EDITED BY ALAN FYALL, BRIAN GARROD,
ANNA LEASK AND STEPHEN WANHILL

THIRD EDITION

MANAGING VISITOR ATTRACTIONS

ROUTLEDGE

Managing Visitor Attractions

Visitor attractions represent a complex sector of the tourism industry and are the catalytic focus for the development of tourism infrastructure and services. The third edition of this successful text investigates these issues further and provides more solutions and suggestions for the present and future.

Now in its third edition, *Managing Visitor Attractions* has been fully revised and updated to include new content on increased visitor numbers, new destinations and attractions, social media, overtourism, environmental awareness, and the experience economy. The book includes case studies on topics such as overtourism at natural attraction sites, new attraction development in Egypt, dark tourism in Latin America, dementia-friendly attractions, and managing sporting venues as attractions. New chapters include the role of the visitor attraction manager, managing safety and risk, themed attractions and storytelling, and digital marketing, among many others.

With contributions from around the world, this is an essential text for undergraduate and postgraduate students of visitor attraction management, written by subject specialists with a wealth of experience in this field.

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Managing Visitor Attractions

3rd Edition

Edited by Alan Fyall, Brian Garrod,
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This book is dedicated to
Alan Fyall – to Lise, Alix and Elliot
Brian Garrod – to Alison, Lydia, Drew and Nick
Anna Leask – to Malcolm and Euan

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Contents

List of figures xi
List of tables xvii
Editors and contributors xix
Foreword xxv
Preface xxvii

Part I: The Nature and Role of Visitor Attractions 1

1. The Nature and Role of Visitor Attractions 3
Anna Leask

2. The Market for Visitor Attractions 22
Ann Hartl

Part II: The Development of Visitor Attractions 39

3. The Visitor Attraction Development Process 41
Stephen Wanhill

4. Visitor Attraction Concept, Market Feasibility, and Site Selection 63
Stephen Wanhill

5. Financial Management for Visitor Attraction Projects 85
Stephen Wanhill

6. Visitor Attraction Success and Failure 108
Ann Hartl and Stephen Wanhill

Part III: Managing Visitor Attractions 123

7. The Role of the Visitor Attraction Manager 127
Brian Garrod

8. Operations Management for Visitor Attractions 145
Peter Robinson

9. Managing Visitor Impacts at Visitor Attractions 163
Brian Garrod

10. Managing Safety, Security, and Risk at Visitor Attractions 179
Marcus Hansen

11. Managing Human Resources for Visitor Attractions 196
Norma D'Annunzio-Green

12. Managing Temporal Variation at Visitor Attractions 213
Philip Goulding and Gill Pomfret

13. Interpretation and Visitor Attractions 234
Gianna Moscardo

14. Themed Attractions and Storytelling 251
Carissa Baker

Part IV: Marketing Visitor Attractions 269

15. Attraction Marketing Strategies 271
Ady Milman

16. Attraction Marketing Management 289
Jeffrey T. Weinland and Scott J. Smith

17. Marketing Challenges and Opportunities for Visitor Attractions: A Collaborative Approach 301
Alan Fyall and Connor Schrils

18. Digital and Social Media Marketing for Visitor Attractions 314
Bill Zanetti

19. Managing Universal Attraction Brands 330
Sean Bliznik

Part V: Cases 347

20. National Botanic Garden of Wales 351
Stephen Wanhill

21. Attraction Failure: The Hard Rock Park in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina 358
Jeffrey T. Weinland and Scott J. Smith

22. Overtourism at Natural Attraction Sites 364
Amanda (AJ) Templeton

23. Interpretation at Heritage Sites: Culloden Battlefield, UK 371
Ellis Urquhart

24. New Attraction Development: Grand Egyptian Museum, Giza, Egypt 378
Mostafa Selima

25. Augmented Reality in Heritage Attractions 386
Caroline Scarles and Zainal Abidin

26. Dark Tourism in Latin America: A History of Blood and Conflict 393
Maximiliano Korstanje

27. Dementia-friendly Heritage Visitor Attractions: A Case Study of the National Trust 399
Marcus Hansen

28. Managing Sporting Venues as Attractions: The Moses Mabhida Stadium, South Africa 406
Brendon Knott and Janice Hemmonsbey

29. Historic Royal Palaces: Managing a Portfolio of Visitor Attractions 414
Ann Hartl

30. Managing and Marketing Natural Sites 423
Bruce Prideaux

31. Developing a Masterplan: Elvaston Castle Country Park 430
Peter Robinson and Angela Glithero

Conclusion 439

Endnote: Visitor Attractions and the Covid-19 Pandemic 445
Index 451

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Figures

Chapter 1

Fig 1.1 Dubrovnik walled city as a visitor attraction with fixed boundaries 6
Fig 1.2 Classification of visitor attractions 9
Fig 1.3 Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland 10
Fig 1.4 Iconic photo of Angkor Wat, crowd-free, at dawn 15
Fig 1.5 Taj Mahal, India 17

Chapter 2

Fig 2.1 Dartboard model of competition 26
Fig 2.2 Average monthly visits to the ‘Big Pit’ National Coal Museum, Wales, 2017–2019 29
Fig 2.3 Display of the ‘Big Build’ at the Eden Project in Cornwall 30
Fig 2.4 Historic Royal Palaces information display outside Kensington Palace 31
Fig 2.5 Environmental analyses: The macro- (PESTLE) and micro-environments 33

Chapter 3

Fig 3.1 Attraction project cost/revenue flows 45
Fig 3.2 The feasibility study sequence 46
Fig 3.3 Stylised attraction project 51
Fig 3.4 Effects of operating leverage 55
Fig 3.5 Operational and overall viability 55
Fig 3.6 The Albert Dock 57
Fig 3.7 Representational theme park site use 59

Chapter 4

Fig 4.1 Economics of innovation for attractions 65
Fig 4.2 Walt Disney 66
Fig 4.3 Two parameter curves 71
Fig 4.4 Three parameter curves 71
Fig 4.5 S curve 72
Fig 4.6 The Delphi method 74
Fig 4.7 Mixed visitor flows 76
Fig 4.8 The implementation process 76

Chapter 5

Fig 5.1 Internal rate of return 90
Fig 5.2 The basic project 94

Chapter 6

Fig 6.1 Pricing rules 110
Fig 6.2 The Harry Potter World of Universal Studios 114
Fig 6.3 The London Eye 115
Fig 6.4 Sydney Opera House 119

Chapter 7

Fig 7.1 Fayol’s five managerial processes 129
Fig 7.2 The roles of the manager 130
Fig 7.3 Types of organisational change 137
Fig 7.4 Eight characteristics of the manager that facilitate organisational change 140

Chapter 8

Fig 8.1 The operations management model 146
Fig 8.2 Part of the polar bear enclosure designed to ensure keepers and bears are safe and not in close contact with each other 151
Fig 8.3 Helter-Skelter temporarily based in Norwich Cathedral during 2020 156
Fig 8.4 The turbine hall is part of the Drax Power Station tour 157

Chapter 9

Fig 9.1 Categories of visitor impact at visitor attractions 165
Fig 9.2 Visitor congestion on the Great Wall of China 166
Fig 9.3 Categories of tools available to manage visitor impacts 169
Fig 9.4 ‘Snaking’ of queues at the ‘It’s a Small World’ ride, Disneyland, California 171

Chapter 10

Fig 10.1 Areas of security concern 183
Fig 10.2 Alton Towers visitor numbers 184
Fig 10.3 Risk assessment template 185
Fig 10.4 Risk management strategies of visitor attraction 187
Fig 10.5 Visitor safety perceptions 189
Fig 10.6 Risk perception attitude framework 190
Fig 10.7 Zipline safety harness 191

Chapter 11

Fig 11.1 Generating strategic recruitment and retention based on skills or diversity audit 203

Fig 11.2 Identifying training needs for all actors and levels via multi-level training needs analysis 205
Fig 11.3 Proactive engagement with trends and developments via trend and market analysis 207

Chapter 12

Fig 12.1 Seasonal distribution of international visitor arrivals to five major destination countries in 2019 216
Fig 12.2 Perspectives of tourism seasonality 218
Fig 12.3 Cherry blossom season in Kyoto, Japan 219
Fig 12.4 Conceptual framework of temporality for visitor attractions 220
Fig 12.5 Conference facilities at the Scotch Whisky Experience 226
Fig 12.6 Tourists stand in line to visit a museum at the Vatican, Rome 227

Chapter 13

Fig 13.1 Interpretation process supporting management at visitor attractions 237
Fig 13.2 Monterey Bay Aquarium layered interpretive sign on take home sustainability actions 241
Fig 13.3 Part of sustainability interpretation at New Belgium Brewery tour 244

