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Tourism Destinations and Destination Images

Introduction

The previous three chapters have discussed respectively, reasons behind tourists' motivation to travel, and the nature of resources that tourists will make use of, when they are involved in tourism. However, the discussion so far has not focused on precisely where tourists will travel to, why they have selected particular locations and/or activities, when they do this and the possible effects of this activity. This chapter considers to where tourists travel, and why they travel to these places. In this way it links the earlier chapters' concerns with motivations and resources.

Destinations

'Tourism destination' is an important concept, because not only is this the location where amenities, services and facilities, such as hotels restaurants, bars and entertainment centres are located (in other words the resources for tourism), but it is where the tourists are found, and they may be present in large numbers. The destination is also the location where visitors will interact with the host (or local) population as well as be in contact with the local environment. Tourists are also likely to interact with other tourists in the destination area.

As a result of the concentration of tourism facilities and the interaction of tourists with other tourists, with local people and the local environment, it is here that many of the impacts, which will be discussed in the second section of this book, usually occur. If tourism impacts are viewed as being concentrated spatially, then the planning and management of the response to these impacts will also be focused here in tourism destinations. This concern with planning and management is discussed in the final section of the book.

It has been traditionally the case that tourism destinations are regarded as geographical areas. Such areas are usually considered to have well defined boundaries (Hall, 2000). It is relatively easy to envisage this concept of a desti-

nation when applied to a geographical feature such as an island. However, it is also the case that the notion of a destination can apply to entire countries and here it is primarily a political definition that is being used. Destinations can also comprise towns and cities – these are both geographical and political concepts. In relation to cities and towns, the tourism element of the settlement may be of significance, but is likely to be found alongside other important functions, related to, for example, manufacturing industry, banking, trade or transport. In other words, tourism destinations often have other functions than those just linked to tourism. Nevertheless, some geographical locations owe their existence almost exclusively to tourism. Such locations would include coastal towns in Britain such as Blackpool, Scarborough and Brighton.

However, a problem with the use of the concept of a tourism destination, which may be apparent from the discussion above, is that it can be used at a range of different scales. So a part of a city can be a destination, a small coastal town can be a destination, but an entire country or even a continent (Antarctica would fit into this category) can be considered as a destination. What is actually considered to be a destination seems to depend largely on the researcher's focus of enquiry (Augustyn, 1998).

Applying the concept of scale to tourism destinations, Ritchie and Crouch (2003) provide a six-fold classification. This classification, (which has an underlying formal, political, and jurisdiction aspect), is as follows, starting with the largest geographical area at the top:

- A macro-region consisting of several countries (e.g. Europe) or a region that crosses several borders e.g. the Alps
- A nation or state
- A province or state within a country e.g. Ontario in Canada
- A localised region within a country e.g. South West England
- A city or town
- A unique locale, such as a national park, heritage site, memorial or monument that is significant enough to attract visitors.

A particularly useful definition of the destination which draws on the important geographical aspect is that of Murphy *et al.* (2000) who indicated that it is an amalgam of tourism products, available in certain geographic locations within a country, drawing tourists from beyond its boundaries.

However, there is an overlap between the concept of a tourism destination with other geographically based notions of the location or area where tourism is focused. So for example, there is a link between the concept of a destination and that of a resort. A resort can be narrowly defined as a localised self-contained tourism complex providing a variety of recreational activities in one location (Gunn, 1994). So, using this definition it is possible to put theme parks, some hotels that also provide significant entertainment activities, and even cruise ships into the category of resorts (see Laws 1993; Buhalis, 2000).

It has been argued that a key element of a tourism destination is that it has a *range* of different tourism facilities (Smith, 1994; Kozak and Rimington, 2000). Indeed, some authors differentiate a destination from a resort when they indicate that a destination has a variety and range of different tourism facilities and activities, whilst a resort tends to be focused on one single tourism attraction, such as a resort hotel (Ekinci *et al.*, 1998). However, the terms resort and destination are often used as if synonymous, and it should be clear how this is possible when a resort has been regarded by some researchers as a town or settlement, with a significant range of tourist activities and facilities or a region or even country in which several holiday centres are located (see Medlik, 1995; Laws, 1993).

It is also the case that the terms 'tourism destination' and 'tourism attraction' are frequently used as if they are synonymous. However, an attraction is usually considered to be just one object or aspect of tourism that draws in tourists (Swarbrooke, 1999). Swarbrooke provides a fourfold classification of visitor attractions (Figure 5.1). As Figure 5.1 shows, visitor attractions range from built heritage features, including historic monuments, such as Stonehenge, other historical built features, which may have had a previous purpose, such as country houses and castles, through natural/semi-natural attractions, for example National Parks to entirely manufactured attractions, including theme parks, art galleries and museums. In some cases a visitor attraction becomes a destination and this is particularly the case with theme parks such as Disneyland Paris or Alton Towers in the UK (Holloway, 2009). In both cases, the location of the theme park was not important as a tourism destination until the theme park itself was built.

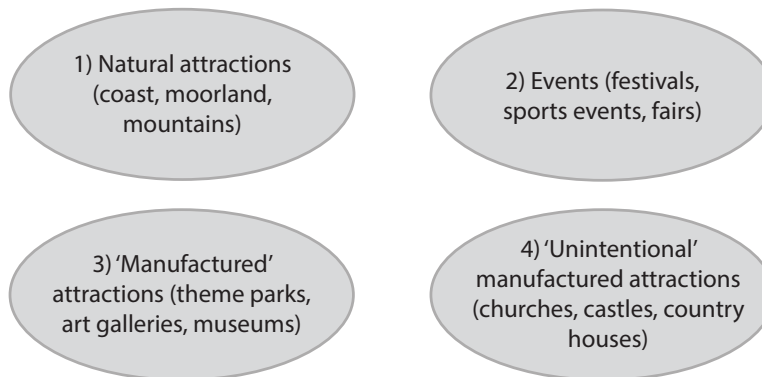


Figure 5.1: Swarbrooke's classification of visitor attractions (based on Swarbrooke, 1999).

Destination image

A key question in relation to visitor attractions is: What attracts tourists to these different types of destinations? If a person has visited before, then to a great extent, they know what to expect, but if someone has not visited the destination before, then it must be information that the potential tourist has obtained in advance and this will be linked to the image of the destination. As Ooi, (2010: 252) stated: