THE TOURISM PRODUCT

Stephen L. J. Smith
University of Waterloo, Canada

Abstract: An industry is characterized by a generic product and production process. For tourism to be considered an industry, it is necessary to show that such a generic product and process exist. This paper argues that they do exist, and presents a model that describes the product as consisting of five elements: the physical plant, service, hospitality, freedom of choice, and involvement. The generic production begins with raw inputs, progresses through intermediate inputs and outputs, to final outputs, or the tourist's experience. The model is a potentially important contribution in the debate about tourism as an industry; it also formalizes the intuitive notion of many authors that tourism products are fundamentally experiences. Keywords: product, industry, supply side, production processes, economics of tourism, definition.

Résumé: Tourisme: le produit. Une industrie se caractérise par un produit et un processus de production génériques. Pour que le tourisme soit considéré une industrie, il faut démontrer qu'il existe un produit et un processus génériques. L'article soutient que ces deux éléments existent bien pour le tourisme. Le produit comprend cinq éléments: bâtiments et matériel, service, hospitalité, liberté de choix et engagement. La production commence par des consommations brutes et progresse par des échanges économiques intermédiaires jusqu'au point final de production, c'est-à-dire l'expérience du touriste. Le modèle pourrait bien être une contribution importante au débat du tourisme comme industrie; il formalise aussi l'idée intuitive que les produits du tourisme sont en même des expériences. Mots-clés: produit, industrie, offre, processus de production, côté économique du tourisme, définition.

INTRODUCTION

Product development is a prerequisite for satisfying tourists' changing demands and insuring the long-term profitability of the industry. Ideally, tourism products meet marketplace demands, are produced cost-efficiently, and are based on the wise use of the cultural and natural resources of the destination. Despite the importance of product development, relatively little work has been done to examine the nature of the generic tourism product. The purpose of this paper is to fill that void.

The term "generic product" refers to the conceptual commodity produced by an industry. For example, the generic products of agriculture are food and fiber; the generic product of the automobile industry is personal transportation. A generic product will take a wide variety of real forms, but each form of the same generic product will provide the same function. In the case of tourism, the function of the generic product is the facilitation of travel and activity of individuals away...
from their usual home environment. This function thus represents the working definition of tourism in this report.

The need for a model can be illustrated by two recent debates in the literature of debates about whether or not tourism is an industry. Tucker and Sundberg asserted in their analysis of international service trade that, "[t]rade in tourism services may be thought of as arising due to demand by itinerant or 'footloose' consumers. It [tourism] is not an 'industry' in the conventional sense as there is no single production process, no homogeneous product and no locationally confined market" (1988:145, emphasis added). S. Smith (1993), in an assessment of his debate with Leiper (1993) on the definition of tourism and whether tourism is an industry, suggests their differences stem from their implicit definitions of tourism products.

A clear and explicit concept of the product will provide greater precision in discussions related to the nature of tourism and the planning, development, management and delivery of its products. Improved understanding of the structure and functioning of the product also will assist developers, entrepreneurs, and planners in creating more successful products for the marketplace. In the long run, the concept will aid researchers in more accurately measuring, analyzing, and modeling industry performance. Before presenting the concept, however, it will be useful to summarize the existing literature on product development. This will be done by reviewing concepts of product development from both the demand (marketing) and supply side perspectives.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Marketing Perspectives

Although few, if any, marketing professionals would challenge the importance of product development, the subject receives much less attention from marketing analysts, planners, and policymakers than do segmentation, consumer behavior, advertising, and promotional strategies. The lack of attention to product development is not unique to tourism. Most service industries also emphasize marketing—that is, selling, advertising, public relations (Kotler 1983:6)—over product development. This situation is in marked contrast to manufacturing industries, which devote significant financial resources to research and development to create and refine products for the market.

