Perceptions Of Canadian Tourism Products - Product Implications - Highlights
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PERCEPTION OF CANADIAN TOURISM PRODUCTS

- PRODUCT IMPLICATIONS -

Highlights

Tourism Canada
Product Development Branch
February 1988

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Market research was conducted in the past years in an attempt to identify our markets' characteristics and needs / preferences.

The results of 6 of those surveys were analyzed to derive implications for product development in Canada. These surveys are:

- Pleasure Travel Markets to North America (Germany, France, U. K., Japan)
- U.S. Pleasure Travel Market Study
- Canadian Tourism Attitude and Motivation Study

These surveys were intended in part to measure the perception of Canada's tourism products held by potential travelers to Canada. In the absence of visitor satisfaction data and national industry standards, it is difficult to say whether these perceptions reflect true product quality or stem from a general awareness of a product which hasn't necessarily been tested. However, because to the consumers perceptions are their reality, survey results warrant further examination in terms of their product implications. Negative perceptions especially will merit closer investigation.

This report presents results on the basis of specific products, including various "product lines". The latter incorporate a series of discrete product items which, when brought together, provide the traveller with a distinct experience (e.g. city, outdoor). Perception, and indeed performance, of individual product items within a product line affect the entire line (e.g. badly perceived accommodation within a city has a negative impact on the perception of the city product as a whole). Individual product items are therefore working in synergy with the rest of the product line. In many instances, they are also part of other product lines, inter-relating this time with different product items. In these cases, operators are providing different types of experiences, depending on what other elements are sought by the client.

GENERAL

BASIC ATTRIBUTES OF A TOURISM DESTINATION

Environmental
- Outstanding scenery
- Warm sunny climate
- Reliable weather

Hospitality
- Hygiene /cleanliness
- Personal safety
- Friendly local people
- Different culture
- Warm welcome for tourists
- Opportunities to increase knowledge
- Local cuisine

Access
- Inexpensive travel to destination
- Sightseeing excursions
- Public transportation

Conclusions

- Canada is well perceived by its major markets on approximately 60% of the attributes identified.

- Half of those can be considered part of Canada's competitive edge:
  - Outstanding scenery
  - Personal safety
  - Friendly local people
  - Different culture
  - Inexpensive resort and city destinations (perception of U.S. market)

- Canada is not perceived as having:
  - Sunny, reliable weather
  - Fine local cuisine
  - Better public transportation than the U.S.
  - Inexpensive travel from overseas destinations

PRODUCT LINES

CITY PRODUCT LINE

Product elements included

Services: First-class hotels
Budget accommodation
High quality restaurants
Shopping

Cultural Attractions: Theatre / Concerts
Museums /Art galleries
Historic sites
Local festivals

Entertainment / Sports: Nighlife / Entertainment
Spectator sporting events
Amusement /Theme parks
Zoos I Wildlife exhibits
Golf /Tennis
Casinos / Gambling

Other: Resort areas
Exotic atmosphere
Easy to see

Competitive Edge

Canada's Competitive Edge

Canada's competitive edge relies on comparative advantages which are *not* refuted to specific "city" products:

- **Safe**
- Not crowded*
- Clean*
- Cities few have seen*
- Friendly local people
- Different cultures/ ways of life
- Inexpensive (especially its accommodation)*

* Vancouver has the top image among U. S., Canadian and European cities on these items, according to the U .S. market

Our Competition's Edge

U.S. and European cities have a comparative advantage over Canadian cities on specific "city" products:

- Cultural attractions (art and history)
- Entertainment/nightlife
- Restaurants
- First-class hotels
- Shopping

Implications

- Although not a comparative advantage for Canada vis-à-vis other destinations, the city product line still constitutes a major tourism attraction for our domestic and international markets.

- Many of Canada's perceived weaknesses reflect awareness problems within our markets. Others, however, would merit closer examination from a product development perspective.

- The quality of our restaurants and local cuisine is one which should be addressed due to its importance in the choice of a destination. A wide range of products with good value for money is essential. Further, local cuisine should be encouraged to reflect cultural differences.

- Nightlife is also a gap which has been recognized by our major markets.

