

iMPACT

Insights & Inspiration for Social Innovation

15 Calling DIBS: Cameroon's Baby Steps

18 Tailored healthcare solutions best fit for tribal women

26 Special Feature: Game-changers

36 "Perfection is the enemy of the good enough"

Health and Sanitation





Crafting sustainable local growth

The conscious traveller desires to give back to the community that played host to them. The local tourism industry and artisans must collaborate to create craft-based experiences, which will lead to sustainable economic opportunities for the region, write Marie-Joséphine Cartier and Giulia Macola.

The tourist memento: a sentimental reminder of a great trip, a thoughtful gift for friends and family or an item to complete one's home décor or wardrobe. Ranging from the humble fridge magnet to a work of art, most tourists travel home with an item that will trigger memories of their exotic getaway. Today, the socially-minded craft purchase is an alternative to the imported plastic souvenirs which generate nothing for the local community.

Developing sustainable tourism around the globe, the International Trade Centre (ITC) supports craftspeople to make the most of the economic opportunity presented by national and international tourists.

But how does a craft group from rural areas gain access to hotels and gift shops? Artisans living in the hills of Kayah State in Myanmar or Lao People's Democratic Republic's

Champasak province are probably not aware of what tourists want or that they might be considering airline weight limitations when making a purchase.

The value of the craft industry

In its 2015-2019 Global Handicrafts Market Report, leading market research company, Technovia assesses that the global handicraft market is estimated to grow to over USD 707.2 billion in 2019 – from USD 395.6 billion in 2014.

Craft traders around the globe often face similar challenges: pricing, marketing, competition, a lack of business management skills, communication challenges with craft retailers, and little knowledge of quality standards or standardised production respecting strict dimensions and colour.

Yet, the income generated from the sales of crafts can make a true difference to the lives of rural





The tourism industry can transform a country's craft heritage into an attraction in its own right. ၂၂



populations who often make objects to complement their agriculture-based living. The tourism industry represents an economic opportunity for remote artisan communities to sell their artisanal goods through craft markets, cultural tours, shops in cafés, hotels, museums or even at the airport.

Craft tourism: the cultural heritage of crafts as a tourism attraction and business

The tourism industry can transform a country's craft heritage into an attraction in its own right. Successfully developing craft tourism requires collaboration between artisans and hotels, souvenir shops, national and local tourism associations, organisations and tour guides.

Tourists can be guided towards exploring craft and hands-on creative activities. Marketing materials like a simple catalogue act as sales links for hotels and businesses wanting to celebrate and sell local crafts and can be used to present the artisans' story and products to customers. Nevertheless, simply developing attractive marketing materials is of little value if artisans are not able to respond

to demand. Through a wide range of projects, in Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Tajikistan and Cambodia, ITC has played an active role in working with craftspeople to elevate their skills and fine tune their products to meet tourists' expectations and establish connections with the tourism market.

Re-imagining opportunities for artisans from Myanmar's Kayah State

Funded by the Netherlands the ITC's project in Kayah State, Myanmar, has laid the path to one possible sustainable solution in linking tourism and craft.

Creative tours, integrating 47 craftspeople, was developed following the community-based tourism methodology. The artisan trails in Pan Pet and Htay Kho involves a series of workshop visits for tourists including handwoven textiles and handmade jewellery. Other creative activities complement these tours: traditional dance, music, and cooking demonstrations.



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The income generated from the sales of crafts can make a true difference to the lives of rural populations who often make objects to complement their agriculture-based living. ၂၂

ITC’s artisanal development expert in Myanmar, Randi Wagner, believes in a practical learning approach and that “the best way to train craft producers is in a market space.” In December 2018, Wagner launched the Kayah State Craft Market in collaboration with the Cultural Museum of Loikaw and the Yangon Photo Festival to ensure the presence of potential customers.

The market was simultaneously an income-generation and a learning opportunity. Bringing together 19 artisans from different rural communities in Kayah, the market enabled practical learning. ITC provided on-the-spot feedback encouraging the artisans to work on their stand display, marketing, pricing and identifying successful products. Now artisans need to take ownership of local opportunities and markets, and not wait around for NGOs or customers to come to them.

To ensure a more regular income stream from craft making, ITC is approaching local businesses to see how crafts can be integrated and sold at these outlets, or their own interiors furnished using local products. Since the craft market, Yangon’s popular Hla



Day store has added a few more Kayah crafts to its selection. Hotels, restaurants and shops learnt about selling crafts and tailor strategies to their specific space and clientele.

Taking lessons from the Kayah example, it would seem that opportunities abound for tourism and craftspeople to come together for the development of a region. Establishing and maintaining such relationships and using the right marketing tools may seem simple, but it is key to transform craft making into a sustainable business. 



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