TOURISM FOR A BETTER WORLD

Culture Guiding and Heritage Interpretation

This topic will help both current and aspiring **visitor guides** delve into the importance and core principles of **cultural heritage interpretation**. You'll gain a deep understanding of various forms of cultural heritage, from **tangible heritage** like archaeological sites, religious buildings, and urban landscapes, to **intangible cultural heritage** such as performance arts and traditional crafts.

What will you learn?

- You'll get an overview of the importance and principles of **cultural heritage interpretation**.

- You'll understand the difference between **tangible and intangible cultural heritage**.

- You'll learn about the diverse **objects of cultural heritage interpretation**.

Introduction to Cultural Heritage Interpretation

It's great to have you back for the seventh unit of our visitor guiding course! Today, we're diving into two incredibly important topics that are central to many guided experiences: **culture guiding** and **heritage interpretation**.

For me, interpreting a country's **cultural heritage** is often a highlight for my guests, even if it can be challenging for me as a guide. Of course, the experience always depends on the guests themselves.

However, when we've done our homework—meaning our preparation work—sharing this kind of information can be a fantastic way to engage guests and truly welcome them to the host country by immersing them in its rich history and culture. There are so many different tools available for **heritage interpretation** that choosing the right one can sometimes feel overwhelming. We'll explore these tools and discuss the fundamental ideas and principles behind interpreting cultural heritage effectively.

I'm genuinely excited to share this unit with you, as this topic is very important to me personally. So, let's get started!

Understanding Cultural Heritage Interpretation

What is Cultural Heritage?

Heritage is a sweeping concept that includes both our **natural and cultural surroundings**. It covers everything from vast landscapes, historic sites, and built environments to the richness of biodiversity, museum collections, and ongoing cultural practices, knowledge, and lived experiences. Heritage chronicles and expresses the long journey of human development, forming the very essence of diverse national, regional, indigenous, and local identities. It's not just about the past; it's a dynamic reference point and a positive force for growth and change in modern life.

Cultural Heritage, more specifically, represents the ways of living developed by a community and passed down through generations. This includes **customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions, and values**. Cultural heritage is commonly categorized as either **Intangible** (like oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship) or **Tangible** (physical artifacts such as buildings, monuments, books, artwork, and archaeological sites).

Because cultural heritage is often fragile and irreplaceable, it requires dedicated protection and safeguarding. This inherent vulnerability underscores why specialized training in this area is absolutely essential for **visitor guides**.

Why is Cultural Heritage Interpretation Important?

Cultural heritage interpretation is a crucial part of preserving and managing these invaluable sites. The **ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites** outlines seven core principles that highlight its significance:

1. **Facilitate Understanding and Appreciation:** The goal is to help visitors understand and appreciate cultural heritage sites, while also raising public awareness and encouraging engagement in their protection and conservation.

2. **Communicate Meaning:** Interpretation should convey the significance of cultural heritage sites to diverse audiences. This relies on careful, documented recognition of their importance, using accepted scientific and scholarly methods, and drawing from living cultural traditions.

3. **Safeguard Values:** Interpretation must protect both the **tangible and intangible values** of heritage sites within their natural and cultural settings and social contexts.

4. **Respect Authenticity:** It's vital to respect the **authenticity** of cultural heritage sites by clearly communicating the significance of their historic fabric and cultural values. This also means protecting them from harmful interpretive infrastructure, visitor pressure, and inaccurate or inappropriate interpretation.

5. **Contribute to Sustainable Conservation:** Interpretation supports the **sustainable conservation** of sites by promoting public understanding of and participation in ongoing conservation efforts. It also ensures the long-term maintenance of interpretive infrastructure and regular review of its content.

6. **Encourage Inclusiveness:** Interpretation should foster **inclusiveness** by facilitating the involvement of stakeholders and associated communities in developing and implementing interpretive programs.

7. **Develop Guidelines:** It's important to create technical and professional guidelines for heritage interpretation and presentation, covering technologies, research, and training. These guidelines must be appropriate and sustainable within their social contexts.

