

# 9

# Marketing and Branding the Contemporary Destination

## Chapter objectives

After reading this chapter you will:

- Understand the process and outcomes of contemporary destination marketing
- Appreciate the importance of engaging with all stakeholders in contemporary destination marketing
- Understand the formation and characteristics of the destination image
- Be aware of strategic approaches to contemporary destination marketing
- Understand the formation and characteristics of destination brands
- Recognise the role that technology, particularly the Internet, can play in contemporary destination marketing
- Appreciate the structure and roles of destination marketing organizations
- Recognise that destination marketing is surrounded by a range of issues and questions relating to the ability of a destination to be marketed as the equivalent of a product or brand

## Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the marketing and branding of contemporary destinations. It demonstrates that one of the major issues for destination marketers is the destination image, yet this is something that is very difficult to influence and to change. The significance of the destination image shows that destination marketing is as much a strategic process as it is a tactical one. Indeed,

destination branding has to be viewed as a strategic activity as it is closely linked to the destination image and demands the close involvement of destination stakeholders in the design and acceptance of the brand. Of course, this process is now facilitated by technology and the Internet provides a cheap and effective marketing medium for destinations, as well as the opportunity to develop destination portals which provide a sense of ownership for stakeholders. Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) spearhead the technological developments for destinations and the marketing process generally; they act as umbrella marketing agencies and consolidate the role of destination partners. The chapter closes by identifying a range of key issues relating to destination marketing, including the role of the public sector, involvement of destination stakeholders, the very nature of the destination as a product and the question as to whether the theory of marketing can – or should – be extended to places and destinations.

## **Contemporary destination marketing and branding**

Contemporary destination marketing and branding is both a process and an outcome (Pike, 2008). The process of destination marketing involves dealing with the complexities of destinations and their myriad stakeholders, whilst the outcome is the brand or image of the destination (Yang and Pizam, 2011). In other words a good destination marketer will focus upon two key operations. First, managing the destination's many stakeholders and networks; and second, formulating and managing the destination brand. Definitions of destination marketing clearly distinguish between the process of destination marketing and the outcome, as shown in Table 9.1.

Ward (1998) observes that place marketing dates back to the selling of the frontier to the American people in the mid-nineteenth century. Destination marketing came later in the late nineteenth century, when destinations sought to attract visitors in an increasingly competitive market. However, the actual term 'destination marketing' and the formal process of engaging in a disciplined marketing approach are more recent. They can be traced back to the 1970s when the advent of mass international tourism enhanced competition between destinations and prompted the beginnings of destination marketing as a practice. The concept continues to evolve and, increasingly there is a view that it is 'branding' that is the glue that holds the marketing of the destination together. Indeed, some now use the term 'destination branding' in place of 'destination marketing'. Tourism agencies are not alone in their practice of destination marketing – it is also practiced by urban planners who tend to take a broader, more holistic view and include economic and social objectives (see Chapter 8).

**Table 9.1:** Definitions of the process and the outcome of destination marketing**The process**

'Destination branding is (the) process used to develop a unique identity and personality that is different from all competing destinations' (Morrison & Anderson 2002: 17)

'Place branding is an extremely complex and highly political activity that can enhance a nation's economy, national self-image and identity' (Morgan et al. 2004: 14).

Place marketing is 'the conscious use of publicity and marketing to communicate selective images of specific geographic localities or areas to a target audience' (Gold & Ward 1994: 2)

Destination marketing can be defined as the promotion of appealing images to attract visitors to a defined destination area (Middleton, 2000, p378).

Selecting a consistent element mix to identify and distinguish it [a destination] through positive image building (Cai 2002: 722)

**The outcome**

'A destination brand is a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination; furthermore it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience' (Ritchie & Ritchie 1998: 17).

A country image is 'the sum of beliefs and impressions people hold about places Images represent a simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected with a place' (Kotler et al. 1993).

Contemporary destination marketing operates at a variety of scales from the international to the very local. It is central to the activities of tourism organizations, delivering destination competitiveness and a range of benefits to the destination. These benefits focus around the issue of differentiation and competitiveness and include:

- Securing the emotional link to, and loyalty of, visitors.
- Coordination of the private sector and other stakeholders through cooperative marketing.
- Acting as a base for promotion of other products such as investment, economic development, film, and TV.
- Facilitating and encouraging the use of local products and design.
- Facilitating seamless market communication of the destination.

However, to be successful, contemporary destination marketing must engage with the complexities of the destination itself, not only in terms of the necessity to be inclusive in the development of the brand, but also to get to grips with the nature of the destination product and the consumption process. Morgan et al. (2011) for example state that destinations are lifestyle indicators for aspirational visitors, communicating identity, lifestyle and status. Their consumption is a highly involving experience that is extensively planned and remembered, in contrast to the purchase and consumption of fast moving consumer goods (FMCG). A destination is therefore more than a product – it is the physical space

in which tourism takes place, where communities live and work and is imbued with symbols and images of culture and history. It is also the space within which tourists and suppliers interact to deliver the tourist experience. This context makes destination marketing so different from marketing FMCGs and is illustrated by the following case study, focussing on a DMO that takes a 'whole of destination' approach to its operation.

## Case study 9.1: Place-making: The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council

The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council is an award winning DMO, having won a range of accolades, including the first ever Ulysses prize for innovation in destination management awarded by the UNWTO in 2006. This case study outlines key features of the Council's award winning approach. First, the Council's commitment to the local community and its development (Billington et al. 2008), and second, the Council's innovative approach to strategic destination marketing and product formulation.

### The destination

Blackstone Valley is in Rhode Island, USA. It is the birthplace of the American industrial revolution, dating from 1790. By the nineteenth century it was dominated by up to one thousand textile mills. Poor economic decisions in the early twentieth century exposed the valley's over-dependence on textiles and the region became depressed with a 14% unemployment rate in 1982, and the river was the most polluted in America.

The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council is using tourism to spearhead the economic regeneration of the Valley. In addition, the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor was created in 1986 to preserve and interpret 46 miles of significant historic and cultural lands, waterways and structures in the Valley, and to boost the economy. The Corridor is managed by the National Park Service, which coordinates federal, state and local agencies. Congress established the 'Corridor Commission' to act as the umbrella agency to develop the vision of the corridor through innovative partnerships. The goal of the Corridor is to create a park system linking parks, historic sites and recreational facilities for locals and visitors along the Valley (Billington & Manheim 2002).

In the early years of the twenty first century, the valley had a population of half a million people living in 24 cities, and attracted around 3 million visitors each year. They visit the valley's attractions, which include:

- Historic sites and museums
- River tours
- Vineyards, farms and orchards
- Events and the arts
- Education and the River classroom.