



Contributing to Rural Tourism: Day Bus Excursions

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the development of day bus excursions for tourism to townships and rural areas. Offering day bus excursions could help to stimulate more rural tourism for areas that are located sufficiently near city centers, cruise ports, and resorts to make a day bus excursion practical. The day bus excursion is planned and implemented by a value chain coalition of stakeholders which may include local businesses, local government, and local nonprofit organizations. This article discusses many possibilities that may be available to townships and rural destinations if they are able to form a well-functioning value chain coalition.

1. Introduction

Many tourists are having negative experiences in overcrowded urban settings and are seeking a deeper and more authentic local experience (Kim & Kang, 2020; Tiberghien et al., 2020). Additionally, some major urban destinations are implementing dispersal strategies to appeal to different types of tourists and encouraging them to visit outlying areas instead of crowded city centers (Su et al., 2021). This trend creates opportunities for rural tourism.

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Rural tourism refers to travel experiences in geographic areas located outside of large towns and cities. While the key difference between rural and urban tourism is the population density of the location, there are other differentiating factors. Rural locations will have closer proximity to natural spaces, wildlife, and agriculture. Urban locations will have more resources like restaurants, lodging, and local transportation. Urban areas are often more diverse and cosmopolitan, whereas rural areas may have unique subcultures and customs.

Rural tourism may offer tourists a more authentic experience, a deeper connection to nature and local culture. An authentic experience is perceived by the tourist to reflect the true nature of a rural setting, natural space, or culture in contrast to a more commercially staged experience in an urban setting. For example, visiting a local festival in a rural setting may provide tourists with the experience of eating traditional food in its place of origin, or interacting with residents in a more meaningful way.

Rural tourism is attractive to tourists who are interested in a more relaxed pace that focuses on spending time in rural areas and experiencing local life. Rural tourism offers tourists a sustainable option, providing economic benefits to local communities and reducing the environmental impact typically associated with tourism (Puckett, 2024; Rural tourism, n.d.).

In this article, the focus shall be on rural day bus excursions. Specifically, it focuses on day tours, in contrast to prior literature that examines multi-day bus tours (Russell, 2008). It focuses on day bus tours to townships and rural areas, in contrast to prior literature that examines within-city day bus tours (Ghanem & Shaaban, 2022). A rural day bus excursion, then, refers to a rural tourism offering that occurs within a day (not offering overnight accommodations) in which tourists are collected from embarkation locations (city centre or cruise ship port, for example), provided with a tourism experience, and then returned to a debarkation location at the conclusion of the tourism experience. Tourism experiences may vary widely based on the availability of attractions and resources in each region.

Unfortunately, rural locations are often overlooked as tourist destinations (The Daily Yonder, 2025). Local businesses are often excluded from corporate collaborations between resorts, cruise lines, and major tour operators. It can be difficult for rural locations to attract attention and market themselves. Bus excursions arranged from resorts or cruise lines capture a sizeable portion of revenue that could otherwise benefit local businesses and communities (Lopes & Dredge, 2018).

However, there are opportunities for rural tourism (Lane, 2009). Urban tourism

is becoming less attractive. For example, overtourism is reducing the quality of the tourist experience at popular urban destinations like Santorini, Venice, The Louvre, the Eiffel Tower, and Vatican City (Brajcich, 2025). Additionally, visiting big cities is expensive (Leahy, 2023). With respect to marketing, the popularity of social media makes it easier for rural businesses to increase brand familiarity and bypass resort and cruise line gatekeepers (Soliman et al., 2024).

The benefits from being able to use social media for marketing rural locations enhances their potential to increase brand familiarity and brand attitudes (Langaro & Salgueiro, 2018). There is the potential for increased revenues from participants in the rural tourism value chain. Furthermore, the involvement of local communities in sightseeing activities helps to preserve and promote traditional crafts, holidays and cultural practices, which in turn preserves the region's identity (Morales-Zamorano et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2021).

Rural tourism serves as an important engine for rural development but also brings environmental pressure (Chen et al., 2018). The positive impact of tourism on the region's economy is derived from the demand for local products, crafts and services, which in turn contributes to the development of small businesses, the creation of new jobs and the strengthening of economic resilience of communities (Hutsal, 2023).

