

Managing and Marketing Tourist Destinations

Strategies to Gain a Competitive Edge

**Metin Kozak and
Seyhmus Baloglu**



Managing and Marketing Tourist Destinations

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Preface

The tourism industry had been ignored in the global research for development and wealth until the 1950s. Along with the end of World War II, tourism movements began to improve especially in Western societies, the developed countries of our present time. In relation to the recognition of its economic importance, tourism has become the fastest growing industry along with telecommunication and information technologies in the 21st century of global economy. In this context, tourism movements have lost the feature of exclusively addressing upper-level of income or aristocrats with free time and high income. Tourism has gained a massive characteristic that enables middle- and lower-income segments to get involved in both domestic and international tourism movements and thereby millions of people to move temporarily from their homelands to other regions or countries in order to meet their psychological, social and cultural needs (i.e. sightseeing, fun, resting, learning etc.). Such a movement makes one country a popular tourist destination while taking more or less proportion of international tourism figures.

Tourist destinations increasingly embrace branding techniques to develop unique positions, identities, and personalities in a highly competitive environment at national and international levels. Customer-based brand equity measures such as brand recognition, image, value, quality, loyalty and brand advocacy also provide valid metrics for destination benchmarking and competitive advantages. However, destination marketers (tourism offices or DMOs) have very little control over highly diverse and interrelated offerings of a destination or place. Community or resident support as well as groups of stakeholders and local politics create theoretical challenges for measuring brand equity (Gnoth, Baloglu, Ekinci and Sirakaya-Turk 2007). Therefore, some scholars debate that special models, principles and frameworks peculiar to place branding should be developed (Blichfeldt 2003; Morgan and Pritchard 2004; Hankinson 2004; Caldwell and Freire 2004; Pike 2005, Kneesel, Baloglu and Millar 2010).

Thus, marketing places and destinations are exciting as well as challenging (Fyall, Callod and Edwards 2003). Tourism systems and products are complex and influenced by economic, social, environmental and competitive

forces locally and globally (Chi 2009). A sustainable destination will act for the interest of travelers and residents as well as for the protection of the resources (Kozak 2004a). A destination should operate in a way so that its economic interests, society or resident interests and environment interests intersect. Therefore, current marketing theories and practices need to balance the requirement for providing “memorable experiences” against the growing requirement of places and destinations to develop and protect their heritage, attractions, resources and human capital in the most sustainable way.

Strategic marketing planning takes place in a rapidly changing environment. Travelers today are more educated, demanding and experienced as well as more sensitive to environmental and social issues. They have more and quicker access to information and media and connectivity from home and office. They expect good value, quality and higher standards. They have multiple or changing lifestyles when they travel and demand more individualized experience based on idiosyncratic expectations.

Places or destinations have more interest than ever before in developing competitive advantages, more responsible tourism marketing strategies and tactics, tourism diversification such as medical tourism and disaster and crisis planning. The urgent need to become more competitive is augmented by the fact that place or destination marketing has some special characteristics. It is not only influenced by characteristics of services (such as intangibility, variability, inseparability and perishability), but also seasonality of tourist demand and the diversity and interdependence of tourism products. On top of all this, marketing decisions are to be made despite the different interests and goals of private and public stakeholders in a given destination.

This book discusses and synthesizes models, techniques and principles for strategic marketing and management of destinations. Global competition, coupled with more demanding travelers and highly diverse tourism “product”, make place or destination marketing highly difficult and challenging around the globe. Competitive analysis of destinations is rapidly gaining in importance in the strategic marketing planning and positioning of destinations (Crouch and Ritchie 1999; Faulkner, Oppermann and Fredline 1999; Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Gursoy, Baloglu and Che 2009; Kozak, Baloglu, and Bahar 2010). The competitiveness may vary by type of competition, target market, and product mix. The destinations should create a competitive advantage by attracting tourists as well as developing and staging memorable experiences as good as or better than competitive destinations. The purpose of this book is also to discuss and present principles and guidelines to facilitate the marketing planning for tourist destinations. The principles and guidelines discussed equally apply to different product levels in travel and tourism such as museums, national parks, cities, regions and countries. Place or destination marketing today should go beyond traditional product or marketing orientation and adopt societal marketing or

socially responsible marketing principles (perhaps a better term would be “sustainable marketing”), which balances the economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism.

