# Introduction

MICHAEL MORGAN, PETER LUGOSI and J.R. BRENT RITCHIE

This book addresses a theme of growing importance in the tourism and leisure industries, by which we include recreation, hospitality, entertainment, events and sport. All these sectors exist to provide consumers with experiences. Some organisations, for example, tour operators who specialise in adventure tourism, seek to provide extraordinary transformational experiences; while others such as a neighbourhood café may involve more mundane experiences, which are just as important to their customers. Experience management is seen as the way to remain competitive in markets where global competition and internet technology have turned products and services into commodities, bought and sold on price alone (Schmitt, 1999, 2003). Pine and Gilmore (1999) say that developed countries are now 'experience economies', where sustainable competitive advantage can only be gained by giving the customer a unique and memorable experience. This is done through treating 'work as theatre and every business a stage'. However, more recently, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) have called for a strategic approach based on shared values, allowing customers to co-create their own experiences in a search for personal growth. The emphasis has thus shifted in recent debates from narrow conceptions of staging or production to broader notions of experience creation, involving a wider range of agencies and processes (Sundbo & Darmer, 2008).

The concept of the experience economy has given rise to a growing number of books aimed at practitioners, often written by 'Customer Experience Management' consultants. Though their approach has been seen as superficial and production-orientated by academic critics, their influence can be detected in the increasingly ubiquitous promises of unique or memorable experiences made by the marketing output of the tourism and many other industries.

Academic interest in the concepts of experience also continues to grow as evidenced by the number of recent journal special editions (*Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 2007, 7:1; *Journal of Foodservice* 2008, 19:2/3; *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 2009, 11:2; *Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management*, 2009, 18:2/3), books (Hjorth & Kostera, 2007; O'Dell & Billing, 2005; Sundbo & Darmer, 2008) and

conferences in which it has been a main theme or a major track. In the last few years the organisers of these have included the Regional Studies Association, Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS), Travel and Tourism Research Association, European Council on Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Education (EuroCHRIE), as well as a number of universities in the UK, USA and Australia. Nevertheless, there is little evidence that practitioners of experience management have much awareness of, or make use of, the range of academic research insights into the individual consumer's experience from behavioural, sociological and anthropological approaches and methodologies that have been developing in the academic literature since the 1980s (for a comprehensive overview of this literature as it relates to tourism, see Ritchie & Hudson, 2009).

This book was inspired by a desire to draw together academic and practitioner interest in the tourist experience by combining the perspectives of the tourist consumer with that of experience managers at regional, destination and individual business levels in leisure and tourism. We invited authors working in this field to write chapters that contribute to a systematic and thematic exploration of tourism and leisure experiences either from the consumer/participant or from the managerial/operational perspective. The selected chapters are written by a mixture of well-established authors in the field and a new generation of researchers. The book, therefore, provides readers with an insight into current research and future agendas that we hope will develop the study of the topic, building on well-established texts such as Chris Ryan's *The Tourist Experience* (1997, 2002) and Jennings and Nickerson's *Quality Tourism Experiences* (2006).

While grounded in recent scholarship and research, the book is not intended to simply be a collection of research papers or case studies. Each chapter seeks to contribute to the conceptual understanding of one or more aspects of the topic, supported by a range of examples drawn from tourism, leisure, hospitality, sport and event contexts. It aims to develop a multidisciplinary perspective on experiential consumption and uses the experience paradigm to provide a critical discussion of the production and consumption of contemporary leisure and tourism. The book is organised into three broad sections: understanding experiences, researching experiences and managing experiences. The chapters in the first section attempt to understand the different dimensions of the experiences while interrogating the different factors that drive consumers and shape the nature of experiences. The chapters in the second section examine emerging approaches to researching the experience; while those in the final section focus on the organisational dimensions of creating and managing experiences.

The book begins with Sarah Quinlan-Cutler and Barbara Carmichael's chapter, which undertakes the ambitious task of charting the dimensions of the tourist experience. The model they produce shows that the tourist experience is, like all consumer experiences, preceded by motivations and expectations and results in satisfaction or dissatisfaction. However, this simplistic reduction would leave out the features that make the study of tourism and leisure experiences so complex and fascinating. The chapter highlights some of these features, the multiphasic nature of the tour or activity, the multiplicity of external influences, the role of 'place', and, the feature which most interests many of our contributors, the rich and often lasting personal significance derived from the experience in terms of emotions, knowledge, memories, self-identity and development.

It is this last theme that Scott Cohen explores. Drawing on his research into those most extreme examples of tourists, the long-term lifestyle travellers, he discusses the search for escapism, authenticity and self-identity that the literature sees as present in most types of tourism. The simple assumption that individuals seek to escape from the monotony of their daily lives to authentic experiences of other places, artefacts and cultures has been challenged by post-structualist approaches in terms both of the possibility of escape and the grounds of authenticity. In its place, there has been a shift in focus away from the authenticity of objects and towards the authenticity of subjective experiences. The individuals he interviewed talked frequently of their travels as a search for identity, for their real self, even though much current academic writing would say that they are searching for an illusion. He ends the chapter by reminding us of the claim by Pine and Gilmore that competitive advantage can come from satisfying, if only momentarily, a consumer's search for transformation. Experiences that allow participants to work and play with identity, he concludes, should not be undervalued.