The focus of this article will be on enhancing rural tourism through day bus excursions. This article explores the potential of one-day bus excursions to rural areas, identifying the challenges and opportunities associated with this form of tourism in the context of urban dispersal strategies and sustainable development. The analysis will focus on the relationship between these excursions and local communities, involving conceptual reflections on authenticity, accessibility, and the valorisation of regional identities.

This article examines a relatively underexplored topic, that is, day bus excursions to rural areas. This topic helps to fill a literature gap in tourism research that examined extended bus tours or urban tourism.

2. Exploratory Field Experiences

Insights were obtained using an exploratory autoethnographic approach to this inquiry that seeks to describe and analyze a series of personal day bus tour experiences over time to provide a richer understanding of this topic. This research approach is useful in providing personal insights into the focal topic and can help to connect personal experiences to the wider culture. As this approach can be subjective and lacking in generalizability, multiple field experiences were utilised, and

observations and conclusions were interpreted in the context of the extent literature on thematically proximate topics.

To enable experiential observation, multiple day bus tours at different locations in Europe and in the British Isles were experienced. For example, in June 2023, field observations included booking four self-funded day bus tours in Ireland. In October 2024, field observations included a series of shore excursions while on a Mediterranean cruise. The shore excursions can be described as a type of day bus tour. Like Lopes and Dredge (2018) who conducted a qualitative study on cruise tourism, focusing on shore excursions, field observations that consist of personally experiencing shore excursions and day bus excursions enable a richer comprehension of the phenomena.

In general, field observations suggested that the quality of an excursion was influenced by the professionalism, charisma, and engagement of the tour guide. Some aspects of the excursions that negatively influenced the tourist experience were outside the control of the tour operator, such as gross overcrowding at some of the various locations. Whether within the control of the tour operator or outside of its control, all aspects of an excursion influence the perceived quality of the experience.

An example of a poor-quality experience due to the tour guide was a shore excursion in Kusadasi (Ephesus), Turkey, while on a cruise. The published itinerary included a visit to the ancient city of Ephesus, the House of the Virgin Mary, the Basilica of Saint John, and the Temple of Artemis. The tour guide had the bus driver stop at the House of the Virgin Mary, allowing the group 10 minutes, but then waited for 15 minutes at the souvenir shops at the exit, encouraging group members to buy souvenirs. The tour guide pointed out locations we should have stopped and visited as we drove past. Instead, we were driven to a carpet warehouse, where the group was presented with a 90-minute carpet sales presentation. In fairness, on the return trip to the cruise ship port, the group did stop at a parking lot near the Temple of Artemis and given 10 minutes to take pictures. The perceived value of the excursion was attenuated because the tour guide was focused on gaining sales from the tourists instead of ensuring the tourist had an enjoyable and memorable experience.

Another example of a poor shore excursion was one at Saint Petersburg, Russia, promoted by the cruise line to be an authentic experience of life in Saint Petersburg. The group was taken to a subway station, then to a grocery store, and then returned to the ship. Cruise passengers on this excursion felt exploited. They believed the excursion was over-priced and delivered too little. Also, they felt a loss because they could have had a much richer experience instead had they chosen another excursion.

An example of a high-quality experience was a cruise excursion from Katakolon (Olympia), Greece. The excursion included a visit to the ancient Olympia site and archaeological museum. The tour guide narrated the travel to ancient Olympia and then narrated the visit at ancient Olympia. The tour guide was interesting, professional, and well informed. The excursion then visited Agriturismo Magna Grecia, a family-owned homestead known for producing olive oil and olive oil-based products. Franca, the owner, gave an interesting presentation on the olive farm and production facility. The presentation was enjoyable and was not a sales presentation. After the presentation, guests were provided with lunch and were entertained with local dancing and music. The perceived value of this excursion was enhanced by the care taken by the tour guide and by Franca, who were focused on the quality of the tourists' experiences.