- Our different culture and way of life should also be more closely linked to our city product line due to the importance attached to it by all markets and the comparative advantage it constitutes for us. It could serve to better package our city product and provide our cities with a clearer image.

OUTDOOR PRODUCT LINE

Product Elements Included

Accommodation: Campgrounds, Trailer parks

Outdoor Locations: Beaches
Wide open spaces
Seaside
Lakes and Rivers
Mountainous area
National Parks and Forests

Outdoor Sports: Viewing wildlife, birds
Water sports
Outdoor activities
Skiing
Fishing
Hunting
Golf, Tennis

Culture (Ethnic): **Different** culture
Different cultural groups

Implications

"Soft" outdoor/scenic vacations

. Canada certainly is well perceived on its scenic product attributes.

. Budget accommodation was not perceived as a strength. It is not known whether campgrounds suffer from the same perception. The implication would be that a **closer** look be taken to ensure that quality accommodation be **offered** through an easily accessible and **"packageable"** network.

. National parks are certainly a key component of this type of holiday. They should be examined with a view to better match this product to market demand and to better integrate this product **to** other tourism products.

Specialized Activities

- **Canada** is in a position to offer high quality outdoor activities; such as **hiking/climbing,** hunting/fishing, and even more specialized **adventure products:** These, however, appeal to smaller vertical markets and should not be **developed/packaged to** meet the ***needs*** of the general outdoor **traveller.**

- Skiing does not offer as clear a picture. Although overseas markets perceive Canadian skiing to be internationally competitive (about 60% feel that we offer a better product than other destinations, while only about 20% feel the U.S. to do the same), the U.S. market prefers **to** ski in Europe or at home.

  Information on resort perceptions in the U.S. market pointed **to** the fact that Canadian resorts are perceived as lacking basic infrastructure and amenities (quality accommodation, restaurants and nightlife). This further worsens the positioning of Canadian ski resorts within the U.S. market.

HERITAGE AREAS PRODUCT LINE

Product Elements Included

Accommodation: First-class hotels
Budget accommodation
Campgrounds, Trailer parks

Outdoor-Related Items: National parks and forests
Lakes and rivers
Mountainous areas
Wide open spaces
Wildlife and birds
Outdoor activities

Culture-Related Items: a. History: Historic cities
Historic sites
b. **Arts**: **Theatre/concerts**
Museum/art galleries
Local festivals
Local crafts
c. Ethnic: Interesting small **towns/villages**
Different cultural groups

Other: Amusementftheme parks
Easy to see

Implications

. According to the U.S. market, in terms of its heritage areas, Canada fares relatively well. The outdoor component is the strongest, except in the case of **Que'bec**. Canada's major competitor in **terms** of the culture component is of course Europe.

. Still according to the U.S. market, New England and the Maritimes have a comparable overall Heritage image although the Maritimes are slightly stronger on the outdoors and New England on culture.

. The Canadian and U.S. Rockies have similar Heritage images, perceived **to** offer similar outdoor and culture products **within** their heritage areas..

- The same overall trend would seem **to** be followed by the overseas markets, perceiving Canada better ***on*** its outdoors, but the U.S. better on its **serviçes** and cultural items
- In terms of comparative advantages, then, it does not seem that Canada could effectively position itself as a destination offering Heritage areas ***different from other countries,*** aside from the fact that these would be perceived to be set in perhaps a more rural environment.

- Should Canada's cultural attractions improve in terms of their quality and/or diversity (or in terms of the markets' awareness of them), then the Heritage areas product line is one which should show marked improvement in its market positioning.

RURAL PRODUCT LINE

Product Elements Included

Accommodation: Budget accommodation
Campgrounds and Trailer parks

Outdoor-Related Items: National parks and forests
Lakes and rivers
Mountainous areas
Wide open spaces
Wildlife and birds
Outdoor activities

Culture-Related Items: a. History: Historic sites
b. Arts: Museum/art galleries
Local festivals
Local crafts
c. Ethnic Interesting small towns and villages
Different cultural groups
Different culture

Other: Opportunities to increase knowledge

Implications

Canada's ability to compete effectively against other destinations is probably satisfactory. Differences between such areas as the Maritimes and New England would prove to be to the advantage of the Canadian destination.

