

Chapter 25

Branding Prince Edward County as a Gastronomic Niche Tourism Destination: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Increasingly, gastronomy is playing a role in people's motivation for travel, and destinations are making food and beverages their main attraction. This study explored the growing field of gastronomic tourism, a type of niche tourism, through the theoretical framework of destination branding theory. Using a qualitative case study research design, this research examined the branding of the emergent region of Prince Edward County, Ontario, Canada as a gastronomic niche tourism destination from the perspective of tourism industry players. Findings indicated that the region turned to gastronomic tourism due to its agricultural history and need for economic development. It was also found that tourism industry players utilized the processes of brand identity, product development, collaboration, support and communication to brand the region. This study contributes scholarly and practical knowledge to the areas of tourism and branding, by providing insight into the development, management and promotion of destination brands.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an industry of growing complexity. Over the last decades, tourism has experienced sustained growth and increasing diversification in order to become one of the fastest growing industries and economic sectors in the world (Chauhan, 2011; World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2011b). In fact, tourism activities have witnessed an upward trend in the number of participants and revenues over the

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past half-century (Cook, Yale, & Marqua, 2002), and tourism worldwide is currently showing a healthy growth after it declined in 2009 due to the global economic crisis (UNWTO, 2011a). The Government of Canada considers tourism to be an important economic driver across all regions of the country (Industry Canada, 2011). In 2008, tourism activities in Canada generated over \$74 billion in revenues – on par with agriculture, fisheries and forestry activities combined – and employed over 660,000 Canadians (Industry Canada, 2011).

Within the industry, niche tourism has been regarded as a relatively new form of tourism that has emerged, in part, as a result of a progressively more segmented and specialized market (Hall & Weiler, 1992; Novelli, 2005). Novelli (2005) has viewed consumers' current tourism practices as increasingly based on selective and informed choices of destinations in line with particular needs and interests. Niche tourism can be defined as a specialized "form of tourism which involves consumers whose holiday choice is inspired by specific motivations and whose level of satisfaction is determined by the experience they pursue" (Novelli, 2005, p. 13). Specifically, niche tourism takes place "when the traveller's motivation and decision-making are primarily determined by a particular special interest" (Hall & Weiler, 1992, p. 5). In other words, niche tourism occurs when individuals choose to travel because they have a particular interest that they are looking to pursue at a certain destination (Hall & Weiler, 1992).

While nourishment has always been and will always be a necessary part of travel – given that everyone has to eat, whether at home or away, Hall and Mitchell (2005) have asserted that food and wine are increasingly becoming a central part of people's decision-making when it comes to where to travel and what to do while on vacation. In addition, a growing number of places around the world are working to make food and wine their main attraction (Hall & Mitchell, 2005). With gastronomy having started to come to the forefront of the tourism experience and tourism research in recent years (Hall & Mitchell, 2005), it can be said that gastronomic tourism, as a type of niche tourism, is currently a contemporary and practical topic of study. Gastronomic tourism can be described as a type of niche tourism where food and wine are the main or major motivations for travel, and thus influence travel behaviour and decision-making (Hall & Mitchell, 2005). Consumers who engage in gastronomic tourism have a high interest in food and wine, which also tends to be related to an interest in the cultures and landscapes that produce them (Hall & Mitchell, 2005).

The region of Prince Edward County, Ontario, Canada was used as a case study to develop an understanding of the phenomenon of branding a place as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. While Prince Edward County has long been known for the natural beaches and sand dunes of the Sandbanks Provincial Park (Aspler, 2006; Phillips, 2006), the region has started to reinvent itself around food and wine offerings.

This study was necessary to capture a fast growing area of public interest in both academic and industry circles, i.e., niche tourism and, more specifically, gastronomic niche tourism. The emergent nature of niche tourism (Hall & Weiler, 1992), coupled with the very recent interest in gastronomy in the context of the tourism experience and tourism research (Hall & Mitchell, 2005), has revealed a dearth of literature on these issues. This study is therefore filling a gap in the field of gastronomic tourism, and breaking new ground by examining an emergent niche tourism region, Prince Edward County, for its gastronomy from a destination branding theory perspective. While a few studies on the region have been undertaken by university researchers and students in recent years (Stolarick, Denstedt, Donald, & Spencer, 2010; Wade, 2007; Wade & Jacobs, 2006; Wade & Jacobs, 2008), these have spanned a wide variety of subjects, from geography and culture to urban planning and economic development. Only one

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