Although product development is contrasted here with marketing, some authors assert that product development is a subset of the marketing concept (Kotler 1983; Meidan 1989; Middleton 1989). In practice, though, linking product development with marketing is more academic hope than business reality. Kotler notes that in his survey of 300 business school administrators, 90% said that marketing meant only "selling, advertising, public relations" (1983:6). Another illustration of the gap between marketing and product development is Gruenwald's (1991) report that research and development laboratories were the single most important source of new products in manufacturing indus-
tries, followed by direct suggestions from consumers. Marketing departments ranked third.

Although marketing practice only infrequently addresses product development, the issue of the origin, evolution, and nature of products is not totally ignored by marketing scholars. Haywood (1985) and Cooper (1992), for example, critique the potential of the product life cycle in tourism market planning. Moutinho (1989) describes a strategy for new product development in tourism. However, the broad descriptive observations about tourism products and services made by marketing scholars are of more relevance to this paper.

Kotler's definition of a product is a good example of how a marketing scholar conceptualizes "product": it is "anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use, or consumption that might satisfy a want or need. It includes physical objects, services, persons, places, organization, and ideas" (1984:463, emphasis added). Kotler's definition is especially relevant in this context because it makes explicit that products are not just physical objects, but also the stuff—services, persons, places, organizations, and ideas—that constitutes tourism.

Medlik and Middleton (1973) conceptualize tourism products as a bundle of activities, services, and benefits that constitute the entire tourism experience. This bundle consists of five components: destination attractions, destination facilities, accessibility, images, and price. Their "components model" (as Middleton refers to it) has been borrowed by other authors, including Wahab, Crampon, and Rothfield (1976), Schmoll (1977), and Gunn (1988).

Middleton (1989) also observes that the term "tourist product" is used at two different levels. One is the "specific" level, which is that of a discrete product offered by a single business such as a sightseeing tour or an airline seat. The other is the "total" level, which is the complete experience of the tourist from the time one leaves home to the time one returns. The "total" level is synonymous with the "components model."

Jefferson and Lickorish (1988) offer another version of the components model of the tourism product. Observing that "[t]he tourism product needs clear definition" (1988:211), they provide two views: the tourism product is a "collection of physical and service features together with symbolic associations which are expected to fulfil the wants and needs of the buyer" (1988:59) and, more succinctly, the tourism product "is a satisfying activity at a desired destination" (1988:211). While the components model has an intuitive appeal, it fails to adequately describe the structure of the tourism product and how that product is produced. Indeed, the diversity of formulations of the components model fails even to lend support to the notion that there is a generic product.

A different approach to modeling service products is proposed by Sasser, Olson, and Wyckoff (1978). They argue that the service product consists of three components: facilitating goods, explicit intangibles, and implicit intangibles. For example, the facilitating good in a restaurant is food, while the explicit intangible is nourishment provided by food and the implicit intangibles are benefits such as service, socializing, ambiance, and/or relaxation.
Normann (1984) presents a simpler model composed of core service and secondary or peripheral services. Drawing from the airline industry, Normann observes that the flight from an origin to a destination is the core service of an airline, while reservations, check-in, in-flight means, baggage handling, cleaning and servicing the plane, comfort, and the general attitudes of the staff are peripheral services.

Lewis and Chambers propose yet another concept of the tourism product. In their view, tourism products are composed of "goods, environment, and services (1989:36). They further argue that the product can be viewed on three different levels: the "formal product," or the product that the tourist believes one is buying; the "core product," or that product that the tourist is actually buying; and the "augmented product," which is the combination of core product plus any other value-added features and benefits provided by the supplier. Returning to the restaurant example, the formal product may be a gourmet dinner at a nice restaurant with a friend; the core product is the wine, appetizers, entrées, desserts, and coffee purchased by the diners; and the augmented product is the service, candlelight, and the violinist.

These three product levels echo Levitt's (1981) typology of "core product" (the essential service or benefit), "tangible product" (the service actually offered for sale and consumed), and the "augmented product" (the tangible product plus all added-value features). Levitt's typology has been adapted by Kotler (1984) in the context of general marketing and by Middleton (1988) for tourism marketing.

