

# Locum Forum

## Spotting the gaps ... and filling them

Locum Destination Consulting presented a paper at this year's TiLE conference, one of the world's premier events for the leisure, entertainment and design communities. Here, we print one part of the presentation, focusing on the importance of destination product and profile matching.

### We're all in the branding business

The destination business is about selling expectations and delivering memories to individual consumers. A good destination brand embodies and expresses the destination promise: that the memory will match the expectation. Great destination products deliver memorable experiences. And behind all great destination products are successful destination makers. Destinations must be aware of their products, services, strengths and weaknesses from the outset.

In the leisure industry, we are all involved in selling expectations and promising experiences. We must deliver the memories to fulfil the promise. It is vital for destination makers not to get too far ahead of expectations, because this leads to over-promising and under-delivering. An unbelievable promise is ultimately just that ... unbelievable. In-depth research allows the destination maker to over-deliver on the promise, thereby creating a first-time surprise and a reason to return. This centres around credible destination values powerfully communicated to consumers. It means understanding the destination itself, identifying the roots of its identity and the routes that consumers take to reach it. This knowledge should then be used to define the brand, and in-depth research results to refine it.

### Fitting the brand to the destination profile

It is important to assess, realistically, where the strengths and weaknesses of a destination lie, and to match them against its brand aspirations. This allows destination makers to accurately gauge where extra investment is needed, to fill any gaps discovered.

Look at Budapest, for example. In the immediate aftermath of the fall of communism, the city possessed reasonable art collections, a low-quality

airport, quite good cityscape and architecture, and moderate ground transport, but its gastronomy was not noteworthy. The pioneering post-1989 cultural visitors seeking cultural short breaks were used to world-league museums and galleries, airport expectations were higher, and they needed higher-quality food and accommodation.

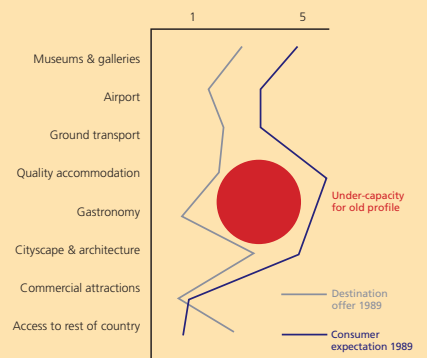
Heavy investment in the product gaps of 1989, coupled with low-price flights to Budapest and the ensuing change in visitor requirements, resulted in over-capacity in five-star hotels in Budapest. A clever destination maker would aim a sub-brand at the gaps in this area, fitting the product to the destination profile by understanding the consumer market.

One answer to the Budapest problem might be to invest brand efforts into domestic conferences and events, which do not require the best museums and galleries or airports, will not expect top-quality gastronomy, will soak up some of the excess five-star hotel capacity in the area, and do require good links with the rest of the country. In short, this target market more closely fits the destination profile.

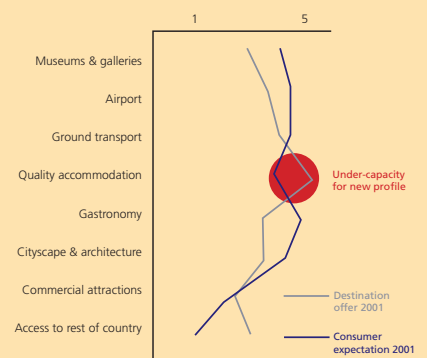
### Key challenge: consumer understanding

Consumer understanding drives the destination brand focus – the primary tool by which a destination is united and communicated to consumers. Real knowledge of consumer desires, coupled with real understanding of what a destination can offer, allows a destination maker to exceed expectations and give consumers what they need. It is advisable to develop destination products rooted in authentic values. Aligning the destination's values and characteristics with the brand promise and the consumer expectation builds a stronger brand. Do not overturn consumer expectations – beat them. The key challenge to us all is to understand what the consumer wants and what keeps us in business.

Budapest possibilities: product/market fit, 1989



Budapest possibilities: product/market fit, 2001



Budapest possibilities: sub-brands for destination gaps