Chapter 14

Fig 14.1 Storytelling in phases of the guest: Strategies from organisations and interactions with visitors 254
Fig 14.2 Dark ride, a unique narrative form created by the amusement industry 258
Fig 14.3 Immersive theatre, role-playing, and branching narrative experiences, a newer addition to the theme park storytelling landscape 259

Chapter 15

Fig 15.1 Strategic experience modules (SEMs) 275
Fig 15.2 Preikestolen (the Pulpit Rock), Norway 276
Fig 15.3 An actor portraying King Henry VIII at Hampton Court Palace 277
Fig 15.4 Eiffel Tower illuminated in pink in support of breast cancer awareness 278

Chapter 16

Fig 16.1 Silver Dollar City Time Traveler: An example of a modern-day rise attraction 292
Fig 16.2 Deep-fried Oreos – snacks suitable for consumption at theme parks 293

Chapter 18

Fig 18.1 Walt Disney World in Florida 319
Fig 18.2 Bowlin's 'The Thing', a roadside stop in Arizona, USA 323

Chapter 19

Fig 19.1 The brands of the Walt Disney Company 336
Fig 19.2 Exterior of Main Street Bakery, Walt Disney World Resort 338
Fig 19.3 Co-branded Starbucks merchandise exclusively available at Magic Kingdom theme park 338
Fig 19.4 Pure brand license. Various merchandise productions of the character Cogsworth from Disney's aminated feature film, Beauty and the Beast 339

Chapter 20

Fig 20.1 The Great Glasshouse of the National Botanic Garden of Wales 352
Fig 20.2 NBGW visitor numbers 354

Chapter 21

Fig 21.1 The Led Zeppelin coaster at the Hard Rock Park 360

Chapter 22

Fig 22.1 Photo opportunity at Bryce Canyon National Park, Utah 366
Fig 22.2 Early morning crowds at a national park more common to major theme park attractions 367
Fig 22.3 Crowds stretching beyond existing visitor management provision at a national park 368

Chapter 23

Fig 23.1 Immersive corridor at Culloden Visitor Centre 373
Fig 23.2 The Battlefield Cairn 374

Chapter 24

Fig 24.1 Example of Egypt's unique heritage on display 379
Fig 24.2 The scale of the GEM is evident with the pyramids in the background 380

Chapter 25

Fig 25.1 Smartify 387
Fig 25.2 Smartify in action at Watts' Gallery – Artists' Village 388

Chapter 26

Fig 26.1 Locals living a normal life in Colombia, with a powerful dark tourism backdrop 395
Fig 26.2 Poor neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires now transformed by tourism 396

Chapter 27

Fig 27.1 Derek peruses the Watercress Line's 'basket of memories' as he sits aboard 402

Chapter 28

Fig 28.1 Moses Mabhida Stadium 407
Fig 28.2 The 'Skycar' at Moses Mabhida Stadium 410

Chapter 29

Fig 29.1 The Tower, Hillsborough Castle, Hampton Court, Great Pagoda, Kensington Palace, Kew, Banqueting House 415
Fig 29.2 Visitors to the Historic Royal Palaces, 2006/7–2019/20 417
Fig 29.3 Market appeal of the Royal Historic Palaces 418
Fig 29.4 Annual turnover development, 2009/10–2019/20 419

Chapter 30

Fig 30.1 The Queensland Rail heritage train is a popular way to travel through the Wet Tropics Rainforest west of Cairns 425
Fig 30.2 Cairns is a major tourist gateway to the Great Barrier Reef and hosts a large fleet of tour boats that offer day and overnight trips 427

Chapter 31

Fig 31.1 Elvaston Castle Country Park 431
Fig 31.2 The Gardener's Cottage will become a tea-room 433
Fig 31.3 Map of Elvaston Castle Country Park 434
Fig 31.4 The car parking strategy 435
Fig 31.5 The proposed visitor hub 436
Fig 31.6 Some work has already been completed 437

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Tables

Chapter 1

Tab 1.1 Visitor Attraction types (after Leask 2010) 7

Chapter 2

Tab 2.1 Top 25 most-visited attractions in the world 24

Chapter 3

Tab 3.1 Tourism development plan 42
Tab 3.2 Attraction terms of reference 47
Tab 3.3 Resolving public-private-sector attraction selection 48
Tab 3.4 Checklist for an attraction feasibility study 49
Tab 3.5 Variety of imagescapes 52
Tab 3.6 Attraction support services 53

Chapter 4

Tab 4.1 Classification of innovations 66
Tab 4.2 The seven stories 68
Tab 4.3 Forecasting methods 70
Tab 4.4 Forecasting attendance at Disneyland Park, Anaheim, CA, USA 72
Tab 4.5 Regional museum scenario visitors (thousands) 75
Tab 4.6 The attraction market–imagescape mix 79
Tab 4.7 Gantt chart for a special exhibition 82

Chapter 5

Tab 5.1 Financial management accounting 86
Tab 5.2 Present value of £1 at discount rate r payable in t years 88
Tab 5.3 Attraction project, £(000s) 89
Tab 5.4 NPV of the attraction project, £(000s) 89
Tab 5.5 IRR of the attraction project, £(000s) 91
Tab 5.6 Attraction project benefits 96
Tab 5.7 Environment and visitor economy 97
Tab 5.8 CRF for £1 at discount rate r with a life of T years 99
Tab 5.9 Profitability measures 101
Tab 5.10 Project sensitivity analysis 103
Tab 5.11 Capital funding for attractions 105

Chapter 6

Tab 6.1 Project outcomes 112
Tab 6.2 Judging attraction success 113

Chapter 7

Tab 7.1 Competence requirements of managers of visitor attractions 132

Chapter 8

Tab 8.1 Application of the servicescape concept to the visitor journey 152

Chapter 12

Tab 12.1 Supply-side strategies for coping with or combating temporal variation 230

Chapter 13

Tab 13.1 Examples of interpretation principles applied in visitor attractions 238

Chapter 14

Tab 14.1 Definitions and components for theme park narratives recap 265

Chapter 17

Tab 17.1 Factors contributing to collaboration effectiveness 310
Tab 17.2 Reasons for collaborative failure 311

Chapter 20

Tab 20.1 Welsh Office feasibility study for the NBGW Locations, 1993 352
Tab 20.2 NBGW capital cost £(millions), 2020 prices 353
Tab 20.3 Failing performance of the NBGW 355
Tab 20.4 The diversity of NBGW product offer, 2020 356

Chapter 29

Tab 29.1 Royal Historic Palaces – Fact box 420

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Foreword

The last 18 months, punctuated by the Covid-19 pandemic, have presented a major challenge to the attractions industry worldwide. The recent months have illustrated just how resilient the industry is, with operators continuing to develop great guest experiences and visitors demonstrating pent-up demand to engage with these memorable spaces. Attractions present guests with the opportunity to connect with family and friends, enjoy entertainment, appreciate the natural world, and grow in understanding of cultures and histories. This is a mission my organization, IAAPA, the global association for the attractions industry, has been facilitating for more than a century. Representing a varied range of attractions from local museums and science centers to family entertainment centers and destination theme park resorts, IAAPA supports its members with opportunities not only to connect with one another at IAAPA Expos held around the world but also to develop as individuals and companies through educational offerings and involvement in promoting safety and advocacy within the industry. Continuous learning of professionals—whether through industry programming, certification or formal education in management—can help attractions achieve IAAPA's goal of delivering meaningful experiences for guests around the world.

As a sector, the attractions industry is an exciting arena to work in. However, it is also a challenging business and ever-shifting in the ways it offers experiences. In my 25+ years in the industry, I have worked in executive roles involving the planning, development, construction and operation of major themed entertainment destinations for several companies in three world regions. During that time, I have been excited to see the growth and change in the industry globally but also constantly surprised in its evolution. This third edition of *Managing Visitor Attractions* will help students understand some of these shifts and comprehend the complexity of this dynamic industry. This book will help new leaders expand their knowledge through an understanding of grounded principles and studying practical cases. It will also be of interest to experienced leaders since it contains historic and recent cases from diverse places. The book focuses on developing, managing, and marketing attractions, and it includes timely topics such as sustainability, human resource management, and the uses of technology in shaping attraction development. Our industry continues to grow, with both mature and emerging markets constantly raising the bar to create new and innovative experiences. I am thrilled to see where the attractions industry is headed and look forward to the next generation of leaders' contributions. I also have no doubt that by utilizing the combination of education and experience to create new attractions the future of this amazing industry will continue to evolve for the better.

