

What makes a great destination

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Everyone has an idea of a great destination. New York; Rome; Mecca; The Serengeti; The South Pole; even Newcastle on a Friday night. A great destination is somewhere

people want to live; somewhere people want to work; somewhere people want to put their money. A destination is somewhere worth leaving home for.

We believe there are a number of critical ingredients that provide the recipe for a destination:

ATTRACTORS create awareness of the destination and attract market interest. They include iconic buildings, natural features, retail, leisure and cultural facilities, and events. Attractors tend to deliver the 'highs' of the visitor experience.

INFRASTRUCTURE helps create a sense of place and supports the smooth operation of the destination. It includes transport, parking, signage, public spaces and so on.

SERVICES cater to visitors' and residents' needs, help create activity and, ultimately, increase spending. They include hotels, cafés, bars, shops, event programmes, and services such as cleaning, security and customer care.

The destination's **BRAND** captures all these elements of the destination experience and presents it to its markets. A successful destination brand articulates ambition, raises expectations, makes a promise of quality – and keeps it.

Integrated **MANAGEMENT** of the destination is important to long term success. Planning, development, operations, branding and marketing must be managed for the destination as well as for the individual attractors, services and infrastructure elements.

This analysis may look like just common sense. But people are getting bored with everyday places.

We complain that all high streets look the same these days – and this is becoming true of high streets in other countries too, as more brands go global. It is harder to find the difference we crave.

Destination branding offers a way out of this dilemma. A strong destination can build and support a brand that penetrates its target market through the background noise of global and national brands. Paradoxically, the growth of global brands has increased the importance of genuinely location-based destination brands.

A strong destination needs to differentiate itself from the competition. It needs distinctive attractors. These could include cultural venues or spectacular public spaces which cannot be homogenised and really provide a competitive differentiation. Just look at Yerba Buena Gardens in San Francisco or Bilbao Riverside, which create a vibrant and dynamic critical mass of attractors and activities.

Leisure and cultural destinations have some of the strongest destination brands in the UK. The Tate Modern and the Lowry have earned more column inches than many commercial leisure developments. The Guggenheim and the Eden Project are as well known as many major commercial brands. These unique leisure and cultural 'attractors' help establish profiles way beyond what could be expected from traditional developments.

So, does any of this make a difference to inward investment decision making? Leisure and cultural attractors are not just for visitors – we argue that these innovative attractors and strong destination brand management help get you noticed in a highly competitive inward investment marketplace.

Of course, factors such as skills base, incentives, accessibility and available premises will be the ultimate deciding factors for inward investors, but a great destination with a high profile brand will get you noticed and onto the long list – an imperative first step.

Furthermore, residents and employees want to live and work in interesting, lively and dynamic environments. One of the most valuable resources a destination can offer an investor is talent and we all know, intuitively, that 'quality of life' is a key locational factor for the talented 'creative class'.

It's time to think imaginatively about how leisure and culture can ensure each place is genuinely unique (individuality is good) and help shape and brand a distinctive and powerful destination experience – somewhere worth leaving home for.

Locum Consulting is the UK's first and most successful specialist destination consultancy. Locum provides leading-edge strategic, operational and financial advice to the destination sector.