

Marketing Innovations for Sustainable Destinations

16 ‘We’ll All Go Down Together’: the Marketing Response of Australia’s Outback Destination to Recent Declines in Performance

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Introduction

In 2005, Desert Knowledge Australia released a report into the future of ‘outback tourism’ which noted that outback destinations had suffered more and were slower than other Australian destinations to recover from recent shocks such as the Asian financial crisis of the later 1990s, the terrorist attacks of 2001 and 2002, and the SARS and bird flu health scares. The *Our Outback* report identified the need for outback destinations to collaborate in a range of ways to counteract individual destination’s lack of critical mass and economic resources. Areas recommended for collaboration were the exchange of knowledge, staff training, and lobbying for improvements in funding and infrastructure. Marketing collaboration was specifically omitted from the report because each of Australia’s mainland states and the Northern Territory wanted to retain control of brand development for their own outback regions. Between 2005 and 2008, Australian tourism experienced four or five years of solid growth in international visitor numbers and held steady in what was previously a declining domestic market. The global financial crisis beginning in 2008 presents a new challenge (Tourism Research Australia, 2008a).

The aim of this chapter is to review the performance of Australian outback destinations during the 2000s and to investigate whether the state and territory push to emphasise ‘points of difference and uniqueness’ (Desert Knowledge Australia, 2005) is apparent in the content of their online marketing sites. In doing so, the chapter highlights the tension between retention of iconic tourism image (as might also apply to Europe’s Alps, the Caribbean’s beaches, Africa’s savannahs and so on) and the need to distinguish destinations from one another in the search for competitive advantage.

The Political Geography of Outback Tourism

Images of ‘the outback’ have played a central role in the marketing of Australia to international and domestic tourists for many years. In 2001, the Bureau of Tourism Research (Barry and Robbins, 2001) identified the outback as a key driver for international tourism, and suggested that those destinations with some claim to host authentic outback

Chapter extract

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