interest. In regard to tourism guide, we should improve interpretation system and tourism line map. because only when the tourists know about the history, can the tourists get a relatively complete tourism experience.

4.4 Experience Tourism Marketing

The tourism experience effects are closely related to the understanding of the historical blocks. Due to the inadequate tourism publicity, the old commercial district has low popularity so it is of great significance to develop the experience tourism marketing. First, make use of advertising media. Jinan municipal government and the old commercial district developer should make full use of various media, especially the network media, such as tourism forum, social networking sites and WeChat platform, to promote the special experience tourism resources. Second, make use of the good word of mouth, and let the customers to be the positive publicity force to attract more tourists.

5 CONCLUSION

Nowadays, experience tourism is getting more and more popular and the development of Jinan old commercial district should follow the trend-- developing experience tourism project according to theme on the basis of the protecting the historic and cultural heritage to give the tourists an impression. Then the rejuvenation of the old commercial district can be achieved through the development of the old commercial district tourism.

REFERENCES