The characteristics of higher quality bus tours included a schedule that reflected the published description of the tour. Higher quality tours focused on giving guests a good experience that represented a good value and good use of time. Highly trained, ethical, and enthusiastic tour guides were essential for a good tour experience.

Lower quality bus tours gave guests the perceptions that the tour was not worth the price, was not a good manifestation of the tour description in the marketing materials. In the worst cases, guests felt exploited and disrespected. Lower quality tours featured disinterested tour guides or tour guides that wanted to generate sales from guests.

Medium quality excursions may have had good tour guides but were negatively impacted by events beyond the guides' control, such as a poor itinerary, too high a price for the tour experience, poor weather, and gross overcrowding at tour sites such as the Acropolis in Athens.

In general, day bus tours from city centers were a better value, possibly because of greater competition. Cruise excursions tended to be a worse value, possibly because of the cruise line's ability to substantially mark up the price of the local tour operator. Cruise passengers have less choice with respect to tour providers. Cruise lines are gatekeepers of information to passengers and repeatedly warn passengers that the ship will leave the port without them if they return late unless they book an excursion through the cruise line.

These tourist experiences have informed the conclusion that the tour operator's focus needs to be on providing a rewarding tourist experience and is consistent with prior research (Ghanem & Shaaban, 2022). These experiences reinforce what the existing literature has already emphasised regarding the

importance of local guides, integrated experience management, and the perceived impact of authenticity on tourist satisfaction (Kim & Kang, 2020; Morales-Zamorano et al., 2020). From tourists' perspectives, the tours need to be enjoyable, interesting, a good value, and not exploitative. The management and quality control throughout the various touchpoints along the tour's value chain need to be coordinated and structured so that tourists have superior and memorable experiences. Touchpoints refer to points of contact or interaction between a tourist and the excursion value chain members.

The insights and conclusions from the exploratory autoethnographic inquiry appear to logically dovetail with a value chain perspective. From the service provider's perspective, the value chain is comprised of participants who provide interconnected offerings and functions that synergistically add incremental value to the tourist experience. Therefore, next the day bus excursion facet of rural tourism will be positioned into the context of a value chain model.

3. The Day Bus Excursion Value Chain

The value provided to the tourist refers to the tourist's perceived sum of benefits received from the entire tourist experience, less the tourist's perceived costs (Morales-Zamorano et al., 2020). The value chain in the day bus excursion context includes the network of participants who collaborate in offering component benefits of the tourist experience. This might include transportation, organization, attractions, food and beverages, retail, entertainment, tour guidance, and marketing/communication (Goni & Yustika, 2019).

The value chain should be distinguished from a similar term, the supply chain. A value chain encompasses all activities undertaken to deliver a product or service to a customer. A supply chain concerns the physical flow of goods and materials from suppliers to customers (Kelwig, 2025; Treefrong, 2023). The value chain aims to add value to each activity undertaken or function provided to deliver the day bus tourism experience, thereby maximising the value of the tourism experience.

The value chain participants can provide primary and support functions, and each participant is expected to add value to the tourist experience (Jonker, 2004). The value chain participants can include commercial, government, and nonprofit organizations (UN Tourism, 2018). Actors along the value chain may be planners or designers of the excursion, suppliers of products and services, and tourism intermediaries (Miličević, 2021). Each member of the value chain provides a function which adds an incremental added value to the tourist experience. The total perceived value to the tourist should be synergistically greater than sum of the individual value

chain components (Zheng et al., 2021).

The tourist value chain should have a leader, usually an organization that has a substantial role in providing value, a large service provider, or the key organizer and manager of the excursion. The leading organization acts as a facilitator, coordinating other value chain members, ensuring members are appropriately compensated, monitoring service quality, and maintaining value chain member relationships (Partale, 2020; UNDP, 2017).

3.1. Fragmentation of value chain in the context of cruise tourism

The cruise tourism value chain is fragmented due to various factors, including diverse actors, distribution channels, and varying degrees of control and integration within the industry. This fragmentation leads to challenges in coordinating activities, managing risks, and ensuring equitable distribution of benefits across the value chain (Sun, 2019). This fragmentation is the result of diverse actors and interests and a fragmentation of distribution channels.