John Hallenbeck
Vice President and Executive Director, IAAPA North America
Orlando, FL, USA. September 2021

Preface

The impetus to develop this third edition of the book came largely from educators who have adopted the two previous editions. With more than a decade having passed since the publication of the second edition, many adopters were asking when a third one would be published. After all, a lot of water has passed under the bridge since the second edition was published in 2008. The visitor attraction sector has continued to grow worldwide, both in size and reach. The theme park industry has grown enormously with many theme parks having effectively become destinations in their own right. Smaller visitor attractions have nevertheless continued to multiply, diversify, and spread. New funding sources have also developed, including, for example, the use of 'crowdfunding'. Visitors have come to expect ever-higher standards of service provision and changes in the benefits and outcomes that they expect from a visit to an attraction. The visitor profile has changed, with an ageing population in many countries, though visitors often still come from traditional attraction audiences that can lack diversity and inclusion. There is a greater emphasis on the use of technology for all aspects of the visitor journey, pre-, during, and post-visit.

The macro-environment in which visitor attractions operate has also become increasingly complex and turbulent, as can be seen by, for example, the currently ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. In terms of the latter, this book was largely written during the early part of the pandemic and many chapters therefore reference its emerging effects. At the time of writing this preface, it is too early to be sure what lasting effects Covid-19 might have on visitor attractions worldwide. We have decided to acknowledge Covid-19 by including a summary of current thinking in a postscript to this book. The ever-more-pressing climate emergency is already impacting on the availability, management issues and solutions in place at visitor attractions internationally, with opportunities for sustainable and regenerative tourism coming to the fore. The changing political landscape in destinations brings changes in the availability of skilled staff and market opportunity, for example, the impact of Brexit in the UK employment market and freedom of movement of tourists.

Visitor attractions have responded to the changes in their operating environments with innovative experience development, new products for new audiences and improvements to existing ones. That said, this is against a backdrop of the commercial imperative that entails a need for visitor attractions to generate their own income and gradually wean themselves from public subsidies. This is a fine balancing act, whereby discerning visitors increasingly look for value for money and time, and funders look for clear evidence of the value of their support. The importance of the staff in the successful delivery of the experience and operation of a visitor attraction is also clear, with many visitors citing staff interactions as being critical in their positive reviews and experiences. Talent and skills development have therefore taken on greater importance, particularly in competitive employment markets.

This new edition has also provided the editors with the opportunity to update the chapter coverage to include topics that have emerged and grown in importance since the publication of the second edition. Other new chapters have been included on the request of readers and adopters in order to broaden the focus of the book. The introductory section therefore now includes an additional chapter on the market for visitor attractions, which helps to set the scene for the rest of the book by outlining the shape, form, and operation of the visitor attraction sector worldwide.

The new edition has also provided an opportunity to expand and reorganise the second section, which comprise a sequence of chapters dealing with the development of visitor attractions. These now take the reader through a more logical story arc, starting from the moment of inspiration for wanting to develop a new visitor attraction and finishing at the point where it is ready to open its gates to the public. An updated chapter on visitor attraction success and failure is also included at the end of this section of the book to bring the previous three into perspective.

The third section, which covers the management of visitor attractions, has also been expanded to include a greater breadth of topics. New chapters are included on the role of the manager, operations management, risk and safety management, and the use of theming and storytelling in interpretation.

Four new chapters on marketing then comprise the final section of the book, covering marketing strategies and marketing management for visitor attractions, digital and social-media marketing, and managing universal brands respectively. With the first and second editions of this book published in 2003 and 2008 respectively, the arrival of Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005, Apple's first iPhone in 2007, the first hashtag appearing in 2007 and then Instagram in 2010, the world of marketing is very different to that studied by the editors of this third edition over three decades ago. Given the growing importance of marketing in the visitor attraction context, including the much greater use of digital communications and branding strategies, we feel that this is a valuable extension to the book's coverage.

There are undoubtedly further topics that are of contemporary relevance to the management of visitor attractions that we have not included in this new edition but that will inevitably be the case with any book. We do feel, however, that this book represents a genuine attempt to bring together the most important topics. As with previous editions, we have divided them thematically into four sections covering: an introduction to visitor attractions, the development of visitor attractions, the management of visitor attractions and the marketing of visitor attractions. We have also again attempted to keep the chapters as generic as possible in terms of specifics such as geographical coverage, visitor attraction type and ownership categories, thematic focus, and size.

The reader will also notice a reorganisation of the case material in this new edition. Whereas in the second edition we included a short case-study section at the end of each chapter, this time we decided to collect the cases together at the end, along with a grid to help explain how each one contributes to the understanding of topics covered in the main chapters. The benefit of this approach is that it allows the inclusion of more substantial and more topical cases, which can develop cross-cutting themes that relate to topics covered in several different chapter. This is, after all, how things work in actuality: the visitor attraction manager must bring together knowledge and ways of working with the knowledge from a broad range of subject areas in order to address, and hopefully resolve, the real-word issues his or her visitor attraction is facing at any point in time.

Other new features can be found at the end of each chapter and case. These include suggested further reading, a set of self-test questions for readers to try once they have read the chapter, and a student project that we recommend educators to set for their students. These projects are designed to help readers apply the knowledge they have learned in the chapters, further developing and embedding it in the process. We hope that readers find them interesting and even enjoyable to do.

In presenting this third edition of the book, the editors would like to suggest that much has changed in the visitor attraction context since the publication of the second edition of this book, but much has evidently not changed at all. While the visitor attraction sector has professionalised a great deal in recent times, this cannot be said of every visitor attraction in every place, with many small, independent visitor attractions operating on a shoe-string with little more than the enthusiasm of their owners and staff by way of resources. This was almost certainly true when the second edition of this book was published. Only the details have changed. Similarly, it could be said that while customer expectations have risen significantly since the writing of the second edition of this book. Much remains unchanged, however, with regard to their nature of those expectations. Visitor attractions still compete against a wide array of other uses of leisure time, including other day-trip activities and various home pursuits: it is just the nature of those competitors, and perhaps the intensity of competition, that has changed. It can also be argued that visitors still want the same things when they visit an attraction: something to catch their attention, satisfy their curiosity and hopefully fire their imagination; somewhere they can go as a group and socialise and spend time together clean, tidy, uncrowded, and safe environments in which to spend their time; somewhere to have a bite to eat and something to drink; somewhere with toilet facilities. Expectations that have changed, meanwhile, and generally for the better, relating to the provision of facilities for people with disabilities, even if such provision has tended to relate mainly to the needs of those with physical conditions, such as the need to use a wheelchair to get about, as opposed to needs associated with sensory and intellectual disabilities. There is still clearly a job of work to be done, even so, in terms of making visitor attractions more accessible to people of varied social and ethnic backgrounds. This is particularly the case with regard to heritage-based attractions, where the visitor profile still remains relatively narrow. Encouraging young people to engage with heritage by visiting visitor attractions also remains a challenge. This is particularly so when school budgets are continually being squeezed, causing the viability of taking schoolchildren on day trips to visitor attractions increasingly to be questioned.

In bringing this preface to a close, the editors would like to recognise their debt to the chapter and case authors, who have contributed a wealth of knowledge to the project and, without exception, been reliable and conscientious in making their submissions on time and in the right formats. This was greatly appreciated by the editors, particularly given that the writing of this book has coincided with a time when everyone working both in education and the visitor attraction sector has been busy coping with the Covid-19 pandemic. All contributors are either recognised academic experts of industry practitioners and their time is valuable. Thank you for choosing to spend it on this project. The editors would also like to thank the amazing professional staff at Taylor and Francis, especially Lydia Kessell for guiding us through the process. The old analogy of managing academics being like herding cats comes to mind.

It is hoped that this third edition of *Managing Visitor Attractions* helps to inform and challenge readers, provides educators with a ready supply of ideas and resources and, above all, records another staging point in the development of visitor attractions as a field of study. Visitor attractions are fascinating, pleasurable, challenging, and rewarding places to visit. We hope that this book helps the same to be said about studying them.

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PART I

The Nature and Role of Visitor Attractions

The first part of this book explores the broad context within which visitor attractions operate and provides an historical overview of how the visitor attraction product and experience has developed over time. While the overall focus of the book is on the role of visitor attractions as a major component of the tourism system, it is important to recognise that visitor attractions operate within a number of inter-related internal and external environments. For example, many visitor attractions play a vital role in conserving and protecting the natural and built historic heritage. Others have an explicit educational function or are important in helping to maintain specific cultural identities and practices. As a result, the management of visitor attractions is influenced by a range of complex issues in addition to those arising out of their role as tourism resources. The key themes identified in the first part of this book therefore cover a broad range of issues relating to the context in which visitor attractions are managed.