If experiences of leisure and tourism are, to some extent at least, identity-work, then this work will involve participants in narratives about themselves and the people and places they encounter. Gianna Moscardo's chapter discusses the importance of stories and themes in the shaping of tourist experience. The chapter sets out the assumptions of Woodside *et al.*'s (2008) Story Telling Theory. People think narratively. They make sense of experience by telling stories. Information is absorbed and stored in the form of stories. Repeating, reliving and listening to stories is a pleasurable experience. From this position, the chapter argues that stories about a destination can play an important role in attracting visitors and in shaping their experiences during their stay. They can even play a part in encouraging sustainable behaviour by the visitors. In turn, the stories told by tourists to others also contribute to the images and representation of the destination, particularly in the era of the social web

where user-generated content is more persuasive than that created by destination marketers.

The stories about the destination interact with the personal narratives of the visitors to create an experience embodied in that place. The concept of 'a sense of place' is explored in the next chapter, by Kelley McClinchey and Barbara Carmichael. This sense of place combines the physical, spatial aspects of the setting with the meanings people attach to it, through their relationships with the community, the sense of belonging or otherness and the emotional and symbolic benefits they derive from being there. The authors' conceptual model distinguishes between the collective domain – the meanings created by the physical setting and social relationships, for example, by their associations with the history and culture of particular ethnic groups – and the personal domain based on the memories and expectations such associations create for an individual based on their previous experience or life-story. Thus, the sense of place can be both reflective, and nostalgic for the past and anticipatory for future experiences. The case studies are of ethnic community festivals in urban Canada. In discussing the role of physical and social space and of the scale of the setting in how the visitor experiences these neighbourhoods, further development is given to the issues of objective, staged and existential authenticity introduced in earlier chapters. The theme of a sense of place is further developed in later chapters by Gretzel and Fesenmaier on sensory experiences, and Haven-Tang and Jones on the use of sense of place in destination marketing.

The second section of the book concerns itself with the problems of researching the complexities of the tourist experience that have been outlined in the first section. It introduces the reader to some of the directions experience research is taking in an attempt to go beyond quantitative measurement of motivational factors or the evaluation of attributes of satisfaction. Gayle Jennings' chapter reflects on the current state of experience research. She sets this in the context of the unpredictable global business environment where organisations seek to remain competitive by providing quality experiences, which are at the same time sustainable and socially-responsible. To achieve this, research will need to go beyond the quantitative, positivistic approaches that have hitherto dominated tourism research and bring in holistic evaluations based on interpretivist and constructionist insights. Such research will need to take into account the cultural differences between the established Western markets and the emerging markets of Brazil, Russia, India, China and other Asian countries in terms of what is considered a quality tourism experience. It should also look beyond the immediate company/customer transaction and instead should consider the provision of quality experiences within a holistic framework that includes and engages tourists, providers, governments, communities and the

environment bearing in mind local and global contexts. The chapter gives an example of qualitative research that draws on a number of techniques to give an insider perspective on adventure tourism.

The remaining chapters in this section provide further examples of qualitative experience research based on interpretivist and constructivist paradigms. Ian Gilhespy and David Harris review the use of visual imagery in experience research. This includes the use of photographs taken by the researcher in ethnographic studies, the analysis of photographs taken by tourists and of the imagery used in tourist brochures and other marketing material. The authors point out that all these methods involve the researcher imposing an interpretation on the data; therefore, the subjectivity of the viewpoint assumed by the researcher as well as the photographer needs to be taken into account. They link this to the debate over realism in visual culture. Reality, they remind us, is never simply recorded but chosen, interpreted and framed, not always in conscious or intended ways. The selection of images and viewpoint is influenced by conventions that try to make the construction invisible and to meet the expectation of the intended audience. They refer to Urry's (2002) work on the tourist gaze and the hermeneutic circle where commercial images influence what the tourist sees and, therefore, chooses to photograph. However, the individual may resist the controlling gaze or dominant discourse and instead enact or perform their own personal experience of the tourist setting or activity drawing on a wider range of images, narratives and meanings.

Richard Wright's chapter proposes some answers to the problem of the inevitable subjectivity of any analysis of qualitative data by researchers occupying a superior position as an academic, an outsider often of a different ethnicity, class or gender from the subjects. He examines two forms of research that dissolve these barriers. The first is memory work, where the subjects of the research become 'co-researchers'. Each produces a personal narrative on the topic, and these are then shared, compared and discussed by the group. To encourage reflection, the narratives are written in the third person. This allows socially-constructed attitudes to be recognised and discussed by the group as a means of determining their self-identity. Developed to explore sensitive gender-based experiences such as physical and mental illness, it has also been used, for example, by Small (1999) to study mothers' memories of family holidays. In some cases, the reader is then challenged to become a co-researcher too and add their own reflections and reinterpretations of the experiences being addressed.

