Influences of films on tourism behaviour

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Introduction and context

Countries attract tourists because they are just wonderful destinations. Or is there something more going on? In many situations, a movie or TV programme has had an influence on the popularity of a destination. New Zealand has got a huge number of tourists who come there, because they want to see the set of the Lord of the Rings movies.

But do movies and other screenplays really have a big effect, or has New Zealand just been lucky? And what about the use of visual publicity in Switzerland?

Below you will find summaries of three papers dealing with the topic of film tourism. It is a growing trend, but it is still unclear what it is all about. There are dozens of different definitions to be found,
and one is not aware of the exact impact it can have. I tried to put the most important elements in the analysis below.

**Summary of results**

**Promoting Destinations via Film Tourism: An Empirical Identification of Supporting Marketing Initiatives**

This paper talks about film tourism as being “tourist visits to a destination or attraction as a result of the destination’s being featured on television, video, or the cinema screen”. Film tourism is an interesting part of tourism to talk about, because it offers something for everyone, and it is a quickly growing phenomenon worldwide. The article discusses the opportunities films give to destinations. There are many chances, but they are not always grasped. The films are a perfect way of product placement that is more effective than every kind of tourism-related advertisement. Movies reach a much wider public than the classical advertisements do. DMO’s should use films much more as a springboard for their marketing campaigns, because the results can be much better than one would expect.

Therefore, a movie does not mainly have to talk about a destination. Even a short and simple background landscape view can be enough to attract tourists. This provides so-called “unaided recall” (the people will memorise something without having to do an extra effort for it) and creates brand recognition.

Tourism statistics after the release of a movie are very interesting. Of course, shortly after release, there will be seen a peak in the number of tourist arrivals. It is more interesting to note that, generally, on a timespan of 5 years after release, the visitation number will have a constant increase of 54% in average.

**The Influence of a Film on Destination Image and the Desire to Travel: a Cross-Cultural Comparison**

Films are never made with the purpose to promote a destination, or to invite tourists to come there. Nevertheless, the impact of films on tourism is very big. Why is this? The destination is shown to millions of viewers. The movie shows immediate information and provides it in the type of visual information, which is picked up much faster than e.g. textual information.

An advantage of location showing in movies is the publicity. The publicity can be huge when talking about a blockbuster. Also, films reach a wider public than tourism ads, and they cost less than tourism ads.
Unfortunately, the impacts of movies on tourism behaviour are still not enough being researched and therefore unknown. The awareness of the link between the two is growing every day though.

One clear example of the influence of movies can be seen in the UK: in research, 80% of the Britons have stated that they base the choice of their next destination on a movie. 20% of them actually goes to the specific location that has been shown in the movie.

Nowadays, even though there is not enough research going on yet, we have some numbers of influences of films on tourism. There is another crucial thing though that we do not know: the elements of films that convince people to choose a film-related destination. Why do people go to this destination, what makes them choose?

Film tourism - Evolution, progress and prospects

Since the growing awareness of effects of film tourism, initiatives by DMO’s have increased, but not as much as would be optimal. The best efforts have been noticed in the UK, the USA, Korea, Australia and New Zealand. In 2004, the USA had quite a clear message in their film tourism campaign: “You’ve seen the movies, now visit the set!”

The definition of film tourism is still unclear. There are many definitions going round, and film tourism is also to be found under different names. Very generally, film tourism can be seen as “a tourist activity that is based on the viewing of a moving image that is accepted as a film/TV/pre-recorded product or digital media.” There are many different forms and activities that can be seen as screen or film tourism.

