







Propuesta de acciones estratégicas para la adecuada gestión de entidades de ocio: Varadero Golf Club, Cuba

*Proposal of Strategic Actions for the Adequate Management of Leisure Establishments:
Varadero Golf Club, Cuba*

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RESUMEN

El propósito del trabajo fue determinar las acciones necesarias para la adecuada gestión turística de la entidad Varadero Golf Club. Para ello se desarrollaron tres etapas: la fundamentación de las bases teórico metodológicas que sustentan la investigación, la caracterización de la gestión de la entidad turística y finalmente la formulación de acciones de gestión turística para entidades de ocio y recreación, desde una perspectiva integral y sostenible. En la investigación primó la consulta a especialistas y la ponderación y evaluación de criterios especializados en Talleres de Acción Participación; lo que derivó que la gestión del Varadero Golf Club presenta grandes ineficiencias que, aunadas a las amenazas del entorno, hacen necesaria la aplicación de una estrategia de supervivencia. Asimismo, propone aplicar acciones estratégicas que devengan en mejores resultados para la gestión de la entidad en el corto, mediano y largo plazo, y de esta forma revertir la situación negativa que atraviesa la entidad.

Palabras clave: turismo de golf; gestión; entidad turística; planeación estratégica.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the work was to determine the necessary actions for the adequate management of the Varadero Golf Club. The investigation was divided in three stages: the review and formulation of the methodological theoretical bases that support the research, the management characterization of the tourist entity and finally, the formulation of tourist management actions for leisure and recreation entities, from an integral and sustainable perspective. In the research, consultation with specialists and the weighting and evaluation of specialized criteria in Participation Action Groups prevailed; which derived that the management of the Varadero Golf Club presents great inefficiencies that, together with the threats of the environment, make the application of a survival strategy necessary. It proposes to apply strategic actions that lead to better results for the management of the entity in the short, medium and long term, and in this way reverse the negative situation.

Keywords: golf tourism; management; tourist entity; strategic planning.

Introduction

Tourism has historically been a sector defined by a sustained growth. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2020) the travel sector registered in 2019 an increase of 4 % in the number of international arrivals compared to the previous year, which represents 1,5 billion visitors. However, with the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic, tourism received a devastating blow, from which it has not yet been able to fully recover.

The UNWTO (2022) reports that in 2020 there was a decrease of 73 % in the number of foreign arrivals globally, although 2021 meant a slight increase over the previous year, the numbers are still alarming. In this sense, it is worth highlighting the need to restart a more resilient and sustainable tourism, in accordance with the trends and needs of the times (UNWTO, 2020).

Soliku et al. (2021) states that tourism research should focus on the resilience of the sector rather than crisis management, affirming that if a system is resilient, it is implicit that it will not only have the ability to overcome crises and disasters, but will also be able to adapt to change in general.

From this perspective, it is necessary to think about the recovery of tourism from a reconstructive way, focusing on existing strengths and generating new ones that allow reducing the risk of external threats. Mulder (2020) suggests a series of actions to be taken for the recovery of tourism in the Latin American and Caribbean area, underlining the diversification of tourism offers and promoting domestic tourism.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2021) maintains that the main tourist destinations in the Caribbean region are marked by massive sun and beach tourism, with a strong dependency of European and North American demands. Given the drastic drop in international travel, it is necessary to develop modalities that avoid massiveness and present business opportunities to enhance domestic tourism (UNWTO, 2022).

Golf, in recent years, has been an activity that has had a strong connection with tourism, to the point of materializing this binomial in a tourist modality called "golf tourism", and is defined by Butler (2018), as the segment of the tourism market that involves visiting one or several destinations with the purpose of participating actively or passively in a game of golf.

Hudson and Hudson (2014) affirm that golf tourism is the largest tourism market related to sports, moving an estimated 22,9 billion dollars (USD) and with the participation of 50 million people.

The practice of golf is currently used as a tourist potential in Cuba, with the Varadero Golf Club as its most popular product, however, the demand for this product is still low, as a result of inefficiencies in its management (Salinas et al., 2019). As well, the management of this product must be in accordance with the needs of the times, betting not only on economic growth, but also in the sustainable use of the resources that this implies.

Given the characteristics that make this product one of special relevance for the development of the tourist sector in Cuba, it is convenient to denote as a general objective of the present investigation: Evaluate the management of the Varadero Golf Club entity.

The work was based on three fundamental stages presented in Table 1: formulation, characterization and statement of actions. During the investigation, consultation with specialists and the weighting and evaluation of specialized criteria in Participation Action Groups prevailed.

