6 The Future of Visitor Attractions

Introduction

This chapter explores the future of visitor attractions by using the examples of theme parks and world-renowned tourist attractions to illustrate the possible developments in this area. The chapter considers the impact of social media on visitor attractions and the associated phenomenon of 'overtourism' to demonstrate the types of problems being faced by visitor attractions and reflect on how tourism authorities are addressing these issues.

Theme parks and other visitor attractions

Attractions are arguably the most important component in the tourism system and could be described as the main pull factor for tourists to travel to particular destinations (Dann, 1981). Since attractions are the core of the tourism product, if there were no attractions then tourism as we know it would not exist (Swarbrooke, 2012). While no clear definition exists of visitor attractions, they can be split into four main types (Swarbrooke, 2012), namely:

1   Natural environments, such as rainforests, waterfalls, beaches, lakes and rivers;

2   Human constructed buildings and sites built for another purpose other than attracting visitors, but which now appeal to significant numbers of visitors who use them as leisure amenities, e.g., places of religious worship such as cathedrals and temples;

3   Human constructed buildings and sites specifically built to attract visitors and meet their needs, such as theme parks and amusement parks; and,

4   Special events.

A popular type of purpose-built attraction is the theme park. When a visitor buys a ticket and passes through the turnstiles, it signals they are entering a