



Bridge over Ironbridge Gorge / Foundry at Ironbridge

Exporting Expertise

Cultural Tourism and Destination Development.

By **Tim Ambrose**

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This paper is based on a presentation he gave at UKTI's Tourism and Heritage Export Showcase on 4th November 2003 at Ironbridge Gorge Museum in Shropshire.

For the day or stay tourist, the choice of destinations is increasingly influenced by cultural considerations. Cultural tourism may be defined as:- 'people from outside a destination motivated to visit wholly or partially by an interest in the cultural heritage, the contemporary culture and the cultural environment of the destination'. While cultural activity may not be the primary motivator for visiting a destination, the majority of tourism trips will have some cultural elements within them. These may be related to cultural history and heritage e.g. museums, archaeological monuments, or historic buildings and/or contemporary culture e.g. modern art galleries, festivals or performing arts - the cultural spectrum is a wide one and may include other leisure activities such as sport.

There are a variety of motivations for travelling to cultural destinations which can be characterised as:-

- Level 1 - people prepared to travel because of specific cultural heritage and cultural products in a destination
- Level 2 - people motivated in part by cultural heritage and cultural products in a destination

- Level 3 - people visiting a destination for non-cultural heritage and cultural reasons, but motivated while there
- Level 4 - people visiting a destination who 'find' heritage and cultural products perhaps through others
- Level 5 - people visiting a destination but not interested in heritage and cultural attractions or events

In terms of visitation, the ratios between these categories will vary from destination to destination, and within any one destination will vary from year to year depending on a range of supply and demand factors.¹ Motivational forces such as these cut across traditional and new segmentation categories for tourist visitors.²

Cultural tourism has become a strong force in the development and marketing of destinations; cultural heritage and cultural products (and their supporting infrastructure and services) increasingly attract high value tourism. This is as true for destinations within the United Kingdom as it is for international destinations, especially where tourism is a key driver within the economy. It is not surprising that cultural tourism worldwide is now being increasingly seen in economic development terms. For destination makers and managers, cultural tourism should not be seen as an end in itself, but as a means towards supporting sustainable destinations and communities. Those responsible for destination management at both site specific and regional level thus need to understand how cultural tourism can best provide leverage for destination investment and regeneration.

The focus of attention in terms of destination development, especially at regional and sub-regional level in the UK, tends understandably to focus on strengthening the quality and extent of supply in terms of product and maximising interest and demand in terms of the market. However, there is enormous experience and expertise, both in terms of the product as well as the market/product fit, in developing, managing and marketing the cultural tourism product at regional and sub-regional level. Developing and managing cultural destinations successfully is a complex process.³

The complexities of managing cultural destinations

One opportunity for generating new income for businesses of all types and sizes working in and in support of the tourism economy is to consider how most effectively to export that expertise and experience into destination markets beyond the UK's shores. British expertise and experience in culture and tourism have a powerful role to play in helping destination makers internationally understand the role of culture in tourism and create successful and sustainable destinations. Indeed, the demand for British destination expertise is reflected in the fact that some 4,000 British architects are currently working for overseas clients⁴ and British experts in the heritage and tourism sector are working on destination projects throughout the world.⁵ These may be drawn from consultancy businesses of different types or from private and public sector attractions.

The tourism and heritage sector is one of some thirty-one industry sectors which exports its services overseas. UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) is tasked by the Department of Trade and

Industry with strengthening the export competencies of each of these sectors, and works with other industry partners and Government departments to provide services and support to them. UKTI has established a tourism and heritage export sector advisory group (THE) to provide support to the sector. UKTI and the THE Group are now increasingly working with Regional Development Agencies and other partners at regional level such as Business Link to encourage and support cultural and tourism organisations and businesses in developing export competencies.

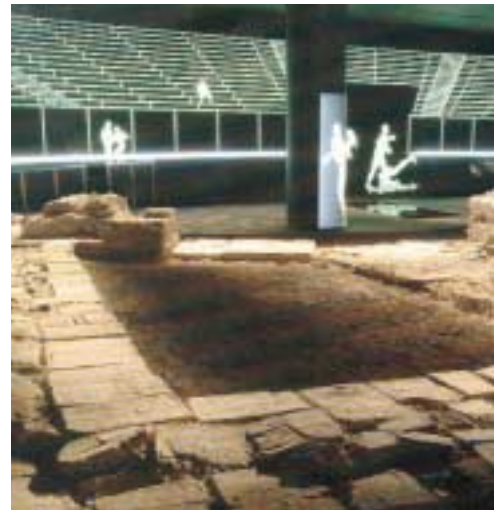
The West Midlands - realising opportunities

A good example of the potential for the export of tourism and heritage services is in the West Midlands. The West Midlands has a diverse visitor economy which includes - a strong business tourism market/product (e.g. the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham is the 7th largest in Europe and Telford International Centre is the 7th largest in UK); a series of major visitor attractions (e.g. Shakespeare's Stratford, Ironbridge World heritage Site, Alton Towers, Cadbury's World, and a wide range of museums and art galleries); and a significant number of cultural heritage sites (e.g. 32,000 listed buildings, 1,300 ancient monuments, and 133 entries on English Heritage's Parks and Gardens Register).⁶ It also has a strong and vibrant cultural offer serving both resident and visitor markets.⁷

The Regional Development Agency for the West Midlands, Advantage West Midlands (AWM), took responsibility for the regional tourism strategy in April 2003.⁸ AWM has created a Tourism & Leisure Cluster Opportunity Group to provide support on tourism funding, although it is important to



Statue of Shakespeare



Birmingham NEC / Cadbury World / Roman Amphitheatre, London

remember that AWM invests 70% of budget through Regeneration Zones rather than into tourism per se. AWM's Regional Economic Strategy has four pillars - developing a diverse and dynamic business base; promoting a learning and skilful region; creating the conditions for growth; and regenerating communities. Export in all industry sectors is an important dimension to the Strategy.

