
Section 3: The Contemporary Tourism Destination

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Delivering the Contemporary Tourism Product: the Destination

Chapter objectives

After reading this chapter you will:

- Understand the core elements in the destination concept.
- Be able to identify the key elements that make up 'place'.
- Understand the concepts of landscape, servicescape, and experiencescape.
- Understand the concept of a tourism resource and its dynamic nature.
- Recognise the cultural basis for tourism resources and attractions.
- Identify tourism attractions as a specific type of tourism resource.
- Appreciate the specific challenges facing destination management and marketing organizations with respect to controlling the destination product.

The destination concept

The notion of a destination lies at the heart of tourism. The concept that people travel from home to a destination, stay there for a limited period of time, and then return is how the phenomena of tourism is generally understood. The destination concept is one of the most important, yet also most complex, aspects of tourism (Saraniemi & Kylänen, 2011; Pearce & Schänzel, 2013; Pike & Page, 2014.; Cimbalević et al., 2019). It is complex because people, including marketers and researchers, have long referred to destinations of different scale. For example, Metelka (1990: 46) defined a destination as the “geographic location to which a person is traveling”; Vukonic (1997) equated the term to that of a ‘resort’, while Gunn (1994: 107) saw a destination as being a ‘travel market area’ and referred to destination zones that are geographic areas “containing a critical mass of development that satisfies traveller objectives” (Gunn 1994: 7). The varying approaches to the destination concept reflects Saarinen’s (2004: 164) observation:

Destination is by nature a problematic concept. It refers to a varying range of spatial scales (i.e. levels of representation) in tourism: continents, states, provinces, municipalities and other administrative units, tourist resorts or even single tourist products. Spatial scales and definitions of destinations based on administrative or other such units ... tend to approach tourism as a spatial and geographical phenomenon from a technical and static viewpoint.

Tourism destinations are therefore described at different scales ranging from the country level to regions, towns or resorts, specific sites and even specific attractions that are visited by tourists. A destination is a spatial or geographical concept that is primarily defined by visitors from outside the location, although many places seek to make themselves destinations for visitors in order to be able to benefit economically from tourism. A destination therefore, by definition, comes to exist by virtue of the people that visit it. If people from outside a location do not visit a place it is not a destination. That may seem like stating the obvious, but it is actually an extremely important point because it forces us to ask: how do places become destinations? And, as a follow up to that, what are the implications of becoming a destination?

The above two questions therefore serve as the focal point for this and the following chapters. This chapter examines how places become destinations and the elements that then make up a destination. The following chapters examine how destinations are then government, managed, planned and marketed.

From places to destinations

Three principle meanings of the idea of place can be distinguished, all of which are important to understanding the nature of destinations:

- Location
- Locale
- Sense of Place

Place as location

In locational terms, a place is a specific point on the earth's surface. This not only means that such a location has fixed geographical coordinates so that we can find them on maps, but that it helps us to place locations in relation to each other. New York is 'there', London is 'here'. Obviously mapping locations is important for tourism, but more significantly the location of where somewhere is in relation to other places will determine how relatively accessible it is and therefore its potential market for visitors.

Place as locale

This refers to place as a material or physical setting for people's daily social relations, actions and interactions. The physical aspects of places are obviously important in terms of their capacity to manage visitors as well as providing resources and attractions for tourists. Place in this sense not only refers to urban settings, such as ethnic neighbourhoods and arts and heritage precincts, but also to various kinds of 'scapes', including landscapes, servicescapes, streetscapes and experiencescapes (Figure 5.1) as part of a 'tourismscape' (Fagence, 2014; Timothy, 2020).

The word 'scape' refers to a view or a scene as well as to realist and abstract representations of a view. In marketing and related literature the notion of a scape has been utilized to refer to the physical environment that a consumer experiences and which is, often, deliberately produced so as to encourage consumption, provide a specific set of experiences, or at least satisfy a consumer's desires (Hall, 2008). Julier (2005), for example, refers to the notion of designscales to describe the use of the regeneration of areas within cities to create a place-identity. Urban designscales are defined as "the pervasive and multilevel use of the symbolic capital of design in identifying and differentiating urban agglomerations" (Julier, 2005: 874) with reference not only to brand design, architecture, events and urban planning; but also the productive processes of design promotion, organization and policy-making (Amore, 2020; Hanna et al., 2021). Undoubtedly, the numerous scapes of the city may be somewhat confusing. However, they highlight the way in which "the conscious design and manipulation of the physical environment in order to enhance atmospherics for consumers is not just internal to retail environments but is being extended to the fabric of space itself and the aesthetic experiences and social interactions that occur within it" (Hall, 2008: 237).