3 Attractions and demand generators

By the end of this chapter the reader will be able to:

- Conceptualise an attraction

- Critique the tourism attraction system and demonstrate how to apply markers

- Explain how the same attraction can play different roles for different market segments

- Analyse a taxonomy of attractions

- Apply the tourism attractions taxonomy in real world situations

Introduction

Tourism is driven by attractions and access. Attractions explain why people come to a destination, while access influences the volume of visitors. The two are inter-related for strong attractions create demand to enhance access, while weak access effectively limits demand and thus the size and scale of attractions. The opposite is also true. Weak attractions create little necessity to improve access, while strong access creates the opportunity to enhance the breadth of attraction offerings.

Tourism attractions play a fundamental role in the successful development of any destination. They serve as demand generators that give the customer a reason to visit (Cooper, 2021). Moreover, consumption of attractions is often considered to be the central theme of the tourism experience. Goeldner and Ritchie (2012) argue that attractions drive people to travel and represent the main motivations for travel. More importantly, they note that without attractions there would be little need for all other tourism goods and services. Mill and Morrison (2012) illustrate

that attractions at a primary destination have to have sufficient breadth and depth of appeal to encourage visitors to stay for many days. Holloway and Humphries (2016: 16) also note destinations must have adequate attractions to appeal to a large number of tourists and add further, the more attractions a destination has, the easier it becomes to market.

However, like most things in tourism, attractions are quite misunderstood, with Leask (2010) noting that even arriving at a universally accepted definition is a challenge. Trying to define demand generators is a reflection of the complexity of tourism systems. Issues such as classification, inclusive or exclusive definitions, size, aesthetic appeal, management regime and the target market all come into play. It is for this reason that some prefer the use of the term 'visitor attraction' instead.

A bigger issue, though, is that the term has been misused, with the concept of what constitutes varying levels of attractions and activities conflated and therefore confused. Holloway and Humphries (2016) observe even the term 'destination' is used synonymously with attraction. This chapter sifts through many of the issues relating to the conceptualisation of attractions and how they work. It begins by trying to define what an attraction is and how the tourism attractions' system works. Then it examines how the term has been abused, so that its use encompasses far more than the original meaning. This discussion leads to the need for some type of structured, taxonomic system to classify the various levels of an attraction. Finally, we look at the role attractions play in drawing visitors to a destination.

Conceptualising attractions

The idea of what constitutes an attraction was discussed in our literature some 40 years ago but has received relatively little attention since. Scholars agree in general that an attraction consists of a single entity bounded by time or space that is visited by tourists. There have been many attempts to categorise attractions over the years. Some have focussed on defining groups and sub groups according to the traditional triad of natural, cultural and built, with built attractions being divided into purpose-built and non-purpose-built (Holloway, 2002). Goeldner and Ritchie (2012) identified five broad classes of attractions, including cultural, natural, events, recreation and entertainment, while Walker and Walker (2011) note a continuum of attractions from natural to built, entertainment oriented. Douglas Pearce (1989) identified the source of attractions as including purpose-built facilities, features that are part of the regional fabric, places that have been transformed from their original function to serve tourism use or features of existing facilities that supplement or complement their original function. However, as Cooper (2021) notes, defining attractions is challenging because they come in a variety of forms, sizes, ownership structures and locations.