Synthesis of the conclusions and recommendations

Promoting Destinations via Film Tourism: An Empirical Identification of Supporting Marketing Initiatives

The paper concludes with some useful advice to DMO’s and other tourism institutions:

- Make films or TV shows with partnerships. (Thailand did this when introducing the movie “The Beach”: they promoted a quiz concerning the movie and supported the first price: a holiday in the movie scenery). This will create more awareness of the destination, and there is publicity you take care of yourself, so you can partially control it.
- Even though many DMO’s still think the influence of movies and other visuals is relatively low, it is very important to have marketing activities. Marketing activities that allow the location to promote itself, in the context of the movie, are much more effective than publicity of the location itself.
- Things one can organise to attract tourists in the context of the film: organise things like guided tours, film walks, promotions for hotels and/or houses where one has filmed scenes, and create special maps that show movie location highlights.
The exposure a movie gives to a city, province or country, is an advertisement that is viewed by millions of people. One can never get such a large audience in one effort, through traditional tourism promotions.

The Influence of a Film on Destination Image and the Desire to Travel: a Cross-Cultural Comparison

Film tourism can generate a lot of economic good for a destination. 10% of the incoming visitors of the UK have chosen their destination based on a movie that has been set there. In 2006, about 1.8 billion GBP was spent by the film tourists only, and 20,000 jobs were created.

DMO’s still do not realise the potential that film tourism has. The opportunities should be grasped more, and more energy should be spent in film-related destination promoting.

Some countries are exceptions. New Zealand has done a great job promoting themselves with the Lord of the Rings trilogy, and Tourism Australia has invested millions of Dollars in Australian promotion, related to the movie Australia.

Film tourism - Evolution, progress and prospects

The paper did some research about themes that should be handled in film tourism research. These themes include, but are not limited to:

The film tourist

1. Characteristics, motivation and behaviour
2. There are many types of film tourists, three major kinds can be discussed:
   a. The serendipitous film tourist goes to a destination which is a film destination by coincidence. It might be possible that he participates in a film-related activity, but it does not really matter.
   b. The general film tourist will certainly participate in some film-related activity, even though the destination has not been chosen because of a film.
   c. The specific film tourist will visit a destination, especially to look for locations he has seen in a film. Of course, film activities will be involved, and mostly be the major activity of the holiday.

Experiences of a film tourist:

This topic still needs a lot of research. It is known that cross-cultural experiences play a role in the phenomenon. Films are most of the time focused on western public, but film tourism is growing quickly in Asia as well. Studies about cultures and nationalities of film tourists have to be done to understand motivation and experiences of film tourism in a cultural perspective.
Personal assessment of the relevance of the studies for Swiss tourism

There are many movies that have been set in Switzerland. Unfortunately, this is not as widely known as is the case with other destinations. Several scenes from James Bond movies have been set up here. A clear example is the Verazca Dam (Figure 1), in the movie GoldenEye. In the movie’s story, it is a place in Russia. It is quite a pity that Switzerland didn’t jump on the opportunity to say that the dam was “theirs”. This is a big contrast compared to New Zealand, who already made publicity even before the movies of LOTR came out.

Figure 1: the Verazca Dam (Ward, 2012)

Switzerland could also try to sell itself more, on the scale of mountain tourism. There are many movies having had “snow scenes” being set in Switzerland. There even is a movie called “Fight for the Matterhorn”. It is an old movie, set in 1928, but I bet it will not be the only movie around.

Also the story of Heidi, which is still very popular in Asian countries, could be used more to promote Switzerland. I remember last year, that there was a large campaign from Switzerland Tourism in a large central train station in Belgium. There were many stands, involving mountain sports et cetera, but there was nothing about Swiss phenomenon Heidi there. If Heidi is so popular in Asia, why not work more around the topic? Maybe tours to the location mentioned in the story can be organised. Knowing that middle class groups in Asia are growing significantly, it seems a good idea to me to focus on that new market. Maybe Switzerland can do as Thailand has done, participate in a TV program that is related to the story of Heidi, and give a Heidi-themed holiday as a first price.

During my research for this topic, I could not find a lot of Swiss examples of promoting a destination via films or TV programs. To ensure a vast number of visitors over the years, I think promotion is almost a necessary item in the future of Swiss foreign product placement.
References