Three conclusions can be drawn from this diverse literature. First, there is interest in the nature of products generally, and in the nature of services specifically. Second, the structure of services is generally seen as being relatively complex, involving different levels of service. Third, the consumer is recognized as often having some connection to the provision of services. These conclusions provide part of the rationale for the model to be presented below, but before considering the model, supply side perspectives on product development will be reviewed.

Supply Side Perspectives

A growing body of literature from fields such as geography, planning, and economics provides additional insights into the tourism product. Supply side research typically involves one of three perspectives: a broad, comprehensive planning approach; a narrow, product-specific analysis; or the development of supply side statistical measures.

The broad planning approach is illustrated by texts such as Gunn's *Tourism Planning* (1988) and Pearce's *Tourist Development* (1989). Other examples are Butler's (1980) applications of the product life cycle to resort development and the analysis of seaside resort structures (Ker-math and Thomas 1992; R. Smith 1992). The planning perspective of product development is also behind Akehurst's (1992:222) assertion that "a clear understanding of the nature of the tourism product" must be a goal of national and international tourism policy.

In these and similar cases, tourism products are viewed either at the
scale of a community, county, region, nation, or international region (such as the European Community) or in the abstract through models of the evolution and morphology of tourism destinations. Although analysts working from this perspective typically propose a Middleton-style components conception of the tourism product, their actual definitions are vague and imprecise.

Product-specific studies include Wall, Dudycha, and Hutchinson's (1985) study of urban hotel locations, S. Smith's (1985) analysis of the forces affecting urban restaurant locution, and the British Columbia Ministry of Tourism's product sector analyses (e.g., The Tourism Research Group, The DPA Group and Mike Hurst and Associates 1989). Much of the current scholarly discussion about alternative tourism and ecotourism (V. Smith and Eadington 1992) is also an example of product-specific research. As useful as these studies are in their sector, the focusing on specific products in specific markets misses the issue of what constitutes the generic tourism product.

Examples of the statistical approach include S. Smith's (1988) and Pisarksi's (1991) supply-side definitions, and the ongoing work on measuring the magnitude of tourism via national and satellite accounts (Franz 1991; Lapierre 1991; Pacific Analytics 1991). This line of work tends to be the most quantitative of the three perspectives. It is driven by the need to develop more credible, consistent, and coherent measures of the magnitude of the tourism industry and to find ways of balancing income/expenditure data from both industry and consumer sources. Authors working from the statistical perspective define tourism products in terms of Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes, i.e., as discrete and observable commodities. The intangible or experiential aspects of tourism recognized by many scholars do not fit into this approach because of the need for verifiable quantitative data and thus miss the essence of the tourism product.

As in the case of marketing literature, none of the above works address the fundamental nature of the tourism product in any detail. Gunn is one of the few who recognizes the importance of having a clear concept of what constitutes tourism products: “Misunderstanding of the tourism product is often a constraint in a smoothly functioning tourism system” (1988:10). His assertions are that a tourism product is fundamentally a complex human experience (not a simple, objective commodity) and that tourism product development must be an integrated process involving information services, transportation, accommodations, and attractions.

THE MODEL

The model builds on the observations of the above authors and moves beyond their descriptions by posing a product concept that consists of the elements of the tourism product and the process by which those elements are assembled. The model explicitly acknowledges the role of human experience in the tourism product, but also identifies which elements can be empirically measured for an estimate of the economic magnitude of the industry. Further, the model can be
applied to either discrete commodities or to a package of commodities representing a "tourist experience."

**The Elements of the Tourism Product**

The tourism product consists of five elements, illustrated in Figure 1 as a series of concentric circles. These range from the core—the physical plant—to the encapsulating shell of involvement. The progression of elements from the core to the shell is correlated with declining direct management control, increasing consumer involvement, increasing intangibility, and decreasing potential for empirical measurement. Each of the five elements is the subject of an extensive body of literature in its own right. The purpose here is to explore briefly these elements as the constituent parts of the tourism product, not to review the literature related to each element.