With respect to diverse actors and interests, tourists have varying needs, preferences, and purchasing power, influencing their engagement with different parts of the value chain. Distribution intermediaries like travel agents and tour operators are involved in selling cruise packages and shore excursions, but their interests and strategies can differ. Service providers like cruise lines, services at ports, and shore excursion providers have distinct roles and business models, sometimes leading to conflicting interests. With respect to the local communities, cruise tourism can bring economic benefits, but these benefits may not be evenly distributed (Daly & Fernandez-Stark, 2017).

With respect to distribution channels, consumers can book directly with cruise lines, bypassing intermediaries. Cruise lines may offer all-inclusive packages that include flights, transfers, and shore excursions, creating a more integrated experience. Passengers may book cruises and other components (flights, hotels, tours) separately, leading to more fragmentation (Daly & Gereffi, 2018; Daly & Fernandez-Stark, 2017).

3.2. Limitations faced by small economic actors in accessing “closed” value chains

Large economic actors like cruise lines, corporate resort chains, and large tour operators may find it profitable to exclude small economic actors to capture a larger proportion of tourism revenues. While small economic actors face barriers to entry, they can do more to market themselves to more powerful members of the value chain

as well as marketing directly to tourism consumers.

The rural setting may not appear profitable to a large corporate tour company but may be attractive and well served by a coalition of local businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies. A vertically integrated corporate tour operator may not see profit opportunities in a rural, small market, setting. Local government agencies, however, that want to promote tourism can identify and recruit local partners who can collaborate to provide attractive tourism offerings.

4. Key Components of a Day Bus Tour Value Chain

The day bus tour value chain consists of an interconnected series of activities and functions provided by value chain stakeholders. It is helpful to take the perspective of tourists when separating the value chain into its constituent subparts, each adding value to the total tourist experience (Song et al., 2013). It is also helpful to think of the value chain as a sequential series of touchpoints along which tourists interact with and engage the subparts along the tourist experience continuum. I will next describe these subparts as being grouped into three sequential categories: the pre-excursion phase, the actual tourist experience, and the post-excursion phase.

4.1. Pre-excursion phase

During the pre-excursion phase, tourists become interested in an excursion experience. They gather information about their alternatives, factor in customer reviews and ratings, evaluate the desirability of the alternatives and consider the relative value of the alternatives and then make a choice (Sitar-Tăut et al., 2020).

4.1.1. Marketing and promotion

The value chain familiarizes target audiences with excursions that are offered. The excursion may be promoted as a package, while some value chain participants may want to promote their own destination or activity. Various collaborations might be useful in building demand through travel agents, tour operators, cruise lines, resorts, or tourism bureaus for municipalities and regions.

Information about the excursion should include information regarding cancellation policies, payment options, weather cancellations, minimum number of booked guests required for an excursion, refunds, and any guarantees. For example, cruise passengers might need a guarantee to be returned to the ship before it departs the port. The value chain will want to minimize perceived tourist risks. The more well-known an excursion is, the less risky it feels to tourists. The more highly rated and reviewed an excursion is, the less risky it feels to tourists (Rahmiati et al., 2020).

4.1.2. Tourist information gathering

Tourists research their alternative experience choices and make an appropriate choice. Information needs to be readily available. The value chain needs to anticipate what information tourists want and ensure that the desired information is easily accessible. The value chain may want participation from a town's tourist office to host a website for the excursions. Umbrella travel sites might be used (for example, Lonely Planet Travel Guides), Google searches, city travel sites, umbrella sites for resort excursions (for example, All Inclusive Outlet), umbrella sites for cruise excursions (Cruise Critic), and so forth. Reviews and social media recommendations are becoming increasingly important (Zarezadeh et al., 2023).

4.1.3. Reservations

Tourist should be able to reserve their excursion through an online booking portal, through the town's tourist office, and through travel agents, cruise lines, or resorts. Making reservations should be convenient, secure, and intuitive (Ghaedi, 2022).

