

# 6

## The service experiencescape

### Aims and objectives

Having established the principles of experiential marketing, we now turn to the different elements in the service environment that can impact upon the quality of the experience. The chapter looks at the different senses that can be enhanced in an experience environment and highlights this approach with several examples – the Guinness Storehouse, Hotel lifestyle, and Tree houses. Theming is then addressed, as it represents a key factor in the construction of the experience. The chapter will present the different facets of theming and will analyse how theming can be developed at both the man-made level of a resort and more holistically at the landscape level. Again, several examples will illustrate those aspects, including ski resorts design in France, forestry landscape management in Ireland and the impact of wind farms on landscapes.

After studying this chapter readers should be able to:

- Understand the different dimensions of the service environment that can be managed to create a satisfying and memorable experience (servicescape, atmospherics, etc.).
- Comprehend all the human senses that can be activated when designing a service
- Provide a detailed analysis of the notion of theming as a key factor to influence the experiencescape
- Contemplate the broadness of the servicescape by incorporating the landscape as an active element of the experiencescape
- Understand to which extent local actors can influence and preserve the attractiveness of their landscapes

The intangibility of services implies that consumers search for tangible cues concerning a firm's capabilities and overall perceived service quality, therefore the surroundings are very influential in communicating a firm's image (Bitner, 1992), creating lasting brand meaning (Baker *et al.*, 1994, Shostack, 1977) and communicating on its emotional persona (Bonn *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, since consumers are present while the service is being produced and consumed, the total surroundings can vastly influence consumers' behaviour (Belk, 1975; Booms and Bitner, 1981; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2007). In tourism, the dimension of the servicescape is extremely important as we will see in this chapter. This is due to the fact that tourists spend an extended period of time within the service environment and also because the experiencescape is at the centre of the experience: it not only needs to be functional but most importantly, this is what consumers have come to seek.

## ■ Concepts of servicescape and atmospherics

One of the first studies produced in this area of research was published by Kotler in 1974 where he qualified *atmospherics* as the process of designing a service space to influence the emotions of consumers, and ultimately their purchasing behaviour. Elements such as sound, scent and sight could be acted upon to influence the quality of the atmospherics. The atmosphere therefore represents the environment quality as it is perceived through different senses and evokes various emotions among individuals. In 1992, Bitner presented the concept of 'servicescape' which recognised that the physical environment had an important impact upon consumers' and employees' experiences. The servicescape included three dimensions: ambient conditions (temperature, music, noise, air quality, etc.), spatial layout and functionality (layout, furnishing) and signs, symbols and artefacts (signage, style, décor, etc.). Originally, the notion of servicescape referred to the built environment (as opposed to the natural or social environment).

### West Edmonton Mall: an experiential tourism experience

#### Shopping and experiential tourism

Shopping is considered as an integral part of tourists' practice within their experiences. It is also a preferred activity for travellers and tourist shoppers who are in search of bargains as well as of leisure and entertainment provided by the shopping centre industries. According to the International Council of Shopping Centres (2000), malls have the potential to create the same magical and entertaining experiences that were once only seen in

amusement parks such as Disney World. Thus, shopping centre industries recognise that a pleasant and interesting shopping experience is a vital part of tourists' experiences.

Although shopping for typical souvenirs and local gifts during the visit has always been a ritual tourism activity, tourist shopping also includes purchases of clothing, jewellery, books, arts and crafts, and electronics (Tomothy and Butler, 1995). Shopping in its broadest sense in the malls and shopping centres of Dubai, Hong Kong, Singapore, New York, etc. continues to develop as an important element of experiential tourism. West Edmonton Mall in Canada is an example of the large-scale tourist-oriented shopping malls in North America, and one that illustrates the experiential and socio-cultural aspects of the shopping experiences of tourist consumers.

### **West Edmonton Mall: an entertaining shopping experience for tourists**

West Edmonton Mall (WEM) is the third largest shopping centre in the world. WEM was founded by the Ghermezians family in the late 70s in Edmonton, which claims to be the world's most vibrant city and is the capital of the Alberta province. The city of Edmonton attracts tourists and shopper travellers from around the world throughout the year, as it is the most easily accessible place amongst tourist spots.

WEM was inspired by the traditional urban bazaars of Persia which combines both shopping and entertainment within one place. The mall has evolved through two phases. The mall opened the first time in September 1981 with 220 stores and services. In September 1983, the family increased the size of the mall and included different attraction spots such as the Ice Palace Skating Rink, Playdium, Blue Thunder Bungee, Deep Sea Adventure, Xorbitor, Professor WEM's Adventure Golf, World Waterpark, Glaxyland Amusement park and another 240 shops and services. Other sights include an aviary with various exotic birds, bronze statues commissioned especially for the mall and a couple of aquariums. In addition, the Edmonton mall has three main theme streets, Europa Boulevard, Chinatown and the New Orleans-style Bourbon Street where tourists can find more than 110 restaurants and eateries.

WEM attracts approximately 22 million visitors per year (Hazel, 2001). The Edmonton mall is currently listed as Alberta's number one tourist attraction (fast facts, 2002). It is also considered as a world-class destination and the mall's stores, attractions and services form the most comprehensive retail, hospitality and entertainment complex, where people come not only to shop but also to play and stay. The shopping malls in Edmonton explode with innumerable spots, products and services of different varieties and all the activities are possible in one place and under one roof at WEM. Beyond the fact that it could be viewed as an oversized shopping mall, WEM's top tourist attraction is a shop-and-play four-season wonderland. In summary, the main objective of the mall developers has been to create a mixed shopping and entertainment environment powerful enough to become a major tourist destination (Getz, 1993).