![Figure 1. The Generic Tourism Product](image)

**Legend**

- PP = Physical Plant
- FC = Freedom of Choice
- S = Service
- I = Involvement
- H = Hospitality

Figure 1. The Generic Tourism Product
The relative importance of each element varies, depending on the specific type of product under consideration, but all tourism products incorporate all five. The success of a product in meeting the needs of tourists is determined by how well each element is designed and integrated with the others. The tourism product is not a simple combination of the five elements, but the result of synergistic interaction among all the components. To borrow a well-worn phrase, the tourism product is more than the sum of its parts. However, to begin to understand the product, the elements need to be separately and objectively identified.

The physical plant. The core of any tourism product is the physical plant: a site, natural resource, or facility such as a waterfall, wildlife, or resort. It may be either fixed property such as a hotel, or mobile equipment such as a cruise ship. The physical plant also refers to conditions of the physical environment such as weather, water quality, crowding, and the condition of the tourism infrastructure. Land, water, buildings, equipment, and infrastructure provide the natural and cultural resources on which any form of tourism is based. Their physical design has a major impact on the consumer's experience. The quality of the physical plant can be assessed by whether the design enhances the user's experience, protects the environment, and makes the product accessible to tourists with a wide range of physical abilities or limitations (Gunn 1972; Mace 1980).

Service. The design and provision of a physical plant, however, is only the beginning. The physical plant requires the input of services to make it useful for tourists. In this context, "service" refers to the performance of specific tasks required to meet the needs of tourists. A hotel needs management, front desk operation, housekeeping, maintenance, and food and beverage provisions to function as a hotel. An aircraft needs a flight crew, flight attendants, and the services of an airport and air traffic control to provide transportation.

The quality of service can be measured by observing the performance of employees against objective criteria that specify the types and level of technical knowledge an employee must have to perform his/her job. The issue of assessing service quality is addressed in greater detail by Grönroos (1983). Fitzsimmons and Sullivan (1982) and Normann (1984) provide an overview of a wide range of service management issues.

Hospitality. Quality service, though, is still not sufficient. As Clemmer (1991) has argued, consumers in virtually every field now expect "enhanced service" or "something extra." This expectation of something extra has long been a part of tourism: It is hospitality. Whereas service is the technically-competent performance of a task, hospitality is the attitude or style in which the task is performed. It is sensitivity to the pressures on a business traveler, encouragement to play for pleasure travelers. Hospitality is an expression of welcome by local residents to tourists arriving in their community.

The distinction between service and hospitality is often difficult to
determine in practice, but it is real. For example, while the service of
front desk staff refers to the efficient processing of hotel guests, hospi-
tality emerges when this service is performed with a smile, genuine
warmth, and the willingness to respond to other needs of the guest such
as information on local restaurants. Service at a convention includes
meeting room setups, while hospitality provides opportunities to relax
and to meet new people or renew old acquaintances. For pleasure
travel, hospitality may include a welcoming cocktail party or fresh
flowers in the room.

Hospitality is more difficult to assess and manage than service be-
cause it is more subjective than service. One way of developing a sense
of the level of hospitality delivered by a business is through solicited
and unsolicited customer feedback. Managers can also hire consultants
to play the role of customers to assess the quality of hospitality (al-
though these models do not always adequately distinguish between
technically competent service and true hospitality) such as Nightingale
(1985); Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988); and Saleh and

Hospitality sets the stage and facilitates the addition of the next two
elements. These two elements may be the more controversial aspects
of this model because they represent the inclusion of the tourist as part
of the product. However, the notion of including the customer as part
of service delivery is not unique to this model or even to tourism.
Normann (1985) has argued that the consumer can be considered as
part of the delivery of other service products. However, the inclusion
of the tourist as part of product production (not just delivery) is essen-
tial if we are to comprehend and accept the notion that tourism is, in a
fundamental sense, an experience.

Numerous authors have asserted that tourism is essentially experien-
tial—not just something that is experienced but, rather, an experience
per se (Dann 1976:19; Gunn 1988:10; Jefferson and Lickorish 1988:
211; Murphy 1985:10; Prentice 1993). The idea that a tourism product
is a human experience is not just an academic notion. The mission
statement of The Disney Corporation illustrates the same concept:
their stated product is “the finest in family entertainment”; they are
in the business of “making people happy.” Therefore, components of
experience must be included as components of the tourism product.
There are two that are relevant: freedom of choice and involvement.