The book is divided into three main parts. Part I expands the concept of destination competitiveness by discussing importance of destination competitiveness (Chapter 1), an overview of destination competitiveness (Chapter 2) and determinants of destination competitiveness (Chapter 3). Part II focuses on destinations’ internal capabilities and management skills such as destination-based management strategies (Chapter 4), destination-based total quality management (Chapter 5), and destination benchmarking (Chapter 6). Part III extends the managerial approach of destination competitiveness into the perspective of destination marketing that also consists of the consideration of three main subjects. This part begins with the discussion of destination-based marketing strategies in general (Chapter 7), followed by the examination of other related subjects in detail such as destination branding (Chapter 8) and traditional versus “IT” marketing (Chapter 9).

Over the past few decades, tourist destinations have become a key component of the tourism system. Certainly, there are a number of reasons to indicate as to why the measurement and determination of destination competitiveness has become so important in travel and tourism (e.g. the existence of multiple destinations, the emergence of new destinations and so on). Each of these characteristics is explained in Chapter 1. These may also aid the readers to clearly understand the necessity of writing a textbook on the concept of ‘destination competitiveness’. This chapter also discusses the distinctive characteristics of the tourism and travel industry along with tourist destinations and evaluating the main elements of destination attractiveness. Some trends on both the demand and supply sides were presented. This chapter also emphasizes that a strategic approach to marketing destinations is a necessity rather than an option in today’s world. Along with discussing the reasons for using “place” competitiveness rather than “destination” competitiveness, Chapter 1 emphasizes the role of branding and experiential marketing in gaining a competitive edge.

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to review the concept of destination competitiveness and the multiple factors which influence it. The chapter first examines previous destination competitiveness research on the basis of their contents, strengths and limitations. The discussion dates back to the studies that came out in the mid-1970s. There was an increase in the number of studies published on the subject of destination competitiveness and its elements in the 1990s. An extensive review of the literature indicated that much has been written about competitiveness between different tourist destinations either at the regional/national or international level. Nevertheless, it is claimed that full competitive destination analysis has not received widespread recognition in the tourism literature.

As a result of weaknesses in earlier attempts to investigate and conceptualize the elements of destination competitiveness, Chapter 3 aims to provide a tentative framework in which each factor affecting competitiveness of tourist destinations in some respects is examined. Using Porter's (1985) terms, five major factors affecting the competitiveness level of international tourist destinations are then identified. These include the supply (or controllable) side, demand (or uncontrollable) side, tour operator operations, emergence of new destinations and emergence of substitute products and services. Each is explained in greater detail later in this chapter. Bordas (1994) suggests that competitive advantage can be created by following various steps in both management and marketing strategies: improving the quality of products and services, changing production processes, accepting new ways of distribution methods, adding new and attractive features and improving the infrastructure of technology. For these reasons, it is expected that a competitive environment at the micro level (business-organization level) and at the macro level (destination or country level) be established and people be encouraged to participate in this.

Chapter 4 aims to introduce an overview of major management strategies and their adaptation required to maintain the competitive advantage of tourist destinations (e.g. environmental management, human resources management, cooperation and collaboration). In order to be able to protect one from challenges of tourism and offer satisfactory products and services, there needs to establish a destination-based management program which requires a strong collaboration and co-operation among all the related bodies of a tourist destination. In order for the management of tourist destinations to give a distinctive appeal to such variables as leisure activities, sports, food, welcoming tourists and natural and cultural heritage, this chapter ends with the analysis of several measures that seem to play a key role in the success of managing the quality of tourist destinations.