It is not a product line which appeals to a very large market (international travellers seem to be looking for a Heritage area rather than a rural area).

In the Canadian market, we see travelers looking for a short trip to visit relatives or to stay in campgrounds/cottage.

This information would indicate that the rural product line is not one which constitutes one of Canada's opportunities for tourism development.

BEACH PRODUCT LINE

Product Elements Included

Services: First-class hotels
Budget accommodation
High-quality restaurants
Shopping

Water-Related: Seaside
Beaches
Water sporta

Entertainment: Nightli.fe/entertainment
Casinos/gambling
Golf/tennis

Other: Resort areas
Exotic atmosphere
Wide open spaces

Implications

Canada is not perceived as being able to offer sun ‘n’ sand vacations. The quality of our amenities also appears **to** be lacking (hotels, restaurants, nightlife).

The Beach product line is not one in which Canada can compete successfully.

SPECIFIC PRODUCTS

SKI

- The Overseas markets have a better perception of Canadian skiing vacations than does the U.S. market.
- 60% of overseas travelers feel that Canada offers a better ski product than other destinations, including the U.S.
- In the overseas study, it is interesting to note that a variety of activities are highly correlated with skiing (from other outdoor activities, to cultural/historical). Also, about 50% of those who reported skiing also reported visiting friends and relatives.
- Only 1% to 9% of the sample of overseas travelers reported ***skiing*** on their trip to Canada. The % was significantly lower for trips to other destinations in the case of the Japanese and the French markets.
- The U.S. market prefers to ski in Europe or at home.

Implications

- The Canadian ski product does not seem to be positioned favorably within the U. S., Canada's major international market.
- When taking into consideration the poor perception of Canadian resorts which the U.S. market has, we can assume that the Canadian ski resort experience is not one that is well appreciated by this market. The poor opinion of our resorts' infrastructure and amenities probably extends to our ski product.
- A lot of investment has been channeled into the ski industry in the past years. If perception remains bad, it may be a problem of awareness.
- The number of skiers in the sample is too small, however, to enable us to draw more specific conclusions.

FISHING / HUNTING

- The U.S. market perceives the resorts in the Canadian Rockies as having a competitive edge over all other resort destinations for their quality hunting and fishing product. experience.
- The other Canadian resorts areas (Ontario, Pacific Coast and Québec) are also better perceived than U.S. and Mexican resorta areas in terms of their hunting and fishing
- Germany, the U.K. and France perceive Canada as offering a better hunting / fishing experience than other destinations, including the U.S.
- Of the total geographic samples, only about 12% fished during their last trip in Canada (as opposed to 9% anywhere else). Hunting is, obviously, a less popular activity (3.5% hunted in Canada, as opposed to 1.8% anywhere else).

Implications

- The numbers are too small to enable us to draw specific conclusions on the hunting and fishing product in Canada.

CRUISE / MARINE TOURISM

. Only the U.S. market study reveals how the Canadian cruise product is perceived. It is, however, a trip type which does not account for a large portion of trips to Canada (1% of U.S. all trip-nights to Canada). The small sample size must be taken into account when discussing results pertaining to this trip type.

. Canada is not well-known as a cruise destination. When aeked to pick a Canadian destination for a cruise trip, the Pacific Coast was mentioned the most often.

. Our Canadian cruise destination (Pacific Coast, Atlantic Coast and Thousand Islands) are perceived as:

- offering scenic beauty
- being inexpensive
- offering interesting ports of call

. However, Canada is not perceived as having a competitive edge vis-à-vis other destinations.

Implications

. If packaged similarly to other cruise experiences in other destinations, the Canadian cruise industry cannot compete.

. Quality cruise vacations could be packaged with touring or city vacations to offer a different experience. Some could also be positioned as an adventure product.

NATIONAL PARKS

. **Overseas markets rate Canadian National** Parks better than other destinations (close to **90%** of the European markets, and 50% of the Japanese market, perceive Canada as **being** better).

. National parks are also important in the choice of a destination for our Overseas markets.

. Travelers showing an interest in visiting National Parks belong to segments which are seeking mostly "Heritage" **areas - a mixture of rural and culture elements.**

Implications

. National Parks should be perceived as tourism generators, as well as one of Canada's major competitive edge.