After providing an introduction to the variety and scope of visitor attractions, Chapter 1 considers how visitor attractions may best be defined and categorised. Definitions of visitor attractions vary significantly around the world, as does the basis for the categorisation of different types of visitor attraction within a certain definition. This gives rise to a major dilemma for the conduct of research into the management of visitor attractions. On the one hand, the lack of a common definition of what constitutes a visitor attraction can frustrate efforts to compare management concepts and identify best practice across different categories of visitor attraction, as well as across the visitor attraction sectors of different countries. On the other hand, the existence of a wide diversity of visitor attractions may call into question the necessity and desirability of a common definition. Indeed, visitor attraction sectors around the world are often characterised by a very large number of small attractions that have poor access to resources and are diffuse in spatial terms, yet are trying to meet a wide range of objectives set by a multitude of stakeholders. The multiplicity of objectives arising from the wide range of stakeholder interests is typically evident among visitor attractions.

Chapter 1 then goes on to explore how visitor attractions fit into the overall tourism system within destinations. Visitor attractions are clearly

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only one part of a complex network of tourism service providers. The chapter considers the main inter-relationships and inter-dependencies between visitor attractions and the wider tourism industry. Visitor attractions are then discussed in relation to the wider political and socio-cultural environment. The degree to which the focus of analysis should be at the level of the individual attraction, at the destination level or at the national level is also explored. This, in turn, raises the question of whether the focus of analysis should be on the management of the attraction as a whole or on particular management functions, such as marketing or human resource management.

Chapter 2 explores the market for visitor attractions. Starting with a brief history of the development of visitor attractions, it can be seen that many visitor attractions have developed and diversified over time, rather than being static openings with visitors as the primary feature. Many have been converted from original uses for worship or industry and continue to balance the multiple requirements of both existing and new user groups. The chapter then looks at the nature of competition, as, with the need to appreciate the variety of definitions and types of visitor attractions, it is also crucial to appreciate the nature of the market environment within which they operate. While attractions often operate in very competitive marketplaces, Ann Hartl points out that co-opetition is strong between some as they recognize the need and benefits of working collaboratively across destinations. A common theme throughout this text is the need to anticipate and meet the increasingly diverse and changing visitor expectations, resulting in a need for visitor attraction developers and managers to understand consumer behaviour in relation to visiting habits and satisfaction. Chapter 2 explores models of visitor decision-making in families and cross-culturally through the use of international examples of practice.

CHAPTER 1

The Nature and Role of Visitor Attractions

Anna Leask

Keywords: Definition – Destination attractiveness – Classification – Flagship attraction

Aims

The aims of this chapter are:

- To explore and define the term visitor attraction.
- To provide a classification of visitor attraction categories.
- To demonstrate the contribution that visitor attractions make to the tourism system.
- To identify the range of roles that visitor attractions play in international, national and local destinations.

Introduction

There can be no doubting the crucial role that visitor attractions have in the development and success of tourism destinations. At their most basic level, they work to attract visitors to an area, while many also operate in a much broader sense, as agents of change, social enablers and major income generators. Indeed, Boniface, Cooper, and Cooper (2016: 54) state that "attractions are the *raison d'être* for tourism; they generate the visit, give rise to excursion circuits and create an industry of their own".

The purpose of this chapter is first to define the terms visitor attraction and tourism destination, showing how they are distinct and yet increasingly overlapping. It will then explain how visitor attractions fit into the tourism sector and link with its other component parts. The multiple roles of visitor attractions will then be introduced. These include not only the economic contributions of visitor attractions but also their environmental and socio-cultural impacts, and their role in generating destination attractiveness. This will link to a discussion of the purposes of visitor attraction. Lastly, the chapter will discuss the role of visitor attractions in local, regional, and national economic development, including the use of visitor attractions to boost destination appeal.

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Defining visitor attractions

There can be confusion in arriving at an agreed definition for the term visitor attraction within an international context, although there is value in this as it enables researchers, students and practitioners to develop shared understanding of the boundaries and debates associated with the term. While the difficulty in arriving at a definitive definition is acknowledged to be challenging (Weidenfeld, Butler, and Williams, 2016), several authors (Leask, 2016; Robinson, Lück, and Smith, 2020) consider it important to establish clear definitions and classifications in order to enable greater clarity and international comprehension.

Definitions for statistical purposes

While they may be some common debates within different definitions, such as the fixed nature or permanence of an attraction, the aspects involved in the various definitions often depend upon the purpose for which they are being developed and the date of their development. For example, tourism authorities such as VisitEngland have used a universal definition of attractions to record and monitor attractions for statistical purposes and to enable annual comparison of results since the 1990s. The current definition (VisitEngland, 2020) is:

> … an attraction where it is feasible to charge admission for the sole purpose of sightseeing. The attraction must be a permanently established excursion destination, a primary purpose of which is to allow access for entertainment, interest, or education and can include places of worship (but excludes small parish churches); rather than being primarily a retail outlet or a venue for sporting, theatrical, or film performances. It must be open to the public, without prior booking, for published periods each year, and should be capable of attracting day visitors or tourists as well as local residents. In addition, the attraction must be a single business, under a single management, so that it is capable of answering the economic questions on revenue, employment etc.

This definition does raise some additional queries, such as the condition that to be considered an attraction for sightseeing purposes it should be possible (but not compulsory) to charge an admission fee for access, as this may not account for broadening visitor motivations and exclude categories such as historic battlefields and places of worship. In 2020 the concept of ‘without prior booking’ took on a poignancy, as health-and-safety precautions due to the Covid-19 pandemic required visitors to pre-book to enable physical distancing and forced capacity limitations. This also relates to the ability to identify the boundaries of a visitor attraction by being able to have fixed points of entry and exit, as would be required for gathering admission fees, and the point that they should be under single management. A city centre, such as Venice for example, may be very difficult to cordon off in this way.

While this definition does limit the range of facilities included, through requirements for permanence and primary purpose, changing leisure patterns and product development mean that the definition may not be so relevant now as it was originally. Many attractions offer a comprehensive range of services and facilities for entertainment, shopping, catering, accommodation, and events, that may not be solely based on the one visitor attraction product. This issue of definition is highly pertinent, as numerous retail and sporting attractions that are included in studies conducted in other countries, such as marinas and golf courses in Canada and casinos in the USA, would be excluded if one were to adopt the VisitEngland definition. As McKercher (2016) states, the term 'attractions' has developed so broadly that it has been used to represent a collective noun that represents groups of single entities into increasingly broad categories, perhaps requiring adjustment to existing definitions.

Definitions for academic research

Developed for the purposes of academic research, Leask (2018: 301) defines visitor attractions as "natural, cultural or built assets that have been created or converted into a permanent visitor experience, where visitor interpretation and engagement with the asset is a core purpose of the development and management of the site". In common with the VisitEngland (2020) definition, this highlights the use of the term visitor attraction, rather than tourist attraction, on the basis that the term 'visitor' is more inclusive, thus emphasising that visitor attractions exist to meet the needs of local residents, day visitors, and overnight tourists. This definition also focuses on the aspect of visitor engagement with the key asset at the visitor attraction via interpretation, rather than the purpose of the visit being for retail or broader leisure purposes. Associated with this aspect of interpretation forming a key part of a visitor attractions contributes to another debate in defining visitor attractions in relation to how they are distinct from festivals and events. While Robinson et al. (2020) consider events to be a type of visitor attraction, Weidenfeld and Leask (2013) argue that they are not visitor attractions in their own right, rather they are a separate form of tourism or an additional experience that is available as part of the visitor attraction product. This is because the visitors must come to the permanent, fixed location of the visitor attraction, rather than the event moving to a different location, while festivals and events are temporary in nature and can move and adjust more easily to the location of the market as they are not usually directly linked to a specific asset. In addition, festival and event experiences rarely involved interpretation of the asset that is the basis of a visitor attraction experience (Leask, 2022). Where the festival or event is directly linked to the asset that