4.2. Tourist experience

The tourist experience includes all components of the day bus tour excursion, beginning with onboarding tourists at the retrieval location and returning them at the conclusion of the excursion. It is helpful for the excursion value chain to involve local businesses, artisans, and cultural groups to promote authentic interactions. Tourists value perceptions and the enjoyment and memorability of their experience are formed from their assessments of all sub-parts of the excursion (Cho et al., 2021; Seyfi et al., 2020). In addition to maximizing tourists perceived value of the experience, consideration should be given to minimizing environmental impacts and maximizing benefits to the local communities.

4.2.1. Transportation

The hallmark of the bus day tour excursion is that bus transportation is provided. Tourists begin their excursion as they are greeted by their tour guide and board the bus and end their excursion as they leave the bus and say their farewells to the tour guide and their fellow tourists (Adventure Travel Trade Association, 2025).

4.2.2. Guides, docents, and interpreters

Tour guides are an important part of the tourist experience. They provide information and answer questions. They manage the day's itinerary. They take

precautions to protect the well-being of the group, ensuring safety. Tour guides keep tourists interested and attentive, sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm for the area with tourists. They can narrate points of interest and highlight aspects of the local culture during the bus journey. Tour guides help tourists anticipate upcoming attractions and help them to obtain the greatest value from their excursion. Tour guides keep guests informed, entertained, and organized (Adventure Travel Trade Association, 2025). Tour guides also need to be sensitive and accommodating to the needs of the disabled or elderly as well as variation in tourists' need to access toilets (Turnstile Tours, 2023).

Tour guides' interactions with tourists serves an important role in influencing the value co-creation of the excursion experience. The functional, social, and ethical interactions between tour guide and tourist leads to enhanced co-creation of the perceived experience and attitudes toward the rural tourism brand (Liu et al., 2021). Leong et al. (2024) found that tour guide incorporation of storytelling has a positive influence on the co-created tourist experience. With respect to heritage tourism as a component of rural tourism, positive tour guide interactions coupled with storytelling, leads to a heightened co-created experience and leads to more positive entertainment and educational perceptions.

The excursion may include sightseeing along a panoramic journey, and it may include different activities. As the excursion visits various attractions during the day, in some instances the main tour guide may escort the group while at an attraction or the guide may deliver the group to a local activity provider and retrieve them when the activity concludes and then progress to the next excursion activity.

4.2.3. Local activity providers

The excursion may include various activities. These may include guided walk or activity in natural spaces, a museum visit, a walking tour within a township, attendance at a performance, experiencing a local festival, or visiting a local business, or farm. Activity providers may include local historians and volunteers, museum docents, local business owners, breweries/wineries, or nature guides who will guide the tour while at an attraction (Green, 2024). Proper value chain management ensures that all touchpoints experienced by tourists are positive value-added experiences (Yılmaz & Bititci, 2006).

4.2.4. Food and drink

The excursion needs to consider this aspect of the experience. Depending on the duration and nature of the excursion, tourists may be provided snacks and bottles

of water, or food and drink may be an important part of the cultural experience. Some excursions may feature a variety of food sampling of local cuisines, visiting local cafes, wine tasting, or sampling locally produced spirits (Zhang et al., 2019).

4.2.5. Closure

One of the most overlooked touchpoints in the day bus tour excursion is the conclusion. This is unfortunate because it is a lost opportunity to highlight the value of the excursion and create a lasting memory for tourists (Ghanem & Shaaban, 2022). It is also unfortunate because it would encourage positive outcomes in the final phase, discussed next.

Most day bus excursions figuratively conclude after tourists board the bus from their last stop. The bus ride to the drop-off location is usually somber and quiet. The tour guide is quiet, and tourists are generally tired and often fall to sleep on the bus ride to the drop-off point. What if, instead, the last bus ride of the day was one of celebration, tourists were given a certificate of completion as a memento of the experience? What if the tour guide was lively and enthusiastic instead of somber and quiet? What if tourists were reminded of all the good experiences they had enjoyed during the day? What if tourists had become more acquainted with one another during the day? What if the tour guide narrated the travel to the end or discussed interesting local customs and lifestyles? What if the tour guide led the group in a rendition of a traditional song from the region? The point is that the final bus ride at the end of the day should help tourists attain a sense of closure and celebration. The final bus ride should be an opportunity to recall all the enjoyable experiences throughout the day. The final bus ride should itself be a value-added experience and not merely transportation, with tourists feeling that their excursion had already ended at the last stop. The closing moments of a tour offer a prime opportunity for a tour guide to solidify the experience in the minds of participants. By crafting a memorable and engaging conclusion, the guide can transform a simple excursion into a lasting memory. This involves summarizing key highlights, encouraging reflection on the journey, and facilitating a sense of connection and closure (Weiler & Black, 2015).