As we know, the practice of total quality management (TQM) aims to satisfy both internal and external customers through continuous improvement in the level of service and product quality provided by an organisation. A successful implementation of a destination-based TQM practice can potentially assist to meet quality standards and enhance competitiveness. Ideally, this should also be the aim of a destination management organization in charge of managing sources, marketing products and setting policies. In the light of these statements, it is possible to suggest the practice of D-TQM as a significant contribution to the management of destinations in improving the quality of service provision. In addition, because the subsequent impact is expected to lead to an increase in the market share, this also would help to maintain the competitiveness of a destination in the international arena. Therefore, Chapter 5 aims to (1) emphasize the significance of quality management in successful improvement of the performance of tourist destinations and then (2) design a tentative model of

D-TQM, particularly suitable for the sustainable development of tourist destinations as well as application suggestions.

Chapter 6 briefly tries to outline how benchmarking may lead tourist destinations to enhance their competitive edge vis-à-vis their competitors. A short answer as to why benchmarking is relevant for tourist destinations includes the careful assessment of the trend of intense competition among destinations, not only as countries but also as regions. Tourists, from one day to another, have become more experienced and knowledgeable about the world and changes in their demand for consumption of products and services available in the international market. This results in a sensitive structure of tourists to even a very little negative experience during a vacation. Thus, the fake positioning of a small piece (e.g. let's say food poisoning or charging higher prices in this case) may distort the overall picture of the puzzle (e.g. quality of the whole vacation experience). Last but not the least, as a structure of human personality, customers compare not only themselves with others, but also make comparisons among their preferences and among various alternatives. A final decision is set as a consequence of the output derived from this decision-making process. Knowing about the performance of other destinations becomes important to take place in customers' final consideration sets.

The succeeding chapter attempts to cover all the relevant subjects that have now become very useful in today's contemporary business environment not only for the individual organizations but also managing the marketing of tourist destinations. In lights of various existing approaches, Chapter 7 provides an overview of existing marketing strategies and their implementation to destinations and then suggests several ways of marketing strategies in order to be able to maintain and even increase the competitive edge of tourist destinations worldwide. This chapter further suggests that monitoring competitors on a regular basis will enable one destination management to reinforce the analysis of the market and identify its own strengths and weaknesses and the potential marketing opportunity. This sort of analysis, in the end, may help to develop the correct positioning strategy. Some of the subjects included in this chapter are product diversification, market segmentation, innovation, market research, destination branding and destination positioning.

Most destinations today have excellent facilities and attractions, and every destination claims and promotes a unique culture and heritage, beautiful landscape, excellent facilities and very friendly locals. Therefore, creating a differentiated brand image is more critical (Morgan and Pritchard 1999). Chapter 8 is about branding tourist destinations. Success depends on essentially two dimensions: (1) the management of the tourism system as a system of networks and channels and (2) the management of brand attributes, their dissemination and consistency (Gnoth 2002). Destination branding should be managed strategically by destination marketing organizations to articulate and communicate a destination identity. This chapter

provides concepts, tools and approaches of developing brands in travel and tourism to help destination marketers implement sound brand strategies and tactics. First, the concept of “destination” and “brand” definitions are presented. Then, branding challenges for destinations and larger context of brand-building processes were introduced. The components of brand image such as cognitive, affective and destination personality as well as destination tourism slogans are discussed. The chapter ends with a case study about destination slogans and branding destinations with unique selling propositions (USPs).

Consistent with the debate that the traditional travel distribution system is going through a very dramatic change, Chapter 9 aims to examine the present and potential impact of Information Technology (IT) on the tourism industry, tourism marketing and management and destination competitiveness. This chapter also examines the nature, structure and characteristics of distribution channels for tourism and travel service providers alongside the implications of IT as a new management and marketing instrument. This chapter further presents theoretical knowledge to examine developments in IT. It reports on how IT’s current and potential use as a tourism marketing tool impacts the competitiveness of tourism and travel businesses in particular and tourist destinations in general.

This book discusses and synthesizes models, techniques and principles for strategic marketing and management of destinations. This book has an international focus. We wanted to discuss and present current theories, principles and practices to facilitate strategic marketing and management planning for tourist destinations. The principles and guidelines discussed apply equally to different product levels (small or large scale) in travel and tourism such as museums, national parks, cities, regions and countries. Several faculty members also contributed to this book by writing highly practical cases. We thank them for their support and contribution. We owe special thanks to the publisher, Routledge, for their patience and meticulous revisions. We finally thank our families colleagues for their support.