Insights from a UNESCO Expert: Peter Debrine

Peter Debrine, a project manager at UNESCO and an expert in cultural heritage interpretation, sheds further light on this topic:

On the Essence of Cultural Heritage Interpretation: Debrine explains that while we often associate cultural heritage with preserving old buildings and artifacts, it's far more expansive. It includes "our songs, our dances, our music, our food that really shape us into who we are." He emphasizes that interpreting these traditional practices makes tourism "more meaningful and more rich."

He points to the **World Heritage Convention**, specifically Article Four, which focuses on the identification, protection, conservation, presentation, and transmission of cultural heritage. It's in the "presentation and transmission" where interpretation plays its key role. Article Five stresses the importance of communities adopting policies to give cultural and natural heritage a meaningful function in their daily lives. Cultural heritage interpretation is crucial here, as it "facilitates an understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage, again enriching the visitor experience and making the communities more resilient."

On Sustainable Tourism Post-Crisis: Debrine believes that cultural heritage interpretation, by fostering more meaningful experiences, can lead to greater understanding and mindfulness among both visitors and local communities. By encouraging heritage interpretation, we can "reshape tourism success at a destination and a visitor level," leading to more resilience within communities and fostering different approaches for sustainable tourism.

On Shaping Our Common Future: Interpretation "adds meaning to experiences, whether this comes from feelings or thoughts or emotions," and how we interpret heritage is "critical for the way we shape our common future." Debrine highlights the significant potential in increasing the capacity of local communities to participate in tourism planning and management. This widespread community involvement helps raise awareness across borders. When built on cultural and social principles, tourism becomes a source of innovation, creativity, and job creation, which is then reflected in the

development of tourism products and services – a fundamental aspect of cultural heritage interpretation. By engaging and empowering people to interpret on their own, "we can offer paths to a deeper meaning and stimulate participation and promote stewardship for all heritage."

The Aim of Cultural Heritage Interpretation

Cultural heritage interpretation is not merely about transmitting information. Its deeper aim is to **provoke interest** and **stimulate learning** about historical, natural, and cultural resources, objects, and places, helping people understand their origins and relationships. To be truly effective, it must cultivate a "sense of identity" within a community.

The Role of the Visitor Guide as an Interpreter

Professional **visitor guides** identify and consider various objects of cultural heritage interpretation in their guiding practice. They confidently apply principles and tools of interpretation, aiming to foster a sense of belonging among citizens and contribute to their identity. Their ultimate goal is to protect and conserve the cultural heritage and sites of their country.

The crucial role of the **visitor guide as an interpreter** is to:

- **Connect people with the land:** This includes historical, natural, and cultural places or objects.

- **Create stimulating experiences:** Design experiences that encourage learning, understanding, and a deeper appreciation of places.

- **Provoke resonance and participation:** Engage the audience emotionally and encourage their active involvement.

- **Develop a "sense of identity":** Help foster a shared sense of identity within a community linked to the heritage.

- **Raise awareness and foster preservation:** Promote understanding and encourage the long-term safeguarding of cultural heritage.

Principles and Tools of Cultural Heritage Interpretation

Understanding and applying core principles is key to effective **cultural heritage interpretation**. The **Ename Charter**, adopted by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), provides a vital checklist for planning and preparing interpretation, encouraging a more critical approach to how we share heritage.

The Seven Principles of Cultural Heritage Interpretation (The Ename Charter)

1. **Access and Understanding:** Interpretation should make cultural heritage sites physically and intellectually accessible to the public.

2. **Information Sources:** Interpretation must be based on solid evidence, gathered through accepted scientific and scholarly methods, as well as from authentic living cultural traditions.

3. **Context and Setting:** The interpretation of heritage sites should always relate to their broader social, cultural, historical, and natural contexts and surroundings.

4. **Authenticity:** Interpretation must uphold the fundamental principles of authenticity, ensuring that the presentation accurately reflects the site's true historical fabric and cultural values.

5. **Sustainability:** The interpretive plan for a heritage site must be mindful of its natural and cultural environment, with social, financial, and environmental sustainability as central objectives.

