

Destination Brand Reputations: The challenges of authenticity and storytelling

Abstract

It is difficult to underestimate the importance of a place's reputational balance sheet in today's competitive globalised tourism marketplace. Growing recognition by national, regional and city governments and agencies that a place's competitiveness is significantly dependent on its reputation has highlighted the importance of country, city and regional 'identity premiums' and the value of pursuing a holistic strategy to place reputation management, projecting a place as an attractive place to live, visit, study, invest in and as an exporter of high-quality, value-added products and services. This presentation examines the connections between culture, heritage and the stewardship of places and their reputations.

If handled appropriately to the benefit of local communities (and of course that is an important caveat), tourism can enable communities, cities, regions and countries to build their economic competitiveness, improve their residents' quality of life and steward their cultural and linguistic traditions and their natural environment. For the creative destination, its authenticity, heritage and traditions are vital ingredients in its reputation. Effectively and sympathetically communicated through marketing activities, tradition is the alchemical ingredient which distinguishes the bland from the unique place; it is the philosophers' stone which transforms the narratives and stories of a destination into a relevant and appealing identity. A place's tone (its ambience, the attitudes of its people, its heritage and narratives) is inseparable from a destination's sense of place. Yet communicating this is no simple undertaking and opens up controversial challenges of place authenticity, brand narratives, leadership and authorship, performativity, story-telling and aesthetics. Drawing on international examples (including London, New York, Copenhagen, Milan, Barcelona, Singapore and Wales) I will discuss how destinations can address these issues in attempting to develop strong reputations based on their unique culture and heritage.