



CONSUMER TRIBES IN TOURISM. CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON SPECIAL-INTEREST TOURISM



Prof. Christof Pforr
School of Management and Marketing,
Curtin University

A/Prof. Michael Volgger
School of Management and Marketing,
Curtin University

Prof. Ross Dowling
School of Business and Law,
Edith Cowan University

A tourism perspective on shared experiences, emotions, and the passion for a specific interest. What influence do collective mechanisms such as norms and identities, sense of belonging, shared communication codes and social structures have on travel behaviours?

CONTEXT

Initially triggered by negative impacts associated with mass tourism, special interest tourism reflects a move away from demand for mainstream tourism offerings. Today, special interest tourism reflects a broader shift towards an emerging demand for non-standardised tourism experiences. To cater for these growing special interest markets by addressing particular preferences, new destinations and activities have emerged since the 1990s. These niche tourism products provide more customised tourism experiences based on the type of interest that motivates people to travel. This book adopts a collective approach to special interest tourism consumption, framed primarily as a demand concept, which is experiential in nature and driven by a special interest, and 'niche tourism', offering a supply perspective.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Certain groups of people share tourism and travel experiences, emotions and the passion for a specific interest. Specialised interest-based tourism can be any phenomenon separate from the generalist mainstream, such as geotourism, cycling tourism or bird-watching tourism.
- Some tribes can be differentiated in "sub-tribes", like for example cycling tourists: road cyclists, mountain bikers and trekking cyclists focused on bicycle touring.
- In some of the contemporary tourism segments, collective mechanisms such as norms, value systems and identities, sense of belonging, shared communication codes and even rudimentary social structures emerge. Common rituals and shared experiences which create a spirit of community in the form of shared passion, beliefs and feelings are important.
- Some special interest tourists have strong collective identities, whereas others are more a sum of individuals with similar motivations. This has different implications on marketing: When addressing collectives, it is of critical relevance to understand the in-group structures, symbols and dynamics. On the other hands, a sum of individuals with similar motivations but without collective structures require appreciating their individual motivations.
- In order to offer attractive products and experiences for existing tourism tribes, it is necessary that marketers understand tourism tribes' collective identities, shared rituals and behavioural traditions.
- Sparking the development of new consumption communities (e.g. brand communities) can be a powerful measure to establish emotional bonds between companies, destinations and tourists resulting in loyalty and repeat visitation.
- Consumption is socially embedded and linked to societal values and relationships. The value of consumption can also be derived from the reaction of others to the consumptive act and is intimately linked to 'impression making'.

METHODOLOGY

- Part 1: Conceptual and theoretical discourse
- Part 2: Presentation of particular international case examples
- Part 3: Synthesis of theoretical and practical contributions

KEY CONCLUSIONS

- Tourism marketing can considerably benefit from engaging with tourism tribes.
- Cooperative marketing and new media may provide new opportunities to destinations and businesses to reach special interest tourists and tourism tribes.
- However, destinations and tourism businesses should not exclusively target special interest tourists (numbers are unstable and groups too heterogenous).