Table 1 - Research stages

Objectives	Research stages
Formulate the theoretical-methodological framework that supports the investigation.	1 st stage: Formulation
Characterize the management of the Varadero Golf Club.	2 nd stage: Characterization
Define strategic actions for the tourist management of Varadero Golf Club from a sustainable and resilient perspective.	3 rd stage: Definition

Methods

Theoretical approach (through the procedures of analysis and synthesis, abstraction and integration and induction and deduction): historical method and logical methods (dialectical, systemic, structural-functional and hypothetical-deductive).

From the empirical level: Survey method: Interview: The non-structural and in-depth type was applied to the key actors of tourism management in the area, during the diagnosis of the tourism offer. For its preparation, a previous test was carried out that facilitated correcting the objective and the questions formulated, as well as greater efficiency in its preparation and application.

Scientific observation: It was developed through the application of the qualitative technique of focus group, this was carried out with a traditional focus group where the key actors available in the tourist area participated, and an online focus group with the key actors not available in the tourist area.

Between both groups, the management of the Varadero Golf Club was characterized. In addition, the hierarchical cluster analysis method of Yim and Ramdeen (2015) was used through the statistical software SPSS, to identify the main segments that demand the product, aided by the probabilistic sampling method and the simple random sampling technique.

Tourist management characterization of Varadero Golf Club

For the characterization of the tourist management of Varadero Golf Club, a Top-Down analysis was used, based on the conditions that regulate the tourist activity and specifically golf tourism, from the international framework to the national, regional and local context.

External Analysis

A PESTEL analysis was applied to identify in depth the macrovariables that regulate or impact in some way on the management of the tourist entity and Porter's 5 Competitive Forces (1980) were used to study the microenvironment.

This procedure helped to determine a weighted list of threats and opportunities for Varadero Golf Club management:

Weighted list of threats (T)

1. Covid-19 health crisis.
2. Unstable economic and politic scenario, at a national and international context.
3. Presence of strong competitors in the region.
4. Cuban economic crisis.
5. Low presence of traditional source markets.
6. Affectations of United States embargo.

Weighted list of opportunities (O)

1. Political will of the government and the Ministry of Tourism to develop tourist sector in the country.
2. Legalization and appearance of the MSMEs as an important actor in the Cuban economy.
3. Juan Gualberto Gómez international airport closeness to the tourist area.
4. Presence of this product in the service package of many sun and beach hotels nearby.

Internal Analysis

The Varadero Golf Club is the only 18-hole golf course in Cuba. The course has five holes of par five, five holes of par three and eight holes of par four, in total 18 holes of par 72 with a total length of 6,269 meters (m). It is located on the Varadero peninsula, about five kilometers (km) from the tourist center.

The entity has the Golf Course and a Club House, the Xanadu Mansion, declared a National Monument Conservation Grade I, which offers accommodation, bar and restaurant services. It is the most modern golf course in the country.

The club's management has established the following mission: "We are a product where all tourist options are linked with units of nature, recreation, leisure, history, gastronomic services, events, golf courses and accommodation".

The vision of the entity is: "To be the preference option of the client as the most important non-hotel chain in the area, through the consolidation of a quality system as a guarantee of all offers, thereby achieving total satisfaction of expectations and needs of customers who visit us".

Product

According to Grönroos (1987) cited in Kotler et al. (2011) the product levels can be divided into the levels: core product, expected product, supporting product and augmented product.

The core product is made up of the *raison d'être* of the product-service, the main motivation that encourages customers to buy the product. In this case it would be the Golf Course. In turn, the Xanadu Mansion is found as a support product with all the complementary services offered, such as accommodation and restaurants; that, although they are not part of the core product, allow greater use and enjoyment of customers, while giving a differentiated value to the product.

The expected product is structured by the products-services that are necessary for the use of the central product, in this case, since it is a golf course, the client takes as an assumed value the existence of buggies to transport, different types of golf clubs, golf balls and grass in top condition.

The augmented or potential product includes accessibility, the environment or physical setting, the client's interaction with the service provider, the client's co-participation, and the client's interaction with other clients (Kotler et al., 2011). To this end, it is necessary to point up that the product has qualified personnel and quite flexible opening and closing hours, the entity offers a personalized and close service, most of the clients are guests from nearby hotels. The product has gaps related to accessibility, the services aren't fully equipped and provided for persons with certain physical limitations.