**Freedom of choice.** Freedom of choice refers to the necessity that the
traveler has some acceptable range of options in order for the experi-
tence to be satisfactory. The degree of freedom of choice will vary
greatly, depending on whether the travel is for pleasure, business,
family matters, or a combination. It varies with the traveler’s budget,
previous experience, knowledge, and reliance on a travel agent or
prepackaged tours. Despite this variation, any satisfactory tourism
product must include some elements of choice.

The role of freedom of choice is particularly clear in recreational or
pleasure travel. Indeed, the concept is well-established in the field of
leisure studies as an integral part of the leisure experience (Mannell
and Bradley 1986). Without the sense that one has permission to play
or to choose one's own activities, it is difficult to fully relax or to participate wholeheartedly in recreational activities. Even the most comprehensive, tightly packaged inclusive tour offers choice. The most basic choice, of course, is the freedom to purchase or not.

The role of freedom is not limited to pleasure travel. Freedom to choose an airline, an automobile route, a hotel, or a restaurant can enhance a business traveler's sense of control and satisfaction with the trip. Even when businesses or agencies restrict their employees' choices of mode of travel or accommodation to preferred suppliers, these suppliers can still enhance customer satisfaction by providing choices of seats, meals, smoking/non-smoking rooms, or other services and facilities to provide some degree of personal choice.

Freedom implies not just choice, but also the potential for happy surprises and spontaneity. Spontaneity may range from merely deciding on one's sleeping and waking times to making a last-minute decision to get away for a weekend or making a major departure from an itinerary. A number of attractions have recognized the appeal of surprise and spontaneity by deliberately planning for it. For example, the management of EPCOT schedules unannounced performances of buskers, parades, and appearances of Disney characters throughout the park. These unanticipated (by the visitor) events give the visitor the feeling that he or she is very fortunate to be in the right place at the right time, and thus is gaining extra value from the visit.

Involvement. A feature of many service products is the fact that consumers participate, in some degree, in the delivery of services (Boom and Bitner 1981; Fitzsimmons and Sullivan 1982; Normann 1984; Silpakit and Fisk 1985). This is true, too, for tourism products. The basis for successful participation by consumers in producing tourism products is the combination of an acceptable physical plant, good service, hospitality, and freedom of choice. These elements set the stage for physical, intellectual, and/or emotional involvement in travel services. For tourism, involvement is not simply physical participation, but a sense of engagement, of focusing on the activity—whether for pleasure or business.

In extreme circumstances, involvement takes on the quality of "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi 1975; Mannell, Larson and Zusanek 1988) in which the participant "loses" himself in an activity. At a minimum, it implies being able to concentrate on those activities important to the purpose of the trip. A business traveler can focus on conducting business, without worrying about the availability or adequacy of accommodation, meals, or transportation.

Involvement for pleasure travelers means playing or relaxing in a way that is personally satisfying, and feeling sufficiently safe and secure that one can doze poolside, stroll on the beach, or strike up conversations with other tourists or locals. It means having access to activities and programs that capture the imagination, interest, and enthusiasm of the potential participant. The sense of involvement causes time to pass without notice, as the tourist explores the world around him, other people, or his own mental and emotional response to the trip.

Involvement, combined with freedom of choice, warm hospitality,
competent service, and a good physical plant (which includes accessibility, acceptable environmental quality, good weather, and appropriate numbers of other people) virtually guarantees a quality and satisfying tourism product.

**The Tourism Production Process**

The tourism product is the result of a complex production process. Table 1 summarizes the process and lists examples at each stage. Although the lists are relatively long, they are not exhaustive.