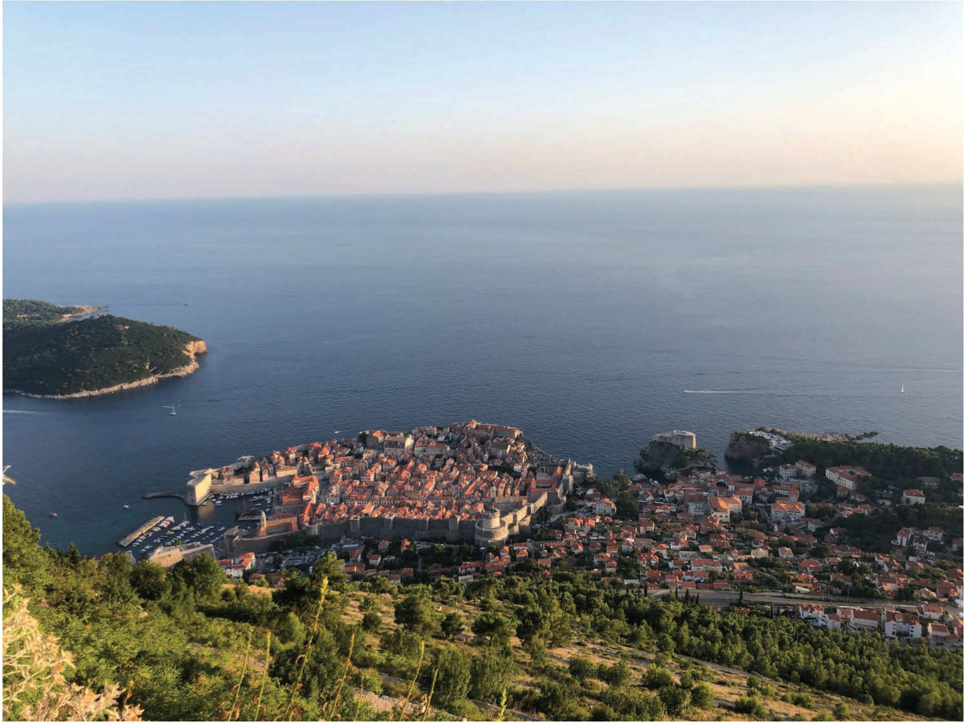

Fig 1.1
Dubrovnik walled city as a visitor attraction with fixed boundaries
Source: Anna Leask

forms the basis of the visitor attraction, then they could be considered to be a subset of visitor attractions, otherwise they are a separate tourism product category. An example of a festival that has grown and developed into a permanent visitor attraction experience will be at the M+ in Hong Kong, a museum dedicated to collecting, exhibiting, and interpreting visual art, design and architecture, moving image, and Hong Kong visual culture that initially started as a festival and will have a permanent structure in West Kowloon in 2021.

Definitions for visitor attractions and destinations

In developing the boundaries of the definition, Leask (2018) draws a distinction between the terms visitor attraction and destination, stating that visitor attractions are comprised of tangible and intangible assets, such as artefacts, buildings, and stories, that relate to the fixed location and that they are distinct from destinations in that they usually have set boundaries, fixed points of entry and exit, and are managed to attract and cater for visitors on the basis of specific assets or resources. However, distinctions between individual attractions and destinations can be difficult to observe in destination theme parks such as Disneyland and Universal Studios, where rides, accommodation, and retail all combine over large tracts of land, or in historic walled towns such as Dubrovnik (see Figure 1.1), where there is a clearly defined boundary. A blurring of the definitions can be seen in the city of Venice, where the city plans the introduction of admission fees for day visitor entry to the city from 2021 (Leask, 2022).

Definitions: International variations

Related to the question of definition are the issues of comparability and equivalence on an international basis: in particular, the way that visitor attractions are categorised in different locations. As with any changes to or variety between the definition of an attraction between countries, data available for each category must be manageable, meaningful and usable. The incorporation of all attractions across all countries into standard visitor attraction categories would prove highly complex and not necessarily advantageous. For example, the National Historic Site category used in Canada does not correspond with any category used in other countries and countries vary significantly on the basis of their asset base, whereas some may, for example, have many categories for heritage, while other may have few. Common categories used internationally include the broad classification of attractions as either natural or built, whether built for tourism-specific reasons or converted from other use. While useful, it can be somewhat artificial, as many sites will contain aspects of both. Perhaps even more challenging is how the researcher classifies visitor attractions by ownership. In previous studies conducted on visitor attractions (Leask, 2010), ownership category proved to be a key dependent variable in determining the entire approach to attraction management. Although there are similarities across many of the ownership categories used internationally the use of the terms 'public', 'charity', 'trust', and 'society' on occasion make for spurious accuracy for international comparison.

To further demonstrate the range of visitor attraction types, Table 1.1 offers a breakdown of the standard types commonly recognised and used by visitor attraction researchers. It is difficult to determine an internationally recognised definition for visitor attractions, mainly due to the variety of product offerings and scope as discussed above. Established features of a visitor attraction are that they are defined sites, usually based on visitor experiences that are based on an asset/s that is managed and interpreted for visitor use.

Table 1.1
Visitor Attraction types (after Leask 2010)

Visitor Attraction Type	Indicative Examples
Theme parks - water parks, amusement parks, theme parks	Mayá, Lost Mayan Kingdom Waterpark, Mexico Star Wars Galaxy's Edge, Disneyland, California, USA Tivoli Gardens, Copenhagen, Denmark
Museums and galleries - art, cultural, historical, collection-based, virtual, open-air museums	Kyoto City Kyocera Museum of Art, Kyoto, Japan Ekebergparken Sculpture Park, Oslo, Norway The Museum of the Future, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

(*Continued*)

Table 1.1
Visitor Attraction Types (after Leask 2010) (*Continued*)

Visitor Attraction Type	Indicative Examples
Natural sites that are managed for visitor use - gardens, national parks, forests, country parks, beaches, caves	Zealandia, Wellington, NZ Eden Project, Cornwall, UK Grand Canyon World Heritage Site, USA
Wildlife sites – safari experiences, zoos, aquariums	Longleat Safari Park, Warminster, UK S.E.A. Aquarium, Singapore Masai Mara National Park, Kenya
Purpose-built visitor centres - cultural, industrial, transport, heritage-themed	Heineken Experience, Amsterdam, The Netherlands Ngong Ping Cultural Village, Hong Kong Volkswagen Autostadt Factory and AutoMuseum – Wolfsburg, Germany
Religious sites	Rosslyn Chapel, Edinburgh, UK Notre Dame, Paris, France Angkor, Siem Reap, Cambodia
Buildings converted for visitors - castles, forts, historic houses, industrial, monuments, archaeological sites	Scotch Whisky Experience, Edinburgh, UK The Great Pyramid, Giza, Egypt Mystic Seaport, USA

The classification of visitor attractions

There have been many attempts to explain the multitude of forms in which visitor attractions may manifest themselves with early classifications based on one-dimensional views relating to the features of the resource and original use of associated building. More recent work by McKercher (2016) and Cooper (2016) has broadened this out, with Robinson et al.'s (2020) classification based on natural features, managed environmental features, purpose-built attractions, other buildings constructed for leisure purposes, and special events. Classification of visitor attractions explores the various influences and aspects on the development and management of an attraction. Figure 1.2 attempts to outline the various approaches that could be considered in the classification of this dynamic sector of the tourism industry.

Assets

The central stage in classification usually focuses on the nature of the resource or asset itself, be it tangible, intangible, natural, built, cultural, created specifically for tourism use or converted from an existing use (Leask, 2018). The main use for this categorisation results from identifying the different approaches required for their management, with natural sites usually requiring fewer staff, incurring lower fixed costs, and having a more open attitude towards access than in the case of built properties. This is not to say that natural sites require no management, but that the objectives of site management often focus on conservation

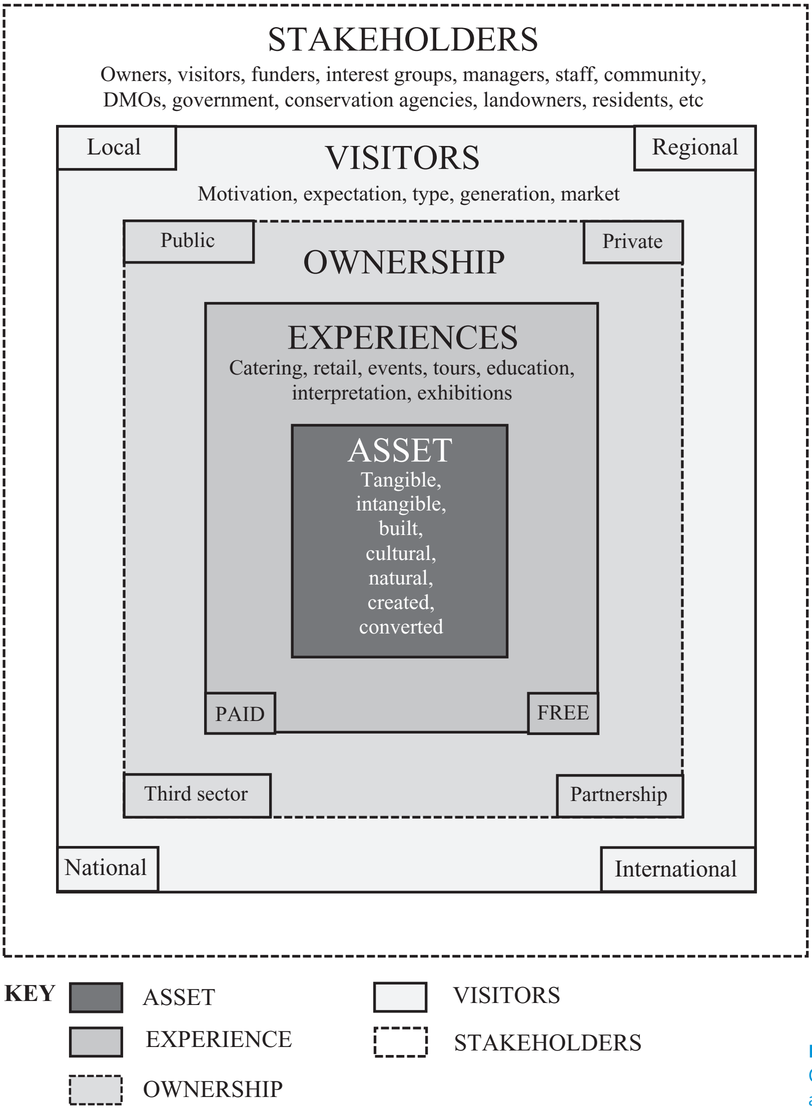
STAKEHOLDERS
Owners, visitors, funders, interest groups, managers, staff, community, DMOs, government, conservation agencies, landowners, residents, etc
Local
Regional
VISITORS
Motivation, expectation, type, generation, market
Public
Private
OWNERSHIP
EXPERIENCES
Catering, retail, events, tours, education, interpretation, exhibitions
ASSET
Tangible, intangible, built, cultural, natural, created, converted
PAID
FREE
Third sector
Partnership
National
International
KEY
ASSET
EXPERIENCE
OWNERSHIP
VISITORS
STAKEHOLDERS