The second method Wright explores is autoethnography where the researcher becomes an insider participant in an activity and writes a first person narrative based on systematic introspection. In the words of Morgan and Pritchard (2005: 35) 'it uses our own lived experience as a

resource and overcomes that sense of artificial opaqueness in much tourism scholarship'. Wright argues that this reflective approach allows for a deeper exploration of the themes of this book, such as identity, escapism, authenticity and social construction, than objective studies of consumer behaviour at a destination.

Nevertheless, there is also a need for experience research that can be applied by tourism and leisure managers in a wide range of contexts. Ulrike Gretzel and Daniel Fesenmaier's chapter on capturing the sensory aspects of a visitor experience says that while qualitative research can provide an understanding of the nature and structure of sensory experiences, it cannot provide information on the sensory appeals of a destination to a larger sample of tourists necessary to design experience offerings or experiential marketing communications campaigns. For this they suggest elicitation techniques which encourage respondents to reveal hidden feelings, beliefs and attitudes through making free unprompted lists. The chapter reviews interview-based techniques such as metaphor elicitation (Zaltman, 2003) and laddering (Grunert & Grunert, 1995) before proposing the authors' own method which is implemented through a survey questionnaire which can be applied to a larger sample of respondents. They demonstrate this through a study of the sensory associations elicited from visitors to Elkhart County, Indiana, an area known for its Amish community. The results reveal the sights, sounds, tastes and smells the visitors associate with the place and analyses them into sensory bundles elicited from different demographic and behavioural segments.

The final section of the book looks at the challenges of implementing the concepts of experience management and the findings of experience research in a management context. Claire Haven-Tang and Eleri Jones begin by providing a case study of experience management at regional level: the Wales Tourist Board's Sense of Place toolkit. They discuss the use of this tool kit with small tourism businesses in the rural county of Monmouthshire on the borders of Wales with England. Based on the assumptions that visitors are seeking experiences and expect authenticity, it encourages the development of tourism products that celebrate the unique resources of the county: its people, its history as displayed in its buildings and the survival of the Welsh language, its food, creative arts and the outdoor activities of the countryside. This case study provides readers an opportunity to consider the application in a specific context of the themes of a sense of place and the issues of authenticity, the power of stories and the subjectivity of viewpoint outlined in earlier chapters.

One of the lessons of the case study is that experience themes set by the regional tourism managers are only effective if they are adopted and implemented by the owners and staff of individual small businesses. In the next chapter Darryl Gibbs and Caroline Ritchie take the focus down

to the individual business. They discuss the importance of developing an understanding of the skills required by restaurant staff to 'put on a good show' in order to meet customer expectations, enhance the hospitality experience and ensure continued custom. From a review of the literature on the analogy of service delivery as theatre they identify a number of key questions for experience management. First, management needs to understand what the customers expect from a particular service encounter – is it a functional refuelling before the next activity or an integral part of the enjoyment of the occasions? Do they want a stage-managed and scripted performance or an opportunity for socialising and unscripted moments of spontaneous enjoyment? Are the staff the leading actors or the supporting cast to enable the customers to star in their own social dramas? Gibbs and Ritchie go on to discuss the extent to which management should empower staff to go 'off-script' as 'natural hosts' and the stress to the individuals of the emotional labour involved. Underlying the discussion are issues of the nature of hospitality and the status of workers in what is often seen as a low-skill, low-wage industry.

In the next chapter Nicole Ferdinand and Nigel Williams explore an under-researched aspect of experience management, the influence of tangible cues on the leisure experience. The chapter highlights the range of meanings, functions, needs and desires that items of tourism memorabilia have for tourists. Items can be practical and functional so that they go on to be used in every day life. They can also be highly symbolic, fulfilling personal needs and desires for social status, a more authentic way of life or simple nostalgia. Thus, the chapter provides material for further discussion of what have emerged as key themes in our book – how tourism experiences, and in this case the tangible objects acquired during the trip, are interpreted in the individual's search for escapism, authenticity and self-identity. The chapter also discusses the managerial implications of these insights. Businesses and destination marketers that understand the range of needs and desires that tourism memorabilia have for tourists can obtain significant advantages from the production and sale of souvenirs.

In the closing chapter Michael Morgan revisits the central propositions of Pine and Gilmore's Experience Economy 10 years after the publication of this influential book, which popularised the concept of experience management as a business strategy. The chapter asks whether Pine and Gilmore's analysis and their predictions for the growth of an experience sector have been proved correct. Does experience management and marketing indeed deliver the sustainable competitive advantage they promised? Or were the critics quoted earlier right that it was just a passing fashion in an era of unprecedented economic growth? It explores the extent to which the concepts have been accepted by leisure and tourism managers, or by the sectors' academic community. It sets out an

agenda for more systematic research into the effectiveness of experience management and marketing in attracting visitors and creating repeat business for the sector.

We hope that readers will find the book a useful overview of the current research and managerial issues in the field, one that will both stimulate them to delve deeper themselves into these fascinating and important topics and at the same time provide a resource to guide their further reading.

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