The tour guide can use the closing period to encourage reflection on the memorable experience. Indeed, the future growth and success of the day bus excursion depends upon the value tourists derive from their excursion experience, which should be staged and designed to be memorable and personal (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

While the final moments of the excursion experience mark the conclusion of the consumption phase of the tourist experience, there is also a post-consumption or post-excursion phase in which the strength and valence of tourist attitudes may influence their behaviors. Rural tourism marketers should still position these tourists as a stakeholder group, worthy of further consideration.

4.3. Post-excursion phase

Consistent with Pine and Gilmore's (1999) conception of the experience economy in which consumers' desire for memorable experiences provides opportunities for value-added offerings, the point of an effective closing experience in the prior section is that it helps tourists to bundle positive emotions with memories about their excursion experience. An effective staging of the entire excursion leads to a favorable and memorable gestalt in which tourists perceive the experience to be greater than its constituent parts (Andersson, 2007).

Effective marketers add value to the tourist offering by enclosing an excursion's components (transportation, attractions) within an overall positive, memorable experience. This added value can be captured by a premium price which can add economic benefits to the rural tourism coalition members and local community (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). In the post-excursion phase, there are two objectives. First, tourists should be reminded of the richness of memorable moments during the excursion experience. Provide memory cues to former guests that will help them to recall aspects of the excursion to help them form enduring memories and evoke positive feelings. Second, tourists should be encouraged to express their positive attitudes about the excursion experience and, by association, the brand or symbolic representation of the coalition of actors proving the excursion experience (Grace & O'Cass, 2004).

Tourists' attitudes and behaviors with respect to the bus excursion will reflect the excursion's brand strength. This means, in effect, that the more familiar (memorable) the excursion is and the extent to which tourists perceive the excursion to be exceptional, they will form strong, positive attitudes about their excursion experience. The stronger and more positive attitudes that are formed will influence tourists' post-excursion behaviors like making favorable word-of-mouth referrals to acquaintances. They will influence social media sharing and posting. Highly favorable reviews about the excursion reflect the degree to which strong, positive attitudes about the excursion were formed.

If tourists have provided their email addresses, tour operators have an opportunity to have a favorable post-excursion influence on tourist attitudes and to

help establish enduring memories. Perhaps tour operators could send tourists a certificate of completion as an email attachment. This would be quite appropriate for some activities like a nature hike, zip lining, mountain climbing, learning a traditional dance, visiting a winery, and so forth. Tour operators could also ask former guests to complete a feedback survey or ask them to leave favorable reviews. Additionally, perhaps an app is available to the value chain in which tourists could review their experiences and provide feedback to the value chain (Pal, 2023).

5. Creating a Day Bus Excursion Value Chain

Creating a high value tourist experience begins with identifying what the local area can offer tourists (Ben Tahar et al., 2018). The value chain developers determine the type and quality of tourist experience they want guests to have at each excursion touchpoint (Pal, 2023). Mapping the customer experience by sequentially listing the touchpoints involved in all phases of the excursion described previously can help value chain members identify opportunities to strengthen the excursion experience. Each touchpoint along the customer experience journey can be identified and the desired level of service quality can be described. Touchpoint service quality standards can provide guides that can lead to a system of metrics for quality control as well as a basis for continuous improvement (Kalbach, 2021; Mucz & Gareau-Brennan, 2019; Nordhielm & Dapena-Barón, 2014).

5.1. Brainstorming

A team should be assembled that represents different skill sets and community constituencies, all of whom, however, would be motivated to inspire more local tourism. The team should be oriented to understand that the main goal is to create superior, value-added tourist experiences, with the caveat that local communities should benefit from tourism through providing tourists with exceptional experiences (Jamieson & Galaski, 2022).