. As mentioned before, National Parks should be assessed with a view to:

- Better integrate this product to other tourism experiences
  - better packaging
  - better access
  - improved quality of amenities
  - efficient distribution channel - operators/wholesalers.

- Better match this product to market demand (perhaps by providing the mix of rural/outdoor and culture which the market seems to be looking for).

AMUSEMENT / THEME PARKS

. Although Canada is not better perceived than the U.S. by most of its Overseas markets on **amusement/theme** parks, about 50% of those surveyed believed Canada to be better than other destinations.

An interesting note is that nearly 50% of overseas visitors having visited these parks also reported visiting friends and relatives.

Further, more overseas visitors reported visiting these parks while on a trip to Canada than on a trip anywhere else.

. In the U.S. market, our ***major*** competitor is the U.S. itself. Canada was a first choice in only 5% of the cases, with the U.S. having an overwhelming 90% of the votes. (Note that perception of the U.S. market pertained **to** special events as well as parks.)

In Canada, B.C. and Ontario have the most frequent mentions, with Niagara Falls being the most popular Canadian “Park”, followed by **Expo** ’86, Canada’s Wonderland and the Calgary Olympics.

In terms of the advantages looked for in a park, Canada has the **advantage** only on the fact that the experience is perceived as being **"different"**. The U.S. market has a negative image of our infrastructure and amenities, which weakens our appeal.

Implications

- Canadian **amusement/theme** parks seem **to** have a conflicting image in our markets, the U.S. market appearing to be less attracted by this Canadian product than are the overseas markets.

OTHER

THE TOURING TRIP

- The touring trip is the most popular trip type of Americans traveling to Canada (over 1/3 of trip-nights in Canada).

- As for overseas markets, most prefer traveling from place to place, rather than staying put in one location. Again, this indicates the popularity of the touring trip.

- The touring trip is of interest not only because of its popularity within the markets, but also because of its larger economic impact and of the wide variety of product attributes which it encompasses.

- During a touring trip, which lasts longer than other trip types, travelers stay at commercial accommodations. About 40% of them use a commercial means of transportation (primarily air carrier, but also bus). Almost 25% of all touring trips are package deals.

- The touring trip incorporates **outdoor, rural and urban products. Small** towns and big cities alike are part of the itinerary, together with natural parks on the one hand and museums on the other.

- Although Canada is well perceived for its outdoor attributes, Canada's edge in the touring market centres around its different culture/way of life.

- Canada's weaknesses in the eyes of the U.S. touring market are major: less excitement and things to see and do, poorer climate and poorer infrastructure.

- Touring circuits known to the U.S. traveller are located in the Maritimes, in the Rockies and in Ontario/Québec. The Pacific Coast has also been identified.

Implications

- **Canada would seem to have the need for awareness campaigns to reposition its major touring circuits as areas containing a variety of things to see and do as well as quality infrastructures. Myths about the climate should also be dispelled.**

. In terms of product development, an assessment of our major touring circuits should be conducted to identify gaps in the product mix (e.g. attraction, amenities and services around attractions, high quality restaurants) as well as insufficient quality levels (e.g of our budget accommodation or local cuisine).

Other areas to consider which play an important role in touring trips are signage, availability of tourist information (e.g. circuit suggestions, etc.) and an efficient travel trade distribution channel to service the large portion of travelers opting for package deals.

Further, individual products (restaurants, hotels, attractions) should seek to better integrate their services in order to increase their appeal as part of a touring trip.

SERVICES - ACCOMMODATION

- Overseas markets rate Canada's accommodation (first class hotels and budget accommodation) as being worse than the U.S. Further, about one third perceive Canada as being better than other destinations as opposed to 50% who perceive the U.S. as being better than other destinations, which indicates that the U.S. is more international] y competitive.

- Germany and France especially have a more negative perception. This is particularly so for budget accommodation.

- The U.S. market perceives Canadian destinations as offering affordable accommodation, Although Canada also has an image of first-class hotels, this image is stronger for U.S. and European destinations. Vancouver is particularly weak in the U.S. market in terms of its first-class hotels.

- Accommodation in our resort areas is also perceived negatively by the U.S. market.

