Cuba’s Tourism: History

- Perceptions of Cuba:
  - “Island of Forbidden Fruits” (1999)
  - “Forbidden Destination” (Padilla & McElroy, 2007)
  - “Wild Island of the Caribbean” (Reddish, 2009)
  - “Accidental Eden” (Schultz, 2010)
Cuba’s Tourism: Today

- Becoming a key player in the Caribbean tourism

- Major markets
  - Canadians (Air Canada)
  - Europeans (Air France, KLM, Aeroflot, Iberia)

- If/when US travel restrictions are lifted:
  - **Americans** (charters + “illegal” access via Latin America)
    - From 22 charter flights to 110 in February 2016
Cuba’s Tourism: Near Future

• American airline carriers
  • Commercial services to start fall 2016
    • 155 flights a week
    • JetBlue 387: August 31, 2016

• American “tourists”
  • 91,000 in 2014
  • 150,000 in 2015
  • 1.5 million/year (once restrictions lifted)
Tour Guides: Role in Tourism

- Direct interaction with tourists
  - Ambassadors
- Cuban tour guides
  - “People-to-People”
  - Religious activities
  - Journalists
  - Professional activities/research/workshops

Tourism in Cuba:

Tour Guide Roles and Perceptions
Tourism in Cuba: Tour Guide Roles and Perceptions

Current Study

- Examined Cuban tour guides’:
  - Role in the current tourism development in Cuba
  - Perceptions of Cuba as a travel destination
    - Built on framework by Echtner & Ritchie (1990)
      - Holistic components
      - Unique components
Methods

• Sample
  ◦ 11 Cuban tour licensed tour guides
  ◦ Amistur, Havana Tour, Cuba Tour

• Semi-structured interviews
  ◦ November 2015
  ◦ 23-38 minutes
  ◦ 10 participants refused to be recorded (1 guide agreed to being recorded)
    - notes taken by interviewer
“I have always had a good time in Cuba. The people are friendly and funny, the rum is smooth, the music intoxication and the beaches wide, white and soft. But you're accompanied everywhere by government minders. They call them responsables. Any Cuban you interview knows your microphone might as well run straight to their government.”

(Scott Simon, NPR, December 20, 2014)
Results:
Sample profile

- **64%** Male
- **39 years old** Average Age
- **12 years** Tour Guiding Experience

Tourism in Cuba:
Tour Guide Roles and Perceptions
Results:

Tour Guides Role

What do you believe is your role in the current tourism development in Cuba?
Results:

Tour Guides Role

Theme #1: Sources of Information/Facilitators of Communication

“As a tour guide, I am the person they meet first when they get to Cuba so I become their main source of information...this information will remain valid to them as long as they notice I am telling the truth which also coincides with the reality they are facing by themselves...”

“...facilitator of communication between the insight reality and the outside perception of such a reality...”

Tourism in Cuba:

Tour Guide Roles and Perceptions
Results: Tour Guides Role

Theme #2: Ambassadors/Representative of Cuba

“I feel I am an ambassador to my country, I am the face they [tourists] see when they get to Cuba and start interacting with me...and I influence their perception of Cuba in spite of the fact that they will interact with other Cubans along the way...”

“As a guide, I feel I am the representative, the person that provides advices, suggestions, information, experiences and of course, I influence their perception of Cuba’s image...”
Results:

Perceptions: Holistic Components

What 3 words best describe your perceptions of Cuba as a travel destination?
Results:
Cuba as a Travel Destination

Theme #1: Natural Beauty

“...we have fauna and flora no other place has [Zapata area]; being able to see our nature and what we do to protect it...”

“Cuba’s beautiful landscapes, beaches, nature...”

“Cuba is a beautiful island with no doubts about it...”

Tourism in Cuba:
Tour Guide Roles and Perceptions
Results:
Cuba as a Travel Destination

Theme #2: Culture, People, and History

“Identity and rich history of this country...very powerful and full of mixture of other cultures which ended up being the Cuban one...”

“Cuba, its warm people and everybody that comes to Cuba feels that. That they love the people...”
Results:

Cuba as a Travel Destination

Theme #3: Unexpected & Intriguing Reality

“It is intriguing...the reality of Cuba implies all this in spite of the outside perception and the reality presented by official (Cuban) media...”

“Unexpected Cuba...you can come to Cuba with some perception about it and leave Cuba full of emotions and experiences you never thought you would have...”

Tourism in Cuba:

Tour Guide Roles and Perceptions
Results:
Cuba as a Travel Destination

Theme #4: Safe Place

“...you can walk freely on the streets and it is pretty safe to do it, safer than many of the country our travelers come from...”

“...It is safe, [Cuban] people do not tolerate crime...”

Tourism in Cuba:
Tour Guide Roles and Perceptions
Results:

Perceptions: Unique Components

List 3 distinct or unique attractions in Cuba?
Tourism in Cuba:

Tour Guide Roles and Perceptions

Results:
Unique Components - Attractions

- Havana
- Trinidad
- Santiago de Cuba
- Cienfuegos
- Varadero
- Viñales Valley
Cuban tour guides recognize:

- They ‘represent’ their country
- They can influence tourists’ perceptions
- The value of Cuban:
  - Cultural (people & history) resources
  - Natural resources
  - Uniqueness & safety
Discussion and Conclusion

• Cuban tour guides perceptions of Cuba are consistent with American Tourists’ Post-Trip Image of Cuba (Látková & Wilson, 2016)

• *Themes:*
  ◦ *Natural beauty*
  ◦ *Unique culture/history*
  ◦ *Safe place*
  ◦ *Sense of community (people)*
  ◦ *Economic issues (unexpected & intriguing)*
“...never tell a lie because people will experience Cuba through interactions with locals...”
Thank you

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