The team should identify potential sites, attractions, activities, and experiences that the area could bundle for tourists (Jamieson & Tazim, 1997). Are there opportunities for in-town guided tours such as visits to a historic site? Is there a local historian that could serve as a tour guide to discuss local areas of interest? Are there local markets, outdoor music events, or festivals?

For example, in some towns there might be a local historian who could offer tours of historic cemeteries or historic neighbourhoods. There may be local walking trails, nature parks, and bike paths. Some towns have outdoor art (murals, sculptures) that could serve as an attraction. There may be summer outdoor music events,

festivals, or farmers' markets. There might be attractive nearby natural spaces featuring lakes, mountains, waterfalls, hiking, kayaking, horseback riding, fishing, or wildlife viewing. There might be a local winery or a regional historic site.

The value chain team may be able to develop itineraries for multiple excursions, depending on a desired excursion theme and other considerations, like time of the year in which the excursion is available. Each excursion itinerary should factor in the timing considerations, such as transportation and required tour debarkation time. Excursion should have an anticipated time duration and any potential limitations for tourists such as required physical exertion or accommodations for people with disabilities.

5.2. Establishing experience standards

Each potential excursion that is proposed from the various itineraries should be developed into a series of touchpoints representing each time tourists will interact with a facet of the value chain. Touchpoints refer to any event along the tourists' experience continuum in which there is a passive receipt of information, an active exchange of information, or an interaction or contact between tourists and the value chain. This may include information and promotion touchpoints, bus boarding, visiting a site, and so on (Stare & Križaj, 2018). The development team should envision the experience they want tourists to have, and then they should develop service standards that should be met to provide the desired experience. Value chain members should agree upon desired touchpoint experience quality standards, how to measure those standards, and how they can provide input for continuous improvement.

5.3. Value assurance

Value chain members form a coalition. It is a voluntary partnership of mutual and collective benefit. To be successful, each member must add value, serving an effective function, delivering a high-quality experience. Members must feel that there is an equitable distribution of benefits, commensurate with each member's contribution to its provided value (Kontoravdis, 2014).

Value chain governance, the interorganizational governance along the tourism value chain, is crucial to the success, growth, and sustainability the collaboration (Song et al., 2013). The United Nations World Tourism Organization recommends that for sustainable tourism value chains there is a need for effective governance and stakeholder engagement. The value chain should have clear rules, policies, and

practices. There should be broad stakeholder engagement in developing policies and strategies (UN Tourism, 2018).

The value chain should be structurally designed to encourage cooperation and collaboration. For example, rural tourism can emphasize cultural, nature-based, or ecotourism experiences, which include local stakeholders in contrast to more vertically integrated tourism value chains which attempt to corral tourists (Adiyia et al., 2017).

The value chain is a cooperative venture that should focus on continuous improvement. Transparency, trust, and collaborative learning are essential for maintaining a functional and resilient network. It should meet periodically to discuss potential improvements and needed changes. The value chain should have bylaws or terms in which the value chain can remedy disputes, dissuade misconduct, and alter membership composition.

Thus, the creation and maintenance of a functional value chain for one-day excursions requires not only strategic planning and cross-sector collaboration, but also a deep understanding of how tourists perceive the value and meaning of their lived experiences. In what follows, we will discuss the implications of these findings for the development of rural tourism as a vector of economic and identity-based regeneration.

5.4. Value chain structure

The value chain must determine its leadership (Kaiser & Overfield, 2010). The value chain's governance framework should include a lead firm or anchor institution. This might be the local tour operator or township tourism office that initiated the value chain development. The leader must be skilled in organizing the tourist experiences, coordinating member activities, monitor service delivery, maintain cooperative relationships among members, and ensure continuous improvement. The style of leadership is not authoritarian and should emphasize participatory governance and consensus building. It should emphasize inclusivity in decision-making for coalition harmony and sustainable value creation.