Part I

Destination Competitiveness

1 Why Destination Competitiveness?

Travellers today, domestic or international, are more educated, informed, demanding and experienced. As a result they expect good value, quality and higher standards. The changes happening at demand side, coupled with recent development in information and communication technology, influence all aspects of marketing strategy and travel behavior. From marketing theory perspective, the requirement of meeting or exceeding travellers' needs and wants should be balanced against the growing requirement of places and destinations to develop and protect destination attractions, assets and resources in the most sustainable way (Middleton and Clarke 2001). Certainly, there are a number of reasons to indicate as to why the measurement and determination of destination competitiveness has become so important in travel and tourism (e.g. the existence of multiple destinations, the emergence of new destinations and so on). Each of these characteristics is explained in this chapter. These may also aid the readers to clearly understand the necessity of writing a textbook on the term 'destination competitiveness'. This chapter also discusses the distinctive characteristics of the tourism industry along with destinations and evaluating main elements of destination attractiveness.

1.1. MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

As a sub-sector of services, tourism has specific characteristics comparing with the manufacturing industry and other elements of the service industry. Such specific characteristics make the tourism industry differ in the management and marketing of tourist destinations, managing the host-guest relationship, and enhancing the competitive edge. These are listed below (for details, see Morrison 1989; Laws 1995; Kozak 2004a):

1. As the production and consumption coincide with time and location, tourists participate in the creation of the services they purchase. Tourists cannot sample the destination or its sub-elements before arriving for their vacations. But, they make their decisions either by looking

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at brochures or obtaining feedback from their relatives and friends, which is so much different than making decisions to choose a physical product.

2. As a significant part of the service industry, tourist services are composed of intangible rather than tangible attributes. Service is consumed as long as this consumption activity continues. As a consequence of this, pricing of services is more difficult than pricing of products. The customer needs to use intangible products sought in travel and tourism operations in a shorter period because they are not re-consumable.
3. Tangible clues and evidence determine customers' assessment of the level of service quality (e.g. the type of furniture, the appearance of facility and staff uniforms and so on). This means that the quality of services is not a single criterion to be considered while evaluating tourists' overall judgment of tourism products provided during a vacation.
4. In tourism services, a much higher level of social interaction takes place among tourists, staff and local residents in buying tourist services than the one in buying tangible products. Thus, emotions and personal feelings, generated by service encounters, influence future purchase intentions. Those employees affiliated with a variety of tourist establishments and encounters contribute to forming an overall picture of tourist experiences with destinations, which might be unique to each user.
5. Distribution channels play an important role in the marketing of tourism products and services. A distribution channel is a set of independent organizations or individuals involved in the process of making a product or service available to the consumer or business user. Most distribution channels are more than simple collections of firms tied together by various flows. Because most channel members also get involved in promoting and selling the destination, an *integrated* communication and distribution strategy is also needed.
6. Customer experience is shaped by a set of products provided by various establishments and even by events to be participated during a vacation (e.g. advertisements by either governments or tourism establishments, recommendations by friends and travel agents, quality of food, shopping, social interaction with other customers and behaviour of local people). The risk refers to the failure on these elements that may lead to customer dissatisfaction and repeatedly negative word-of-mouth recommendation.
7. Obtaining objective prior information when purchasing services is more difficult than when purchasing products. Thus, word-of-mouth communication helps potential customers obtain information about the alternative services or tourist destinations they would like to purchase and, in turn, decide which one to be purchased.

8. Most tourism services are not easy to be copied. Rather, it may be impossible to be patented, either. Different hotel establishments may have rooms and restaurants with the same size and recreation activities with the same features. This is also the case for tourist destinations where several identical products exist (e.g. beaches, museums, nature, shopping and accommodation facilities).
9. The capacity of either a tourist establishment or a tourist destination is not suitable to be expanded quickly. For example, expanding the accommodation capacity of destinations takes months and sometimes years. Subsequently, such tourist services as beds and meals cannot be stored for sale in a following day when a growing demand appears.

