



**THE SIX SENSES OF TRAVEL**

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### CAPTURING KEEPSAKES

As anyone attending ITB in Berlin in past years can strongly attest to, for the world's travellers - the millions and millions of people who board planes, trains, ships and automobiles each and every day - the world can sometimes become a blur. This is especially true for business travellers whose days can be strung together by itineraries dotted by that oh-so familiar pattern: airport, hotel, office, hotel, airport, home (maybe), airport, hotel, office, hotel, airport...and on and on it goes. So often the visas stamped in one's passport feel undeserved as the place visited was not really 'touched' at all.

The same can apply for leisure travellers. Too much beach-hopping can turn to beach-blurring. Too long spent temple-touring can leave one all templed out. Too many days exploring ancient ruins can leave one feeling simply ruined. Shopping sprees in stylish city-centres can lead to shopping-induced *zzzzz*s. Too many hours game-viewing in the savannah can lead to game-gazing. Saturation of the senses is always a risk...for the traveler, and for the destination.

Yet it is '*experiences*' which tourism professionals across the world put forward to travellers to sell their destinations. From international trade shows to individual advertisements and CRM efforts, with all of their heart, imagination, budget and invitation destinations, marketers showcase opportunities to do so much, see so much, take in so much, and take home so much. These experiences stretch time and budgets, and they strengthen destination competitiveness.

Through all the travels, through the blur, travellers seek to take home mementos as touchstones of being there, being blessed to make the trip, whether with business suits or swimsuits. Curios, arts & crafts, collections of keepsakes find their way home onto boardroom and living room bookshelves. And destinations try to find new, creative, clever ways of leaving a lasting impression.

Yet if we were to pause all of the travel busyness, slow down all of the overdrive efforts to make an impression, and zoom in on the heavily detailed postcard-like

images, we would find that our most precious moments of travel are taken home not through our luggage, not through our purchases, not through our cameras...but through our senses.

### THE POWER OF THE SENSES

In so many ways our senses are our largest, deepest built-in suitcases. *Touch, smell, sound, sight* and *taste*: Five magic ways of literally taking in a place, a moment, a memory.

Within our senses are held some of our most precious memories of our travels and lives. Neatly and discreetly packed away into our cellular memory, our senses have captured split seconds of time from across the globe, and across our lives.

It happens completely naturally. And when we least expect it, these little packages open through triggers which occur randomly. When they open, out pour sound bytes which can prompt us to close our eyes, freeze our thoughts and actions, and travel through time. Travel back to a place in the world and in the stories of our lives.

Uniquely, these grand voyages are most often inspired through the tiniest of details:

- The *scent* of jasmine... taking you back to that peaceful, perfect spa in Thailand, the one tucked away behind the hotel pool in the lush palm garden that you walked to by a small, wooden bridge over a water lily garden, allowing you to leave your laptop and TO-DO list for a short while for some much needed pampering;
- The *sound* of a cow skin and wood drum... taking you back to a grand bush Boma glowing gold from the roaring campfire within while tribal dancers fill the still, silent night with music of their ancestors as you and your family watch in awe late into the night in the mighty Serengeti;

- The *touch* of fresh, clean, crisp white cotton linen sheets... taking you back to a charming B&B in the Provence, the one with little sprigs of Lavender gently laid across your pillows every nighttime turn down;
- The *taste* of cardamom... instantly bringing back the soothing flavour of authentic Indian *chai* served late afternoon under rhythmically rotating ceiling fans on the terrace just outside the ornate yet tech-tailored meeting rooms;
- The *sight* of sunburnt orange and red and yellow leaves on the ground... taking you back to autumn in London's Hyde Park, on a leisurely walk to enjoy some time out before the dark of winter sets in and the festive season begins.

The transposing power of detail through the power of the five senses.

But what is even more powerful, more stirring and more enduring is the sixth sense of travel – the fusion of the five senses, the collective *feeling*.

### THE SIXTH SENSE

It is the *feeling* of being in a place, that deeply held emotion attached to a specific moment in time, and felt once again in the mind's eye when cellular memory triggers return, which makes travel so profoundly impactful beyond the immediate, three-dimensional experience.

With all of the stimuli and emotion of the moment combined into a multi-sensory cocktail, it is the resulting *feeling* of the moment which is so intoxicating.

That feeling of freedom.

That feeling of luxury.

That feeling of exhilaration.

That feeling of connectedness (to oneself and/or to another).

That feeling of adventure.

That feeling of play.

That feeling... of feeling.

The sixth sense, *feeling*, can become one of the most powerful elements of an experience and therefore a powerful competitive edge for the destination. That is, if the feeling is a positive one.

While marketing and promotional efforts focus on attracting audiences of travellers at a conscious level, the sixth sense of feeling can, when of a positive nature, work on the subconscious to magnetically pull a traveler in a direction – ideally the direction of the destination to unlock all of the senses once more.

For leaders mandated to grow and develop tourism through *inter alia*, repeat visitation / usage of the tourism product, the power of the senses to bring visitors back is of critical importance to tourism economy management. Recognising and leveraging the six senses of travel makes good tourism business sense.

### **SIGNING YOUR SENSORY SIGNATURE**

For tourism leaders the challenge lies in identifying the critical sensory details, the specific senses, which have the power of positively and provocatively embedding themselves in the minds and memories of travellers, bringing to life all that they so enjoyed not just in their visit, but about their visit.

This demands that the travel experience understand the sensory ‘feeding’ needed and desired by travellers, consciously and unconsciously. And where possible, *owning that sense* – creating signature sensory triggers as part of the

DNA of a travel experience (be it a place, journey to the destination, specific experience, service culture, etc).

It could be something as simple as:

- a certain spice – the way in which Tahitians weave Vanilla into their seafood cuisine;
- a particular flower – a signature red carnation adorning key aesthetic points throughout the luxurious properties of Red Carnation Hotels;
- a distinct style/print/texture/colour of fabric used for décor or uniforms – the signature turquoise paisley silk used in the elegant women’s sari and gent’s waistcoat uniforms of the Taj, Hotel;
- a select piece of music – gentle signature music played on boarding and disembarking an Emirates aircraft;
- a certain fragrance – signature ylang ylang scented candles in Bali;
- a certain expression used by the people of the destination – ‘Howzit?’

So importantly, the tiniest detail can make the grandest impression. And the grandest effort may make no impact at all. It is up to the senses to decide.

In the end, while success of the sensory feeding is something which we have limited real control over, the importance of making the signature sensory stimuli freely available, and linking it with unique aspects of the travel experience, cannot be understated.

This is one of the most interesting parts of the six senses of travel: it is not necessarily about the engineering of the travel experience, it is the often invisible matter which fills the engineered experience’s *space* – the *scents* and *sounds* which fill

the air, add a layer of emotion to the experience, which inspire the ultimate *feeling*.

Simple sensory signatures, when pervasive in the destination (be it product or service), can become a powerful, inseparable part of the Brand's competitive edge and therefore competitive strength. When selected and brought to life effectively and consistently in Brand experience delivery, these sensory signatures acquire a role and importance to destination identity, growth and development beyond measure.

In a time when travellers search the world for journeys, places and spaces which feed their need to go beyond the ordinary and expected there is no question about it – the six senses of travel matter.

You can just feel it!

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