The value chain should try to gain collaboration from all community sectors, including government, nonprofit organizations, and businesses (Song et al., 2013). The diversity of the value chain is its strength and the inter-sectoral dynamism among government, commercial, and nonprofit coalition members is a key factor in the value chain's resiliency and adaptability. Local businesses might be needed to provide various services. Local nonprofit organizations might be useful in engaging local citizens, or arts and culture organizations to enhance portions of the tourism

experience. The government might be needed to provide organization, resources, and expertise. The government, especially in the beginning, may be needed to create incentives for members, fill gaps in services, and act as a leader and coordinator. The government may be needed to initiate and coordinate the participation of local businesses, artisans, and cultural groups.

6. Conclusion

This article has presented a conceptual and exploratory framework for developing a rural tourism value chain for one-day bus excursions. This article contributes to the rural tourism literature by adding a novel facet to this knowledge base. Developing day bus excursions that can provide rich and memorable tourist experiences complements other rural tourism efforts, while not being as affected by resources constraints like limited local transportation, lodging, and other resources that may impact other types of rural tourism (Rosalina et al., 2021). Hence, day bus excursions can contribute to rural economic development, while requiring fewer adaptations and resources than other types of tourism.

A substantial caveat is that townships and rural destinations need to be located within a sufficient proximity to an urban center, resort, or cruise port that make them practical for a day bus excursion. This is necessitated because the transportation time driving from the tourist muster location must be factored into the schedule. Collecting guests in a nearby city or from a resort is not as time restricted as dealing with cruise passengers. Cruise passengers must be returned to their ships by prescribed times or passengers risk missing their ship's departure. With respect to cruise passengers, the itinerary may have to be adjusted on their behalf to ensure they return to the ship on time. Additionally, some credible risk-reducing assurance or guarantee should be given to cruise ship passengers to alleviate their concerns about being returned late.

Offering day bus excursions may represent part of a larger bundle of tourism offerings to facilitate township and rural tourism. The communities may have periodic events and festivals that attract visitors to the destinations. Day bus excursions could be a component a separate multi-day, multi-destination group bus tour, meaning that the value chain could partner with the multi-day tour operator for the day the tour visits the township or rural area. Additionally, some value chain members might be able to integrate visits from residents or car travelers into their portion of the day bus excursion.

Rural destinations can develop value chain coalitions to create innovative opportunities for tourism offerings. Small towns and their out-lying areas may offer

more tourism attractions than is first apparent. Natural spaces, such as forests, mountains, lakes, and rivers are appealing to some tourists. Some tourists enjoy wildlife viewing or bird watching. Agritourism, wineries, distilleries, and historic sites are appealing to some types of tourists. Some tourists enjoy activities like bike tours, kayaking, cave exploring, or zip lining. Other tourists prefer activities in town, like walking tours, museums and cultural sites, and markets and festivals.

There may be many possibilities that surface after more fully considering tourist options. Bringing a value chain coalition together and managing it may be challenging and may require government support. Each set of activities should be linked by a theme to appeal to a subgroup of tourists. In this paper, the tourist itinerary has been presented as a sequential chain of activities bundled together. However, it is possible to structure the tourist offerings in a hub and spoke model instead of a sequential chain. For example, a bus could retrieve tourists and deliver them to a township and tourists could then be divided into subgroups for a more narrowly defined set of activities to appeal to the subgroups. Later, the subgroups can meet again and then board the bus to be returned to their point of origin.

The model presented in this article is adaptable for most rural contexts. Local communities can form value chain coalitions to identify potential tourist attractions, events, and activities. They can map the desired tourist experience, set standards, and monitor and improve their tourist offerings. Each rural area will face a different set of circumstances which will restrict some options but also provide opportunities. All value chain coalitions will have to be effectively managed. All excursion plans will have to be effectively implemented, with a common goal to offer a high value tourist experience for the benefit of the participating communities and value chain members.

In conclusion, in a global tourism context in which sustainability and authenticity are becoming imperatives, the model of one-day excursions to rural areas offers a strategic opportunity for the revitalisation of local communities. Through collaborative governance, co-creation of experiences, and equitable distribution of value, tourism value chains can transform local attractions into a sustainable economic, cultural, and social resource.

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