Fig 1.2
Classification of visitor attractions

issues and the management of visitors, rather than increasing visitor spend and entertainment. Built sites may also be subdivided into those built for the purposes of tourism, such as the Ngong Ping Cultural Village at the Skyrail on Lantau Island, Hong Kong, and those converted from other uses, such as Robben Island, the former prison of Nelson Mandela in South Africa. The significance of this is apparent when looking at the design and operation of these differing properties, where the conversions often need to compromise on operational issues in order to meet building conservation legislation. Additionally, the converted buildings often carry higher fixed costs, fixed capacity, and a need to consider the needs of existing users, for example in religious buildings such as Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland (see Figure 1.3), where worshippers

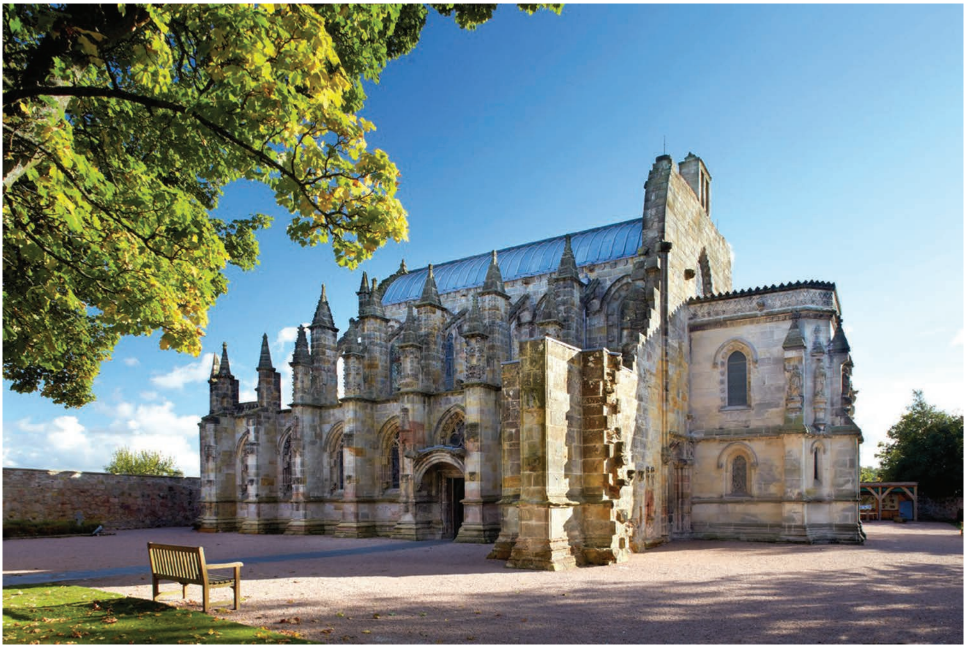

Fig 1.3 Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland
Source: With kind permission from Rosslyn Chapel

stand next to increasingly large numbers of visitors attracted as a result of media coverage. An additional feature of built properties may be their scarcity that can bring associated status and motivation to visit. The assets form the basis of the experiences that can be developed for visitor use, though many may never be developed due to cost or other restrictions. Assets may be tangible, in the form of buildings or artefacts, and intangible in terms of associated stories, traditions, and folklore.

Experiences

Experiences are the tourism products that are developed from the assets specifically for visitor use. This usually involves the addition of interpretation to explain the significance of the asset within a context specifically designed for the visitor audience. It could be argued that the interpretation of the assets should be the key feature of an attraction visit, though the increasing commercial imperative has led to the expansion of the core activities in many new and existing attractions. The vast majority now open with some element of retail, event, and catering provision, while others offer various off-site activities to boost income; associated product development such as cookery schools to attract additional markets, and have extended their experiences using all available assets and space, for example see the new Roof Walk and Zip Line at Abu Dhabi's Ferrari World and Hobbiton movie set tours in New Zealand, where they aim to add a new experience every year.

New trends in visitor attractions experiences show innovative uses of existing assets being developed into products accessible to visitors, for example the use of grounds to offer outdoor Christmas events, for example at Harewood House, Eltham Palace, and Holkham Hall in the UK. Similarly, new product development such as the inclusion of art installations in outdoor and indoor environments, such as at Kew Gardens, achieving an increase of 23% in visitor numbers due to offering a 'blockbuster' glass outdoor art gallery. Responses to Covid-19 have included the development of new perspectives, such as Yeoman warders at the Tower of London delivering tours based on tales from lockdown, and new delivery methods, such as new smartphone tours at Old Royal Naval College, Greenwich.

The trend for movie-based experiences shows no sign of abating, with approval given in 2020 to develop the Game of Thrones Studio Tour, based in Banbridge, Northern Ireland, in partnership with HBO and under licence with Warner Bros Consumer Products. The interactive experience places authenticity at its heart, showing yet again how important this is to the visitor experience, being based at one of the series' principal filming locations, and using props, costumes and sets used in the filming of Game of Thrones. The Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles, based on all aspects of cinema, will offer immersive experiences alongside more traditional exhibition galleries.

The use of technology to enhance the experience is an increasingly popular approach, with the development of hands-on interactive exhibits, virtual-reality shows, immersive experiences (e.g. Bodmin Jail's new dark walk), and the development of augmented-reality systems, such as those at the new Ghostbusters Experience at Ginza Sony Park in Japan. While these developments may well cater for specific markets, they are costly both to install and to maintain, and they may serve to exclude other markets that are not impressed with or pre-disposed to use this style of presentation.

The experiences available at a visitor attraction may be paid admission, free, or a combination of both. An example of a combination of approaches is the Natural History Museum in London, where general admission is free, but visitors are required to pay for temporary exhibitions. While government policy on this varies internationally, there is usually some provision for key national sites to offer free access to visitors on either a permanent or specific-day basis. This often overcomes the perception of local residents that the attractions are there for use by tourists and meets the broader educational and social inclusion aims of many institutions. Additionally, some sites, such as Pompeii, offer free access to the under 18s age group for citizens of the European Union. There is some evidence to show sites varying their pricing throughout the year to encourage off-peak visitors and meet broader educational objectives, for example at Versailles, France where prices vary by day and month of the year. In addition, there has been development of pricing targeting local residents, such as the Florida Resident Pass that offers 40% discount on passes. The management objectives of the managing body usually determine the admission-charging policy for the visitor attraction. One example of this is Historic Environment Scotland, the lead public body responsible for many of Scotland's historic monuments, which charges admission at approximately 70 of their 330 sites in order that money raised at the revenue-generating sites can be used to support conservation work at less-visited sites. Additionally, they offer free education visits in the shoulder months to help meet their broader educational objectives. However, the policy of free admission for public facilities has been criticised as offering an unfair advantage to attractions, with examples such as Newseum in USA closing in 2019 and blaming this in part on being unable to compete with surrounding free access Smithsonian museums.