Demand

To identify the demand segment, a representative sample was determined from the total number of comments and reactions made by visitors to the entity on the Trip Advisor page and social networks. From an accessible population of 742 visitors who interacted with the digital platform in the last 5 years, a simple random probabilistic sampling was carried out.

A margin of error of 5 % was estimated, for which a representative sample of 254 individuals was obtained. Following this methodology, three clusters were determined:

1. Of the 132 clients that conform this cluster, the majority are of German origin, male, between 40 and 50 years old, who generally travel in the company of their partners and relatives. They value the personalization of the service, recreation, exercise, fun and the existence of complementary offers.

2. It is made up by 51 visitors, mostly Germans and Dutch of the female sex with an age range of 30 to 40 years who travel in the company of their partners and relatives. They value security and professionalism as main benefits.
3. It is integrated by a total of 71 visitors between Americans and Canadians with a slight preponderance of the male sex, between 50 and 60 years old who travel accompanied by their partners. They seek professionalism, entertainment, physical and mental well-being, animation, security, exercise, fun, recreation and personalization of the offer.

Environmental Management

According to Satorre and González (2020), the golf course presents several environmental problems that are a consequence, to a large extent, of poor environmental management of the course itself. Some of the main ones are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 - Main problems in the environmental management of Varadero Golf Club

Environmental problems
Conductor of sewage channeled inside the golf course, which cause blockages and overflow of the manholes.
The absence of trees in the countryside causing soil erosion.
Salinization of the soil due to its proximity to the sea.
High water consumption.
Low depth artificial lakes where algae reproduce that leave an unpleasant odor.

Source: Own elaboration base don Satorre and González (2020).

As a result of the internal analysis, it was possible to determine a weighted list of strengths and weaknesses validated by experts and actors in tourism management in the area.

Weighted list of weaknesses (W)

1. Environmental management problems.
2. High prices in comparison to the competitors.
3. Desmotivated human resource.
4. Deficient commercialization of the product.

Weighted list of strengths (S)

1. Advantegeous location in Varadero destination.
2. Green in good conditions.
3. High renown in the national and international context, hosting several competitions.

4. Strong service package with complementary products.

SWOT Matrix

The internal and external analysis of the tourist entity allowed the creation of a Cross Impact Matrix to determine the degree of incidence and importance of the defined variables divided in strengths (S), weaknesses (W), opportunities (O) and threats (T).

The values were categorized as following:

- 0: no impact
- 1: slight impact
- 2: regular impact
- 3: high impact

Table 3 - SWOT matrix

	O1	O2	O3	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5
S1	3	1	3	0	0	3	2	3
S2	1	0	2	0	0	2	1	0
S3	3	2	2	2	0	3	3	3
S4	2	3	3	2	1	2	3	1
S5	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
	27			33				
W1	3	0	2	3	2	3	2	2
W2	2	3	2	3	3	3	3	3
W3	3	0	2	2	1	2	2	3
W4	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3
	25			52				

Carrying out the cross-impact matrix detected the need to apply a survival strategy. The threats of the environment and the weaknesses in the management of the tourist entity prevail. The threats with the highest impact are given by the affectations caused by the Covid-19 and the economic and political crisis that affect the main source markets. The actions must be aimed at solving internal problems such as those associated with the commercialization of the product and the environmental problems present in the course.

Proposal of Actions

In accordance with the mission and vision established by the entity, the following strategic actions were identified:

- Implement an environmental management system aimed at responding to environmental problems that affect the golf course, with measures applied in the short, medium and long term. One of the attractions most valued by customers is precisely the recreation in the natural and fresh environment provided by the golf course. It is necessary for the actors and managers of the tourism product to value this attribute if they wish to preserve and increase the number of customers.
- Apply a system of attention to the man that motivates the workers and instills the organizational values, in this way the level of service is raised and a more personalized touch is acquired with the clients (internal and external) of the entity.
- Promote the holding of national and international events supported by the prestige of the Varadero Golf Club. Sporting events are a way of increasing tourist flows while giving the entity greater visibility.
- Promote domestic tourism through tour packages with more competitive prices. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge effect on international tourist arrivals; in this line, it is advisable to take advantage of other potential demand segments such as the domestic tourism.

Conclusions

The proper management of tourist entities is a prevailing need in current times.

Inadequate environmental management of the Varadero Golf Club golf course is a fundamental and counterproductive problem for the entity's tourism development from a comprehensive and sustainable approach.

The tourist entity presents important deficiencies in its management that, together with the latent threats of the environment, make it necessary to apply a survival strategy.

It is necessary to take strategic actions contemplated to respond and guide the proper tourism management of the entity.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.