

**International Conference on Religious Tourism:
*Fostering sustainable socio-economic development in host communities***

Bethlehem, State of Palestine, 15-16 June 2015

Session 3: Innovative approaches to tourism management in religious sites

Ms. Felicitas Wressnig, President of the World Federation of Tourist Guides, Austria



Bio:

Felicitas Wressnig studied art and journalism at the Vienna University and is an active licensed tourist guide in four languages for Austria; vocational trainer and National assessor; accredited as Lead International Trainer by the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (WFTGA) since 1999.

She worked on the Executive Board since 2000 and is now President of the WFTGA.

Vocational Training for WFTGA and lectures has taken her around the world, mostly for appropriate training of tourist guide skills such as how to interpret and present one's own local heritage to the visitor.

Examples of her interest and expertise in religious tourism:

- UNESCO/UNWTO presentation for Silk Road Corridors
- Panelist for UNWTO in Spain for "Qualified Guiding in a Religious Site"
- EN panelist for standards and norms

Abstract:

Religious Tourism differs not that much from all other tourist attractions: it needs thoughtful preparation, very well trained people and excellent infrastructure, all combined in the chosen site: then it brings international customers and

becomes the source for regional income. It might equally become a boomerang. How to survive with thousands of visitors and still promote understanding, to install sustainability is the major consideration during development. It is necessary to collect feedback and exchange opinion with all, provider and receiver, learn from outside examples.

The Role of Administration:

Due to secularisation Religious Sites are endangered: they lose their believers and visitors arrive with specialised, sometimes limited knowledge. People travel for fashion; they have preconceptions and need facts; they are exhausted and demand attractive stimulation. To achieve best presentation of the site and intention, the administration is obliged to offer a professional service – train your interpreters.

The Role of Tourist Guides: To combine core knowledge with enthusiasm, to select tales with empathy for the guest, to interpret the local traditions and encourage the guest to admire, enabling the newcomer to love and understand the place. By guiding a wide range of visitors with their wishes and concepts, tourist guides can inform the administration on necessary up-dates. Dealing with so many different people brings information and includes constructive criticism – positive and negative; it encourages development and renewal.

Means to Attract Visitor:

Combine all efforts and create sustainable infrastructure - then the place will remain intact and attractive!