

Tourism: “Destinations...it’s all about the experience!”

Shakespeare’s famous line, “All the world’s a stage,” can be applied to millions of settings in today’s world. I value this line for its literal translation: every destination in the world *is* a stage. The production of a destination is a dramaturgy of culture that plays itself out each and every second for visitors and residents to see.

Pine and Gilmore (2002) refer to today’s tourism and service cultures as the “Experience Economy.” With the competition so fierce across the globe, destinations must find a way to layer their traditional services with memorable highlights. This has altered the way tourist destinations have presented and marketed themselves in today’s market. Simply, destinations are no longer about their position on a map, but about what they provide to the tourists that makes their destination unique and memorable.

There are two elements to turning a destination visit into an experience: what the destination has to offer and how the destination marketing and management organizations present these offerings. The richness of a destination comes from the people, food, art, music, lifestyles, natural elements, and man made fixtures. This is essentially the culture of a location. As a stage, the destination unfolds a performance of different characters, drawing in the tourist into the seductive entrapments of good food, beautiful sites, and the social desire to see people. As in the days of playhouses, each troupe competed for the most patrons, and the same can be said for destinations and tourists today.

From my own experience in Bavaria, what made traveling to each city memorable were the ways that each place was different from one another. Tourists travel to locations to have ‘different’ experiences, not to visit some place just like home. The stage of each city was set with architecture, road signs, history, food, and attractions. Every day held a new experience as accents changed, landscapes blurred, the weather varied, and the story of each city was told. The perfect dramaturgy of each city was laid out, not by the offerings of the destination, but by the tour operators who specialize in presenting the destination.

As mentioned previously, tourism management, marketing, and operation organizations are responsible for providing an experience with the tools given by the destination. Today’s market necessitates a true understanding of each location’s products and what will give each tourist an unforgettable experience. Those that are dedicated to destination marketing help shape and mold each piece, prop, and actor into the perfect Shakespearean production for tourists to enjoy. The lonely buildings of ancient architecture and history no longer rely on lives long past to help with promotion. Traditional and modern food customs can be shared and enjoyed with visitors. Arts and culture are no longer struggling, but thriving in a world where each piece completes a drama of the destination experience.

Tourism has passed between business-driven models over time, and has finally come to thrive in a world where passions and desires are lived through a performance of tourism. Destinations are marketed to provide an all-inclusive, all-sensory experience for guests to remember and relive time after time. Destination experiences may be one of the few total escapes for tourists to submerge themselves into without losing sight of reality in a hectic world.