

Visitor Experience Case Study

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Hitting the mark with visitor experiences

Experiences – it's a word that gets used a lot in the tourism industry and can be a source of confusion.

Yet businesses that don't get what is important about experiences for the market, and fail to provide them in a way that matches holidaymakers' expectations, are being left behind in the competition for visitor dollars.

And it's all because in our rapidly-changing world, our holiday needs have changed.

Visitor expectations have changed

Extensive research on [changing consumer behaviour](#) shows that we want holidays that enable us to make a connection with the places we visit and the local people – holidays that change us in some way.

It is the prospect of a temporary 'new life' that motivates us – “not just in terms of places to see and things to do, but also in terms of learning, personal development and gaining genuine social and cultural insights. Experiences that deliver a sense of exhilaration and vitality, whether through active adventure or passively acquiring new skills, are on the top of the wish list.”

Experiences are different to activities

An activity is usually focused on the physical action, with minimal connection to the meaning or significance of the place in which it occurs, or the local story. Examples are sightseeing, bushwalking or swimming.

An experience, however, goes beyond an activity to provide a higher level of engagement with the sense of place and local people and access to a greater depth of involvement with and understanding of both.

For example, Federal Hotels & Resorts' [Piners and Miners](#) product, based at Strahan, incorporates a Hi-rail ride, 4WD wilderness component, a cultural heritage walk, Tasmanian food and wine and a harbour cruise, all designed around a strong interpretive theme and face-to-face guiding that reveal a compelling story.





[Casaveen Australia](#) provides an experience that takes visitors into a world of a rural family that's built a dream of a global business against the odds and is helping sustain a local community. It combines static interpretation with a factory tour, meeting local identities, the chance to touch finished items in knitwear showroom and to socialise and have refreshments in the café.

People – not just tour guides but all frontline personnel – play a key role in an experience. The quality of the relationship between the visitor and those involved in providing the experience is critical.

How does it work?

Experiences have power. They:

- Spark the imagination;
- Engage the senses;
- Stimulate the intellect;
- Invoke an emotive response; and
- Enliven the spirit.

They can do this in wide-ranging settings – from an underground mine to an eco-cruise, a wildlife night prowler to a mountain lake.

Your role, as a tourism operator, is to create an environment for the experience – to provide the ingredients and to set up the circumstances so the visitor can be an active part of what happens, as in the case of shucking their own oysters as part of a marine farm tour, or going with the chef to buy vegetables as part of a food tourism experience.

The [Tasmanian Experience Strategy](#) shows that experiences consist of four layers – **place, infrastructure, service, interpretation**. When these are combined in a holistic way that matches the needs of visitors, they deliver a true visitor experience.

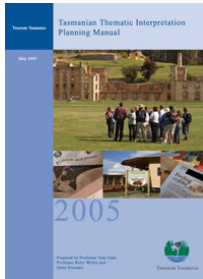


An experience is not just what happens when a visitor arrives for your tour, adventure or attraction. It is a managed process that starts from initial communication, such as an advertisement, brochure or website, and can continue even after the visitor leaves, through follow-up, reinforcement or marketing of allied products.

Visitors create their own experiences

Ultimately, visitors create their own experiences through personalised interaction and the processes taking place around them.

A vital part of the experience is the meaning that they create from what the tourism operator provides. This is why interpretation sits at the core of a quality visitor experience.



[Thematic Interpretation](#) is a tool for creating “meaning-making” – it causes visitors to make meaning from the place, activity and people involved. It is a purposeful approach from the operator’s point of view, yet the outcome for visitors can be spontaneous and full of surprise and impact.

According to Gilmore and Pine (*The Experience Economy: Work Is Theatre & Every Business a Stage*, 1999, Joseph Pine II & James Gilmore, Harvard Business School Press), a service turns into an experience automatically when using a theme – a theme is the underlying concept for everything staged in a particular place.

Everyone in the industry is part of this

Experiences apply at all levels of tourism – from products, businesses and destinations to the role of local government and regional tourism bodies.

Increasingly, this is gaining recognition in Tasmania.

Cradle Coast Authority has developed experience strategies that include produce to plate and [mining heritage](#). King Island has a tourism food experience strategy. Burnie City Council and Central Coast Council are implementing interpretation strategies for their areas. The Huon Valley Council and Huon Trail are working on interpretation strategies across the region.

[Port Arthur Historic Site](#) has an interpretation strategy that uses Thematic Interpretation to develop interpretation that shapes the experience and the way it is delivered, as well as the development of new visitor products.



Attractions such as the Port Arthur site, Tahune AirWalk and Dismal Swamp are continually reviewing their interpretation plans, refreshing services, developing infrastructure and designing products around these elements to strengthen the visitor experience.

Experiences not destinations

The trend in Australia and internationally is seeing a shift from marketing of destinations towards marketing of experiences developed across destinations. That means destinations are positioning and delivering their offering based on one or more sets or groupings of themed experiences.

This change is a response to emerging research findings. For example, a recent [Perceptions Research Study](#) commissioned by Tourism Tasmania showed that while nature remains the lead appeal for the State's tourism positioning, visitors are more interested in what experiences are overlaid on it. Nature becomes the "canvas upon which we build the offerings of Tasmania".

When a destination, through its network of operators and tourism bodies, works together to create one or more 'experiencescapes' – nested products that together create one or more sets of experiences – it creates value for visitors and the industry.

This approach is the basis of the [Launceston Tourism Plan 2005-2010](#), which has identified four experience sets for the high yield tourism market, such as 'culture, history, nature' and 'adventure and relaxation'.