What is served by the supplier and consumed by the consumer in tourism is called 'the tourism product'. It involves both tangible and intangible features. The tourism product is defined as "comprising attractions of a destination including images, sites, scenery, events and weather; facilities including accommodation, catering and entertainment; and accessibility with regard to the time and cost it takes to reach the destination" (Lewis and Owtram 1986, p. 204). As can be seen, attractions, events and accessibility play a pivotal role in the management and marketing of tourist destinations as they attract visitors; and, in turn, gaining the competitive advantage of tourist destinations. The primary marketing response to the above-mentioned travel and tourism characteristics has been managing and manipulating demand in the short term.

However, given the current trends such as sustainable tourism development and marketing as well as branding, a long-term planning and approach is a necessity, as well. In other words, the marketing responses should have both a strategic approach (long-term planning) and a tactical approach (short-term planning). And the tactics should be shaped and guided by the strategies. The term *sustainability* has emerged because of increasing consciousness of the countries about finding ways to develop their economies with minimal destruction of their environments and full consideration of the welfare of future generations (Carey, Gountas and Gilbert 1997; Rodríguez, Parra-López and Yanes-Estévez 2008; Prideaux 2009). A sustainable destination will act for the interest of travellers and residents, as well as for the protection of the resources. The triple bottom line suggests that a destination is operating in a way so that its economic interests, society or resident interests and environment interests intersect (Savitz 2006).

1.2. ATTRACTIVENESS OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS

Contributions to the work of classifying major elements of destinations include the following. In an earlier attempt to measure the tourist

attractiveness of destinations, Var, Beck and Loftus (1977) note that it is a function of natural, social and historical factors, recreation and shopping opportunities, accessibility and accommodation performing above minimum touristic quality standards. Mill and Morrison (1992) state that a destination is composed of attractions, facilities, infrastructure, transport and hospitality. Similarly, Laws (1995) classifies elements which contribute to the attractiveness of a tourist destination under two main headings. Primary destination features include climate, ecology, culture and traditional architecture. Secondary destination features are those developments introduced particularly for tourist groups such as hotels, catering, transport and entertainment. Laws further claims that the primary purpose of tourists is to enjoy the primary features rather than the others, but the secondary features are necessary to reinforce the attractiveness of the destination. Goodall and Bergsma (1990) consider total cost as a fifth component in addition to attractions, facilities and services, accessibility and image. All these features together contribute to the attractiveness of a tourist destination.

Destination choice, image and satisfaction have all been the subject of considerable tourism research. Numerous attempts have been made to profile tourist motivations and link them to destination choice (e.g. Mayo and Jarvis 1981; Goodall 1988). Findings can be useful and helpful in directing future marketing efforts despite the fact that elements differ from one destination to another depending upon the type of destinations and tourist motivations (Kozak 2002a). In an empirical study, natural beauty, infrastructure, tourist facilities and climate were all found to be prime elements of the destination attractiveness (Gearing, Swart and Var 1974).

In other research, factors affecting tourist destination choices were listed as physical (infrastructure, superstructure, scenery, beaches, climate, historical sights), socio-psychological attractions (attitudes of the local people, cultural events, nightlife and entertainment, novelty of the destination, accessibility, food, quietness and so forth), political and social environment and cost and availability of time (Sirakaya, McLellan and Uysal 1996). In an attempt to investigate international travellers' destination choices and the factors influencing their choices, Kale and Weir (1986) found that the major factors in general were the availability of things to do and see, cost, climate and accommodation. It was also observed that major factors affecting respondents' choice of a specific destination were culture, scenery, history and food.

In a further analysis of tourist motivations, a category of *push* and *pull* factors is presented. Tourism literature emphasizes the importance of both push and pull factors in shaping tourist motivations and in choosing vacation destinations (Crompton 1979). Push factors are origin-related and refer to the intangible or intrinsic desires of the individual traveller (e.g. the desire for escape, rest and relaxation, adventure, health or prestige). Pull factors are mainly related to the attractiveness of a given destination and tangible characteristics such as beaches, accommodation and recreation