

The Difficulties Encountered by Regional Hostels in the Face of Bad Publicity and How to Solve Them

Speakers:

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ROBERT

We all know the top European destinations:

London ... Paris

Rome ... Barcelona

Dublin ... Berlin

Corfu ...etc....

But what about the “less popular” destinations?

Catania Yerevan

Canakkale ... Baku

Belfast

Would you travel to a city if

- **It is difficult to reach (distant, limited transport connections,);**
- **The locals don't speak English;**
- **It is dangerous (crowded streets,Mafia, “crazy locals”, unknown area)**
- **It is expensive**
- **It is “backwards” (no modern facilities)**
- **The Media says “NO!!!”**

Catania would not be the number 1 destination for most travellers. It is relatively unknown in comparison with other Italian, or Sicilian, cities such as Milan, Rome, Florence, Palermo etc.

I think a lot of people would think (maybe they won't say it to me) of Sicily as meaning :

MAFIA!!

Of course the world media jumps on almost every opportunity to write about Mafia corruption at local and national levels in Italy. Cinema and television have played their part with productions such as “The Godfather”, “Wiseguys”, “The Sopranos” and others. Mafia assassinations make world headlines more than they should do. Even a recent trade fair in Germany advertised new “Kaffeemafia” served from the back of a hearse!!

Or maybe some of you remember the scenes which went around Europe last year after a police officer was killed during riots after a football game between Catania and Palermo.

Of course Italy is famous for constant strike action, mainly affecting trains and planes.

Catania does not see the same number of tourists as in Rome so the need for the locals to speak English is not as important .

As hostels are relatively few in Sicily most publicity is concentrated on 4 and 5 star hotels which are way beyond the budgets of most backpackers. Few people know that there are hostels in Sicily or where to find the ones that do exist.

And finally Sicily is perceived by some as chaotic, backwards and lacking in modern structures. The image of the “lupa”, the typical Sicilian form of transport does not help to give a modern image of the island.

So .. would YOU come to Sicily?? I probably wouldn't !! So how do we get the hostel to fill up?

- 1) Good publicity. Show backpackers how easy it is to reach the city / hostel with a good flyer with a map and various transport options.
- 2) Good website with lots of photos of the city as well as the hostel.
- 3) Don't hide the problems but show the good side of the problems (the town of Corleone is one of the most visited towns in the south of Italy).
- 4) Organised tours leaving from the door of the hostel so our guests won't worry about getting lost!!
- 5) Our reception staff speak English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Polish and Japanese. A good mix of languages helps guests feel at home.
- 6) Create a good network of contacts between hostels and B&Bs. Create awareness of how easy and cheap it is to travel in a zone while having lots of fun. We are working towards this with a new website and campaign “www.hostelsofsicily.com” to help promote the city and the region, and ultimately the hostel.

SOFIA

- 1) "Do you know what flight I caught to come here?" (I'm catching a 3am flight landing in Barcelona at 5 am.)
- Athens is far, no ryanair! travellers around Europe tend to choose more easily reachable destinations. BUT:
 - a) contact hostels where low cost connect your city or there are direct flights and let them know!! most of people travelling are not aware of different possibilities to get there! (we recently discovered the Catania/Athens flight!)
 - b) help with hard timetables (late arrivals etc.) with pick ups, possibility of early/late/flexible checkins/outs!
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- 2) "Traffic jams, caos etc."
 - are you really going to drive into the city centre and get stuck? have a look at Athens metro, it's fantastic! (show pic) Inform people in website on how to move around quickly and safe and avoid traffic! Anyway, some roads look like an Asian crowded city, markets, ethnic... BUT slowly sip a coffee like a Greek in a terrace under the sunlight, walk in the royal gardens (pic), stroll at the seaside.
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- 3) Politicians
 - Tend to invest on the islands only, Athens is not shown as a weekend city - there's not we can do about this, BUT to help discover the city, go where the locals go and word of mouth will spread if it's worth it!
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- 4) Travellers like the whole experience, where they stay is part of it!

- your hostel will make it a great experience or destroy it! we all have memories of our travels connected to place where we stayed, people we meet, improve security, advise on where to go, what to do, help make the most of it and even if destination is not promoted by the media, it will be by the travellers themselves!!! (much better)

SVETA

- Some destinations sell themselves

- ▶ - Whereas others are unknown

Even though these destinations have a lot to offer!

Why to visit Armenia?

- ▶ To taste Armenian cuisine
- ▶ To see historical Khachkars
- ▶ To learn about the rich culture and history
- ▶ To see historical monuments and monasteries
 - Garni temple of Hellenistic period – 1st century
 - Zvartnots – 7th century
 - Edjmiadzin monastery built after the adoption of Christianity in 301
 - Geghard monastery carved in rock – 13th century
 - Matenadaran depository of about 1700 ancient manuscripts
- ▶ To go hiking and mountaineering
- ▶ To explore beyond standard holiday destinations

Destination – Unknown

- ▶ Bad Publicity:
 - Bad travel stories: eg needed to pay bribes
 - Difficult to enter the country
 - Mafia rules the country
 - Conflict in neighboring countries and tension at some borders
 - Faith based conflict (unsure of state religion)

Concerns of travelers

- ▶ Is it safe?
- ▶ Is it safe to travel alone for females?
- ▶ How easy will it be to travel around there?
- ▶ Will I be able to communicate?
- ▶ Will I find affordable accommodation?

Safety

- ▶ Fear of the unknown
- ▶ Fear of the rumours – Mafia!

Solution:

- ▶ Provide information!
 - Website
 - Testimonials
 - Blog articles (e.g. Women cyclists etc)
 - Direct emails
 - Relevant chat rooms (e.g. Lonely Planet)

Transport

- ▶ How easy will it be to travel around there?

Solution:

- ▶ Be expert on transport solutions for travellers – point them in the right direction.

Communication

- ▶ Language barrier

Solution:

- ▶ Aim for diversity in languages in staff
- ▶ Refer to other relevant websites (e.g. Tourist Information Centre)

Accommodation

- ▶ I don't want to pay too much!

Solution:

- ▶ Do your research and know your competitors
- ▶ Price yourself accordingly
- ▶ Highlight your service offering

Promoting the Hostel

- ▶ Website is very powerful

- *Some guests have confessed that the reason for them visiting Armenia was because they found a hostel in Yerevan!*

- ▶ Testimonials speak for themselves

Dear Envoy Team! Wonderful hostel and wonderful stay. You have a great country, and you're doing a brilliant job. We never felt so much at home like in your hostel! I would have so much more to say, but the taxi's here! Merci beaucoup. " - August 2007 France

"Envoy Hostel is so far the best accommodation I found in the Caucasus. This is really well organized. but besides all the good things that everybody can see, the best is the atmosphere and the staff not to mention the hot shower. " - August 2007 Italy

Selam! Thanks for all your hospitality! I enjoyed a lot during 5 days here! I wish that someday there will be no borders between our countries. With all my sincerity and friendship. " - August 2007 Turkey

- ▶ Word of mouth
- ▶ Advertising strategy

Promoting the Hostel

- ▶ Blog articles
- ▶ Complementing services
 - Walking tours
- ▶ Alliances
 - Tourist information centre
 - Travel Agents
 - Groups (Church, school, sports etc)

Service

- ▶ Don't underestimate the power of:
 - Treating your guests with respect
 - Treating your guest individually
 - Greeting them with a smile
 - Knowing them by name
 - Being courteous and responsive
 - Genuinely trying to help