6. **Inclusiveness:** Interpretation should result from meaningful collaboration between heritage professionals, host and associated communities, and other relevant stakeholders.

7. **Research, Training, and Evaluation:** Continuous research, ongoing training, and regular evaluation are essential for effective cultural heritage interpretation.

Applying These Principles in Visitor Guiding

As **visitor guides**, you can and should actively apply these principles in your practice:

- **Help:** Guide guests to understand and appreciate cultural heritage sites, raising their awareness and engagement for the sites' protection and conservation.

- **Communicate:** Clearly convey the meaning of cultural heritage sites to guests. Base your information on accepted scientific and scholarly methods, and incorporate insights from living cultural traditions, always acknowledging the site's significance.

- **Safeguard:** Protect the tangible and intangible values of cultural heritage sites within their natural, cultural, and social contexts.

- **Create Respect:** Foster respect for the authenticity of heritage sites by communicating the significance of their historic and cultural values. Provide accurate and appropriate interpretation, and help protect sites from intrusive interpretive structures and excessive visitor pressure.

- **Contribute:** Play a part in the sustainable conservation of cultural heritage sites. Promote guests' understanding of ongoing conservation efforts, advocate for the long-term maintenance of interpretive infrastructure, and regularly review interpretive content for accuracy and relevance.

- **Encourage Inclusiveness:** Promote inclusiveness in heritage interpretation by facilitating the involvement of local stakeholders and associated communities in interpretive programs.

- **Develop:** Strive to develop and adhere to technical and professional guidelines for heritage interpretation and presentation, including the use of technologies, research methods, and training. Ensure these guidelines are appropriate and sustainable within their social contexts.

Preparing with the Principles in Mind

To prepare for your guided tours in relation to these seven principles, consider these tasks:

- In your own words, **describe what cultural heritage interpretation is.**

- **Describe all seven principles of cultural heritage interpretation.**

- Focusing on Principle 7, "Research, Training and Evaluation": **Identify professional development and training opportunities** for interpretation practice available in your region. Then, **describe how you would share good interpretation practices** within your local guiding community.

Tools for Heritage Interpretation

Once you've decided on the story you want to tell—whether it's about a specific object, a historical event, a natural resource, a cultural place, or an intangible element—you can choose from a variety of tools and interpretive media. These generally fall into two categories: **personal** and **non-personal** methods.

Personal Tools and Methods

These involve direct, face-to-face interaction and are highly effective for creating emotional connections:

- **Personalized Interpretation:** Consists of direct, face-to-face guiding.

- **Emotional Connection:** Helps visitors connect emotionally with a resource, provoking feelings like pride, empathy, or even anger, sadness, or frustration.

- **Activities:** Includes guided tours, factory tours, craft demonstrations, storytelling, first-person interpretation (where the guide assumes a historical character), re-enactments, participatory learning, and performing arts.

Non-Personal Tools and Methods

These methods use informative materials and technology to convey meaning:

- **Informative Material:** Use of signs, trails, brochures, and displays.

- **Printed Materials:** Brochures, leaflets, printed images, and maps.

- **Interpretive Displays:** Exhibits, panels, and static information boards.

- **Multimedia:**

- o **Audio-Visual:** Slide shows, films, videos.

- o **Computer-Based:** Interactive sites, kiosks.

- o **Roving:** Handheld audio or video tours on CDs, DVDs, or podcasts.

- o **Visitor-Controlled:** Podcasts, mobile phone delivery systems.

- **Web-Based Interpretation:** Websites can be valuable interpretation tools, offering pre- and post-visit information.

Choosing Interpretive Media

Determining the right tools in advance is crucial for a successful guided tour. To help you prepare, here are two tasks:

- **Describe the advantages and disadvantages of both personal and non-personal methods** of cultural heritage interpretation.

- **Choose a specific object or site for cultural heritage interpretation in your region** (e.g., a specific artifact at the Uganda Museum, a section of Kasubi Tombs, a traditional craft workshop in Kampala Uganda). Identify and describe the **personal and non-personal tools** you would utilize to interpret this chosen object or site to your guests.