In terms of the volume and value of tourism within the West Midlands economy, tourism last year generated £6bn - £4bn from day visitors, £1.5bn from UK domestic overnight visitors and £500m from overseas overnight visitors. The region had 125 million visits the majority from residents of the region and their visiting friends and family. Some 10% were overnight visits.

10% of the region's workforce - some 251,000 people - are employed in the core tourism & leisure cluster with 305,000 people (12% of regional employment) in the wider cluster. There are some 22,000 tourism and leisure business units in the core cluster (accounting for 12% of all businesses in the region) and 28,000 in the wider cluster (15% of businesses).

The vision for the West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy for 2010 aims to develop 'a world class region to visit'⁹. Culture and tourism are recognised as an important force for economic regeneration and critically are seen as relevant to urban and rural economies. Indeed, developing the strength of the West Midlands cultural tourism offer for incoming visitors is a powerful way to showcase the Region's development and management competencies to external markets and use them as a springboard for export effort. The Regional Economic Strategy

supports, and is supported by tourism, in a number of ways:-

- Improving business quality and competitiveness
- Growing income, employment and economic benefits
- Encouraging appropriate business development
- Monitoring tourism volume and value, consumer trends
- Improving management and customer service skills
- Improving tourism delivery and promotion
- Improving and modernising regional infrastructure
- Branding and marketing the region more effectively
- Linkages and partnerships

Opportunities now exist to translate these economic objectives into the new West Midlands Regional Tourism Strategy.¹⁰

Issues and implications

As we have noted, the strengths of the culture, heritage and tourism product in the West Midlands reflect strong expertise and experience across the sectors. Tourism is already well grounded in the Regional Economic Strategy and there is a strong recognition of the world-class ambitions for the region. If the opportunities to develop and integrate export competencies within heritage and tourism businesses - direct (e.g. heritage and cultural attractions) and supporting (e.g. consultancy and training), then it follows that significant support and encouragement will need to be given by the regional agencies to help them meet those opportunities. Advocacy, business advice - especially for micro businesses and SMEs which characterise the sectors, information provision, investment in skills and workforce development, and

promoting case studies and case examples are all required to help encourage engagement in international markets.

For attractions and businesses in the sectors, while recognising that not all will wish or be able to do so, developing export competencies can be a valuable part of overall business development. There are opportunities to generate new strands of income and to work within markets of UK domestic relevance. Allied to these there are opportunities to extend professional development and personal competencies for the workforce. The export of services is also a mechanism for developing international networks and building company brand profile.

For Advantage West Midlands and its regional partners, supporting development export competencies within the tourism and cultural sectors helps to deliver on the Regional Economic Strategy's objectives for the cluster e.g. business development, regional branding and profile. Of critical importance in building the region's brand is the development of an international profile for the region through encouraging international engagement at all levels. John Edwards, the Chief Executive of AWM, noted in his talk to the Agency's Annual Conference in September 2003 that 'to achieve a world-class region, we must have a strong international presence.'¹¹ While he was focusing on new AWM facilities in Brussels, it can be argued that a valuable way to build an international presence for the West Midlands is through the export of the Region's experience and expertise in cultural destination development and management.



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The challenge is to recognise and accommodate the different dimensions of the public and private sectors in this respect. While the public sector heritage and cultural sectors have significant expertise, they do not necessarily have the time or resources to engage effectively in the export of that expertise on an individual or collective basis. There are also differences in the private sector where the range of existing consultancy companies have much to offer, while operators may not necessarily recognise the export value of their business experience. If benefits are to flow, building an export development strategy for the cultural tourism sector in the West Midlands is an important step for the future. Integrating this effectively into the key economic and tourism strategies for the Region will progressively help to strengthen both public and private sector aspects of its overall tourism economy.

1 See for example Gail Dexter Lord The Power of Cultural Tourism Keynote Presentation: Wisconsin Heritage Tourism Conference September 17, 1999, Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin; Ted Silberberg Cultural Tourism and Business Opportunities for Museums and Heritage Sites www.lord.ca/publications/articles

2 For example Tim Blightman, Visit Britain Consumer Futures TMI Conference Eastbourne Thursday 9 October 2003

3 For a detailed explanation of this diagram see John Nurick Heritage and Tourism Locum Destination Review 2:2000 pp. 35-38 available as a free download from www.locum-destination.com

4 See www.creativeport.co.uk the British Council website dedicated to export information for the arts and creative industries sectors; and www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk for export information for the heritage and tourism sectors

5 See UKTI's Tourism, Heritage and Museums - British Expertise October 2003

6 See English Heritage in the West Midlands Region 2003-2005; and www.historic-environmentforum-westmids.org

7 See West Midlands Life, the Regional Cultural Consortium, at www.westmidland-slife.org.uk

8 Locum Destination Consulting is currently developing the Regional Tourism Strategy for AWM and it is anticipated that this work will be completed by February 2004.

9 See www.advantagewm.co.uk

10 See above footnote 8.

11 See www.advantagewm.co.uk -annual-conference-transcript-2003.doc



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