Ownership

The ownership category and differing objectives of the visitor attractions will naturally impact on the management and operations of each site. Figure 1.2 separates these into private, public and third sector (charities and trusts), plus those that combine into partnerships of these categories. Quite different approaches to management issues such as pricing, visitor access, interpretation, and marketing, can be seen across the ownership categories across the world (Leask, 2010), though an increasingly competitive market is encouraging more common approaches to be adopted, most noticeably in the areas of revenue generation, the use of technology for management purposes and associated product development. Ownership often dictates the management policies, with public-sector/government-operated visitor attractions more likely to put a higher priority on preventing negative environmental and social impacts (Weaver and Lawton, 2007). It also influences the types of attractions in their portfolio: national parks, for example, are highly likely to be in public ownership while theme parks tend to be privately owned (Robinson et al., 2020).

An additional consideration related to ownership relates to whether a visitor attraction charges, or does not charge, for visitor entry. Although there are a large number who clearly charge for admission, there are a significant proportion of visitor attractions which rely on voluntary donations and alternative ‘pricing’ mechanisms. For example, many churches, historic properties and gardens in Scotland rely heavily on visitor donations, whilst in New Zealand the enormous number of wineries do not charge for visitor admission but set token prices for wine tasting. In this instance, the New Zealand winery is similar to the Scotch whisky distillery in that it serves both tourism and non-tourism objectives such as building brands and brand loyalty. Further anomalies exist in the number of ‘free’-access sites charging for temporary exhibitions or events, plus those that do not charge for admission but do levy a car parking charge at the point of entry.

Visitors

Visitors are clearly crucial to visitor attractions, with the various types shown in Figure 1.2 that form the market and set the operating environment on which the visitor attractions depend. Some may cater mainly for the local market and require facilities that allow this, for example flexible use of space to allow community use, while others may cater more significantly for the international market, acting as key flagship attractions within a destination. The target market for an attraction may well determine the nature and management of the product offering, particularly in terms of pricing, visitor spend and interpretation. Issues such as public transport access to attractions may impact significantly on potential visitors, particularly in rural areas where only 65% of English attractions have this (VisitEngland, 2020). One evident implication of the market within which an attraction operates is the potential pool of visitors that might be attracted in terms of local, national, and international visitors. This was seen particularly clearly in 2020, where the importance of repeat visits by local residents became the key provider for many attractions due to Covid-19-related travel restrictions.

Very few visitor attractions attract large numbers of visitors on an annual basis, while most, particularly in rural areas, rely on much smaller visitor throughput. This can be clearly seen in the UK, where for example, only 18% of visitor attractions responding to the English annual attractions survey record visitor numbers above 200,000, while 60% attract less than 20,000 per annum (VisitEngland, 2020). The Association of Leading Visitor Attractions (ALVA) (2021) reported a general picture of increase in visitors year on year (2018/19), with the British Museum being the most popular (6,239,983 visits, up 7%) and over 70 million visits to London attractions, up 4%. Attempts to broaden an attraction’s visitor appeal may entail increased collaboration, training and marketing, with ALVA member sites seeing success from investment in developments related to, for example, space exploration and climate change, or hosting blockbuster exhibitions, such as the Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery with ‘Dippy the Dinosaur’ and the ‘Leonardo da Vinci: A Life in Drawing’ exhibitions resulting in a 74% increase in visitor numbers.

Visitor expectations are seen to be increasing, particularly in respect of value for money and time, though many visitor attractions remain unaware of visitor motivations due to lack of data (Leask, 2016, 2018). It can therefore be difficult for attractions to predict the best experiences to develop for these changing visit needs, though research indicates that visitors are looking for authentic, personalised, interactive and shareable experiences (Leask, 2018). Interest in film associated with tv and film continues, for example, Scottish sites used in the Outlander series have seen sustained increases in numbers, Blackness Castle up 36%, Glenfinnan Monument up 22% and Craigmillar up 15% between 2018/19 (ALVA, 2021).

Stakeholders

The final section in Figure 1.2 indicates the range of stakeholders who may have some part of play or influence in the management of a visitor attraction (Theodoulidis, Diaz, Crotto, and Rancati, 2017). A stakeholder can be defined as anyone who can affect or be affected by the decision-making of an organisation (Garrod, Fyall, Leask, and Reid, 2012). As such, a stakeholder has an ‘interest’ in how the organisation is managed and stakeholders with interests that are allied to each other can be categorised as a ‘stakeholder group’.

Stakeholder groups typically have conflicting interests with respect to the management of the attraction asset, requiring careful stakeholder management to implement effective management practices. Visitor attractions are themselves stakeholders of the destination in which they are located. As will be discussed later in this chapter, attractions contribute significantly to destinations, where they both contribute to and need the support of other stakeholders.

The different ways of classifying visitor attractions suggested in Figure 1.2 are not exhaustive but serve to indicate the main features of classification used in various settings. Each national tourist board or attraction governing body has its own classification mechanisms appropriate to its own context. What this figure does do though, is demonstrate the diverse categories of attractions and offers some explanation as to how this variety has evolved over time. The variety of visitor attractions on offer around the world has developed significantly in the past 20 years, no doubt influenced by our increased ability and propensity to travel. While more traditional museums and galleries have long attracted local markets, they can now also look to international audiences both in attracting actual visitors to their properties and in providing remote access via the use of advanced technology. Changes in funding structures often influence the available stock of facilities within a country, seen significantly since the introduction of National Lottery funding in the UK in the 1990s and the availability of European Union structural funding in new member countries previously unable to access these sources. Similarly, changes in access to public finance for on-going revenue support or to capital funding priorities by enterprise companies can make vast differences in the development and reinvestment in the visitor attraction product. Current trends indicate an increasing need for attractions to appeal to broader audiences and to generate increasing levels of external income, resulting in an increased mix of product offering and choice for the visitor. Changing patterns of leisure time and discretionary income are influencing the form of the attractions wanted by consumers, calling for experiences that meet their needs and quality expectations, rather than a decision taken by the attraction operators on the basis of what they feel the visitor wants.

The purpose and role of visitor attractions

Destination attractiveness

As stated by Swarbrooke (2000: 267), “visitor attractions are at the heart of the tourism industry, they are motivators that make people want to take a trip in the first place” and are the cornerstone of tourism (Navarro-Ruiz and McKercher, 2020). As a key element of tourism (Robinson et al., 2020) the role of visitor attractions within a destination

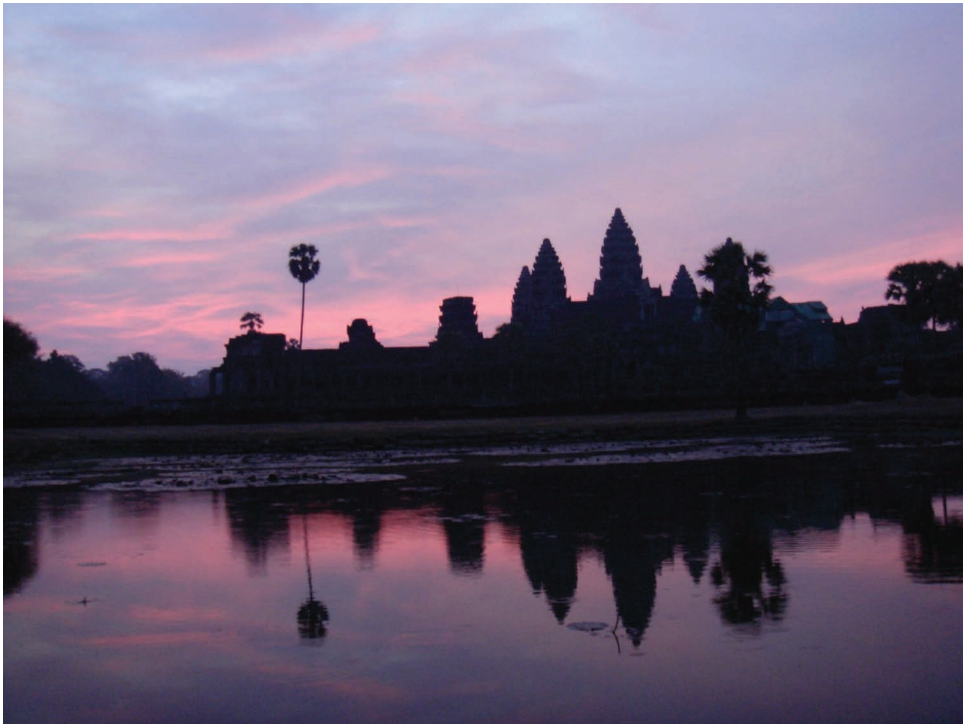

Fig 1.4
Iconic photo of Angkor Wat, crowd-free, at dawn
Source: Anna Leask

forms part of a complex network of tourism service providers within the broader tourism product, however they are often used as key products in marketing activities to draw media attention and audience interest and support the development of the experience economy (Paraskevaidis and Weidenfeld, 2021). Examples of this are the use of images of iconic sites such as Uluru when marketing Australia or those of Angkor Wat in the promotion of Cambodia (see Figure 1.4). The value of specific visitor attractions within a destination is that they can play a significant role in increasing destination attractiveness and can be a key motivator in attracting business to the destination. Therefore, the quality and success of these inter-relationships depends not only on the visitor attraction itself, but its contribution to the development of the critical mass of the destination product offering. Within the business tourism context, visitor attractions may also be an important part in the decision to return to a destination for a leisure visit, thus attracting those elusive repeat visitors.