Implications

- A good look haa to be taken at our accommodation sector to ensure that it caters well to all our major markets (wide range of product and good value-for-money at all levels of quality within the range).

- Further, good quality accommodation should be available within all major touring circuits, i.e. outside of urban centres.

- The accommodation sector should be working closely with other suppliers of tourism products (i.e. carrier, attractions), in order to offer high quality packages. These would provide the accommodation sector with a clearer image and a better positioning.

SERVICES - RESTAURANTS

- **In** the eyes of our overseas markets, the Canadian food and -beverage sector is not of quality. Both highquality restaurants and local cuisine rate poorly.

- For the U.S. market, **only Québec** City has an edge for its local cuisine.

Implications

- Restaurants and cuisine are important elements in the choice of a destination. They are also a major vehicle for any country's culture and way of life, two attributes which are also important in the choice of a destination.

- The key role which our restaurants and cuisine play in travel habits and vacation experiences is enough to justify that more attention be paid **to** them.

- Like the accommodation sector, a wide range of food and beverage establishments with good value-for-money at each level is essential.

- Further, local cuisine should be encouraged to reflect cultural differences and typify unique ways of life. Local cuisine, whether it be offered in an urban or a **touring/rural** setting, should be better integrated in the travel "package" as a tourism product in its own right.

HOSPITALITY

. It has already been noted that Canada is well perceived in its overseas markets for its friendly local people. (It is perceived better, in fact, than the" U. S.) It should also be noted that those who have been to Canada before have a better perception of this than those who have never been here (60% say we fare better than other destinations as opposed to 50%).

The friendliness of the people as well as a warm welcome for tourists are also considered ***extremely*** important in the choice of a destination (over 85% feel that they are important factors).

. Other factors related to hospitality on which the overseas markets were questioned are:

- simple entry formalities
- easy to find tourist information.

Both these factors were rated important in the choice of a destination (over 76% rated them important).

Implications

. Due to their importance in the choice of a destination, it is worthwhile to consider all of these factors in the development or implementation of a hospitality y "program".

COST / VALUE FOR MONEY

. Overseas markets do not perceive Canada well in terms of "value for money" and the "cost of traveling to the destination", although Canada is not necessarily perceived worse than other destinations (perception is better for those who have been in Canada).

. The U.S. market perceives our 4 Canadian resort areas as being less expensive than U.S. and Mexican resort areas (especially the Canadian Rockies).

Our cities are also perceived as being less expensive than U.S. and overseas cities, particular Vancouver and Québec City.

Again, Canada comes out strongly as inexpensive touring destinations vis-à-vis European touring areas and California. (Canada is perceived as being comparable to New England, but more expensive than the U.S. Rockies.)

Implications

. These market results indicate that in most of our markets, the cost of a Canadian vacation is not perceived too negatively, and is often perceived favorably. Cost, therefore, would not constitute a deterrent to travel to Canada.

PACKAGED VACATIONS

- All-inclusive package trips (with accommodation and airfare included) are generally not too popular with the European markets:

	% of all-inclusive trips
U.K.	26%
France	24%
Germany	39%

Japan **favours** this type of trip, however, with 65% of all trips being all-inclusive in nature.

- In all cases, the proportion of all-inclusive trips was lower for trips to NorthAmerica than anywhere else, Canada often having the lowest proportion.

- Fly-drive is a type of package which is **significantly** more popular for Canada and the U.S. than for any other destination.

- Of the total pleasure travelers in the U. S., approximately 10% use package trips as their primary means of enjoying a vacation.

- Travel agents play an important role in booking all-inclusive trips as well as the commercial transportation **portion** of other package trips.

- In the U. S., most packaged travelers are **first-time** visitors **to** Canada and are found enjoying a touring trip.

Implications

- The types of packages to be developed are not of the all-inclusive type.

. Actually, the propensity for travelers (including the Japanese) **to** travel independently **to** Canada would suggest that ways to make travelers more “comfortable” should be an important area of consideration:

- language spoken
- **availability** of travel information within the markets and in Canada
- ease of access to **major** tourism areas (circuits and destinations)
  interesting packaged deals **to** be tied **to** a flydrive package or **to** an **independent** travel experience (accommodation/attraction combination, for instance, available **to** the independent **traveller)**