The process begins with primary inputs of resources, raw materials, and other components such as construction materials, fuel, and agricultural product to create the facilities and equipment needed by the tourism industry. These are then converted through additional processing, manufacturing, or construction into intermediate (processed) inputs or tourism facilities. Intermediate inputs include attractions such as national parks, museums, galleries, historic sites, and convention centers, as well as tourism supports and facilitators such as hotels, restaurants, gift shops, and car rental companies. The intermediate inputs are then further refined through managerial expertise, technical services, scheduling, and packaging into intermediate outputs.

Intermediate outputs are those services normally associated with the tourism industry such as commercial accommodation, tour services, foodservices, and festivals. At this stage, however, the tourism product is still effectively just a potential commodity. Rooms may be offered by a hotel, but they do not become a part of the product—the tourist’s experience—until the guest stays in the room. Restaurant food does not become a meal until it is ordered, cooked, and consumed. The services of the tourism industry must be refined by consumers to form the final output—personal experiences. In the final stage, the tourist utilizes the intermediate outputs (services) to generate the final output: intangible but highly valued experiences such as recreation, business, and social contacts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. The Tourism Production Function</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Inputs (Resources)</strong> → <strong>Intermediate Inputs (Facilities)</strong> → <strong>Intermediate Outputs (Services)</strong> → <strong>Final Outputs (Experiences)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land → Parks → Park interpretation → Recreation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Labor → Resorts → Guide services → Social</td>
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<tr>
<td>Water → Transportation modes → Cultural performances → contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural produce → Museums → Souvenirs → Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fuel → Craft shops → Performances → Memories</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building materials → Convention centers → Accommodations → Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital → Hotels → Meals and drinks → contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental car fleets → Restaurants → Festivals &amp; events</td>
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The production process makes explicit two special features of tourism products. First, value is added at each stage of the production process. Value-added is the difference between the costs of production at any given stage and what the consumer is willing to pay. Second, the consumer is an integral part of the production process. The production of most non-tourism products occurs independently of the consumer. For example, automobiles are manufactured without the motorist's active involvement on the production line; auto insurance is offered for sale without the insuree's involvement (except, of course, for paying the premiums); a surgical patient does not assist with cutting or suturing. Tourism products, however, do not exist until a consumer journeys to the point of production and actively gets involved in the final phase.

The physical plant element is incorporated into the generic product at the primary input and intermediate input phases. Service and hospitality elements are added as the intermediate inputs are processed into the intermediate output phase. Finally, freedom of choice and involvement transform the intermediate outputs into the experiences of the Final Output phase.

A major implication of the observation that tourism products require the active involvement of consumers in their production is illustrated by the Leiper (1993) and Smith (1993) debate. A question implicit in their debate was whether a business could belong to more than one industry. The tourism production process provides the answer.

In Leiper's (1993) view, tourism production stops at the intermediate output stage. Restaurants, for example, produce prepared meals as their product, which are consumed by both locals and tourists. From the perspective of the proposed model, tourists take the intermediate output of a restaurant meal and "refine" it into a tourism product—a personal tourism experience.

At an empirical and statistical level, an analyst observes and measures the value of prepared meals as an output in the foodservices industry. The value of the intermediate foodservices output can be assessed at the level of all meals sold, or disaggregated by meals consumed by locals versus tourists (Smith 1988). At the more "advanced" level of tourism industry assessment, the foodservices output is processed into a tourism product and a certain percentage of the volume of sales is properly allocated to the tourism industry.

CONCLUSIONS

The structure of the tourism product is complex and it is the result of a complicated production process. Production of a tourism commodity begins with the physical plant, which is tangible and controlled to a high degree by the planning and management process. Then, in successive phases, the elements of service, hospitality, freedom of choice, and finally, personal involvement by the consumer are added to the emerging product. In the final analysis, tourism product and process are inseparable.

The tourism industry is the constellation of businesses, public agencies, and non-profit organizations that create products to facilitate
travel and activity for people away from their home environment. The nature of these products, though, has not been well understood on a conceptual level. Without a clear statement of the nature of the tourism product and how it is produced, imaginative and successful product development is hindered. This paper has made explicit the existence of a generic tourism product and production process. The production process and product may not be conventional, but they are real and of substantial economic importance to communities and nations worldwide.

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