Attraction contribution to destination experience

The main inter-relationships and inter-dependencies between visitor attractions and the wider tourism industry appear to focus on standard areas of mutual benefit, with an increasing move to develop more formal partnerships and collaboration being seen in recent years. One example of this is the Association of Singapore Attractions, with full and associate members across a variety of sectors including the Ministry of Education and Changi Airport. Competition for visitor numbers and revenue, in an environment of decreasing public capital and revenue funding, has encouraged visitor attractions to expand their revenue streams into new product developments. These all require attractions to work effectively with other tourism operators within a destination, such as accommodation providers, food and beverage suppliers, destination management companies and transport operators. This also translates online, where it has been shown that attraction popularity may increase significantly when linked to accommodation sharing via hospitality platforms (Song, Xie, Park, and Chen, 2020) and digital marketing offers extensive opportunities for collaboration. The ability of visitor attractions to respond quickly to visitor needs and wider external factors is also crucial within the destination context, as evidenced by the swift and efficient actions of many attractions across the UK once lockdown restrictions were lifted and they were able to reopen safely following Covid-19.

Flagship and iconic attractions: Their role in destinations

The terms ‘flagship’ and ‘iconic’ often appear in visitor attraction debate and are often used interchangeably, but there are some significant differences and questions regarding their status and influence. Weidenfeld (2010: 852) describes a major attraction as a flagship when ‘its appeal is attributed to distinct qualities, including uniqueness, location, international reputation, and outstanding media attention’, referring to Disneyland Paris in France as an example. In urban areas, there may be several flagship attractions, whereas in rural areas, there may often be only one major attraction that has such, or could be developed to have, broad appeal. The main aim and role of a flagship attraction such as Universal Studios in Osaka, Japan, and the new Grand Museum in Cairo, is to generate positive economic and cultural impact on the destination area, usually through attracting high volumes of visitor numbers. Weidenfeld (2010: 851) goes on to argue that iconic attractions are sites that ‘serve as universally recognised symbols or representation of their location or culture/heritage and evoke a powerful positive image among both tourists and local residents’, such as Mount Fuji and Taj Mahal (see Figure 1.5). Iconic attractions may develop over time in response to marketers and visitors consuming the site, developing an understanding of its authenticity and appraising the fit with the destination. Iconic attractions are not necessarily about attracting high volumes of visitors, but about setting out and building a destination image that might attract visitors to a destination.

An attraction could therefore be both a flagship and iconic attraction, and could also lose this status over time depending on factors such as: how well it is managed; if it attracts negative media attention; loses its appeal in light of new or improved attractions elsewhere; or as a result of environmental deterioration (Weaver and Lawton, 2007). Robinson et al. (2020) comment that iconic attractions have the potential to act as major pull factors for visitors but also bear the risk of stereotyping a

Fig 1.5
Taj Mahal, India
Source: Anna Leask

destination and narrowing the visitor appeal. Likewise, McKercher and Koh (2017) caution the assumption that an iconic attraction will act as a major demand driver, commenting that destinations still need to provide a range of diverse and interchangeable experiences across a destination, rather than just focusing on one, as it may be that the visitors are not so much drawn on the basis of the specific attraction to an attraction, but because of the concept of the whole visitor attraction experience itself, i.e. quality time with family, de-stressing, and having an adventure. Some caution should therefore be taken in relying on flagship and iconic status, particularly in uncertain conditions such as those post Covid-19.

Attractions as part of destination revitalisation

Visitor attractions may also play a crucial role in the revitalisation of an area or destination, where they are often used as growth poles to contribute to urban development and push regional economic development, cultural opportunities and employment within their sphere of influence. The role of visitor attractions in this manner should form part of a general strategic tourism plan that may identify such opportunities to 'use' the attraction as a management tool within the destination, rather than in isolation. Examples of this are the Guggenheim in Bilbao, the V&A in Dundee, and the Titanic in Belfast. These ventures all offer continued opportunities to tackle management issues such as seasonality, economic benefit and development of civic pride. The creativity shown in the nature of the architecture of a building to house a key development may, in itself, elevate the role of the attraction to flagship proportions.

Similarly, visitor attractions can be used to alter the perceived image of a destination and to extend the destination's portfolio, as seen in Singapore with recent investments in nature-based attractions to dovetail with the existing urban, leisure-based attractions, and in Abu Dhabi, with significant investment in the Louvre to add to the cultural offering. Flagship attractions can be used to pull visitors in, meet the needs of local residents and develop stronger tourism activities across the destination. While a destination rarely survives long term on the basis of one attraction, it can be the key 'pump-primer' in the sustainable development of a destination, for example the increased business opportunities now available within Cornwall that developed from one of the key objectives of the Eden Project: economic regeneration. Where possible, the Eden Project buys from local suppliers, supports local businesses and farmers, and has thus far contributed £1.7 billion to the local economy to date (Eden Project, 2020). Another flagship example is the Titanic Signature Project in Northern Ireland. The £1.5 billion waterfront development revolves around the Titanic Belfast visitor attraction alongside hotels, restaurants, apartments, and a marina. Completed in 2012 and initially projected to attract in the region of 500,000 visitors per year, it has consistently attracted in the region of 800,000 visitors per year, plus provided employment and broader economic benefit to the destination (www.titanicbelfast.com).

Attractions and local residents

In considering the role of visitor attractions within a destination, the needs and aspirations of the local population must also be included and may, indeed, play a more significant role in the success of an attraction. This may be particularly so in rural settings, where their support for repeat visits, staffing, recommendation, and participation may be vital. There is also the issue of social inclusion to be considered, to encourage cultural awareness and engagement within the local population and meet educational objectives. The maintenance of specific cultural identities and practices can often only be achieved through the involvement of those from the local population. This aspect rarely features in the key performance indicators for visitor attractions, which tend to focus on visitor volume and value, but could form the basis of the measurement of success in a move to broaden the criteria to include aspects such as engagement with the local community through usage, membership and participation, or support and links with local businesses.

Attractions and stakeholder management

The multiplicity of stakeholders involved in the operation and use of visitor attractions can create difficulties in identifying the future practices of attraction development. Objectives and measures of effectiveness may include revenue generation, enterprise, conservation, cultural issues or simply entertainment (Leask, 2010) and will vary by stakeholder group. It is unlikely that any one attraction can be directly compared to another in terms of its role and purpose within a setting, as these will vary considerably between destinations. However, certain policies can be set in place to encourage effective management of the visitor attractions that exist. While individual attractions may achieve certain levels of success according to their own set of objective criteria, it usually falls to national bodies and organisations to determine the parameters and structure for long-term success. It is important that these structures – be they strategic policies, funding principles, or quality standards – take account of the variety of purposes that visitor attractions may have within their individual contexts. There is also a need for a cross-sectoral benchmarking and information sharing that concentrates on improving the visitor experience and organisational effectiveness that is available and accessible in a format suitable to both large and small attractions. Membership organisations such as ALVA play a significant role in identifying and disseminating best practice, conducting research, representing visitor attractions, lobbying for support, and communicating policy. In 2020, the importance of such organisations came to the fore in supporting visitor attractions across the UK to both respond and enable recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, with strong leadership shown in ALVA and the Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions.

Conclusions

This chapter has defined visitor attractions and explained their important role and purpose within destinations. There is no doubt that the visitor attractions sector is facing a challenging time ahead with uncertainties over the impact of Covid-19, restrictions on international tourist movements in light of terrorist activity and health issues, changing patterns of leisure time and use, the decline in public funding, and the commercial imperative all creating the need for new approaches to be developed in how visitor attractions are managed. The multiple objectives and measures of effectiveness at visitor attractions need to be clarified to determine the nature, role, and resultant success of sites, but also to invite innovation and change. Meanwhile, the wide range of stakeholder interests relating to an attraction, be they related to education, revenue generation or conservation, will inevitably lead to conflicting management pressures.

Self-test questions

1. What are the similarities and differences between visitor attractions and destinations?
2. How do definitions of visitor attractions vary around the world?
3. What are the key component parts in the classification of a visitor attraction?