


Chapter 18

Impact of Carnival Tourism: Carnival as Niche Tourism Product

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the growing prominence of niche and special interest tourism, driven by a demand for unique, tailored experiences that foster deeper connections with destinations. Focusing on carnival tourism, a key subset, it highlights its integration of heritage, culture, food, and events. Using St. Lucia as a case study, the chapter explores how strategic marketing and branding elevate carnival as a premier tourism product, driving sustainable growth, economic diversification, and cultural preservation.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Destinations and firms strategically market tourism products to align with the specific interests of targeted visitors, reducing competition and fostering product differentiation (Bunghez, 2021). By focusing on specialised interests, they effectively distinguish their offerings, enhance customer engagement, and establish a unique market presence (Li et al., 2022).

This approach, known as niche tourism, attracts visitors with specialised interests while showcasing a destination's commitment to tailored experiences (Rodrigues & Carvalho, 2023). Destinations offering niche products can position themselves uniquely in a crowded market, creating a distinct image that enhances competitiveness (Rodrigues & Carvalho, 2023). Niche tourism spans various categories, such as special interest, cultural, and activity-based tourism. For example, special interest tourism caters to specific hobbies like bird watching or culinary tours, cultural tourism focuses on heritage and traditions, and activity-based tourism offers experiences like hiking or wellness retreats.

In a competitive global market, tourism-dependent countries continuously innovate to differentiate themselves (Cillo et al., 2021). By leveraging unique cultural heritage, environmental attractions, and specialised activities, these destinations create compelling identities that resonate with niche markets.

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Strategies include promoting sustainability, authenticity, and exclusivity while utilising advanced marketing techniques like digital campaigns and technologies such as virtual and augmented reality to attract global audiences (Bunghez, 2021). Collaboration with local communities ensures sustainable tourism development that benefits the local economy, boosting long-term competitiveness and resilience.

Carnival tourism exemplifies niche tourism, incorporating festival, cultural, heritage, and event tourism. Iconic events like Rio de Janeiro's Carnival and Notting Hill Carnival showcase vibrant cultural expressions, attracting tourists seeking immersive experiences (Cuffy, 2017). These celebrations highlight unique cultural identities, integrating local cuisine and crafts to appeal to diverse tourist interests. This chapter explores the evolution and impact of carnival tourism and its marketing strategies, with a focus on St. Lucia as a case study.

2.0 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND EVOLUTION OF CARNIVAL

Carnival's origins have long been debated. Some trace it to the Roman festival of Saturnalia, celebrated with feasting and social equality in honour of Saturn, while others connect it to diverse cultures and eras. Saturnalia's spirit of revelry became a hallmark of carnival festivities. In 1464, Pope Paul II revived ancient Roman traditions with the Renaissance Carnival in Rome, which featured races and events. By the 18th century, Venetian carnival, known for its masks and social equality, became the focal point of Italian celebrations (Kinser, 2020).

Carnival also draws influences from Greek and Macedonian traditions, medieval Catholic Europe's pre-Lenten celebrations, and ancient Egyptian festivals like Sham El-Nessim, marking seasonal renewal (Elsaid & Ahmed Fathallah, 2024). Across Europe, carnival evolved to reflect local customs, such as Cologne's November 11 start, France's Mi-Carême, and Switzerland's demon-mask festivities (Godet, 2020).

Globally renowned events include London's Notting Hill Carnival, rooted in Caribbean culture and the Windrush generation, and Canada's Quebec Winter Carnival and Toronto's Caribana, which celebrate winter and cultural diversity. Brazil's Rio Carnival is inseparable from samba, a symbol of cultural unity originating in the Afro-Brazilian favelas (Ette & Muller, 2021).

In the United States, New Orleans' Mardi Gras combines French Catholic traditions with African and Indigenous influences. The Caribbean carnival, deeply tied to the history of slavery and emancipation, features J'ouvert and vibrant celebrations across islands like Trinidad, Saint Lucia, and Jamaica, each reflecting unique cultural identities (Klien-Thomas, 2020).

Months of preparation go into creating costumes, floats, and performances, showcasing heritage and community spirit. Carnival has evolved over centuries into a global celebration blending Roman, Christian, and African influences (Klien-Thomas, 2020). It embodies community, history, and freedom, honouring diversity and resilience through music, dance, and joyous expression.

Carnivals, with their origins in European pagan traditions and African diaspora influences, have long been celebrated as vibrant expressions of cultural identity and community spirit. In Trinidad, for example, the festival evolved during the 19th century as a profound celebration of freedom following the abolition of slavery (Ette & Muller, 2021). Rooted in the defiance and creativity of enslaved Africans, the event became a platform for cultural preservation and resistance, showcasing music, dance, and costumes that carried symbolic meaning. Over time, these elements have fused with European masquerade traditions to form the rich and dynamic celebrations seen today (Ette & Muller, 2021).

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