

# The travel industry: What's in a name?

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*The travel and tourism industry is enormous in both size and importance. There can be little doubt that the field is striving to accommodate the diversity of opinion concerning what the industry is and how it can be improved and enlarged even further. Resistance to critiquing long-held beliefs about the industry may inhibit its future. Deconstruction, a postmodern method of analysis, is proposed as one tool with which to engage in reflection upon what the industry is and where it may be headed.*

To deconstruct a “text,” “a term usually defined by postmodernists as any and all phenomena/events and applied broadly enough to include a factory, a conversation, a policy manual, an organization chart,”<sup>1</sup> or even a definition, means to scrutinize its meaning taken as a whole and, equally, to look at all of its parts — to “tear it apart.” The intent is to stimulate critical thinking about the “text,” its content and meaning.

The process is similar to brainstorming where all ideas are given equal weight — no matter how unusual or even bizarre. A key feature of deconstruction is that every text contains within it concealed messages which are the artifacts of the mental processes used by the originators of the text and which may be subject to widely different interpretations or orders of importance by other stakeholders. The stakeholders in this case are those working in the tour and travel industry directly and indirectly, those doing research about the industry, those creating policy which affects the industry, and those educating new entrants into the industry.<sup>2</sup>

The text used here is the definition of tourism as promulgated by the World Tourism Organization: “Tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes.”<sup>3</sup> This definition is not, of course, universal in its use, but it may be argued that the WTO is perhaps as authoritative and certainly as diverse an organization as one may find with a definition

**Table 1**  
**The Core of the Tourism Business**

|                       |                            |                               |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Accommodation/lodging | Hotel/restaurant suppliers | Construction/real estate      |
| Hotels/resorts        |                            |                               |
| Motels                | Taxi services              | Distillers/brewers/bottlers   |
| Hostels               |                            |                               |
| Caravans              | Cameras and film           | Auto/aircraft manufacturers   |
| Camping               | Maps, travel books         |                               |
| Transportation        |                            | Motor fuel producers          |
| Airlines              | Shopping malls             |                               |
| Cruise ships          |                            | Clothing manufacturers        |
| Rail                  | Service stations           |                               |
| Car rental            |                            | Communication networks        |
| Bus coaches           | Sporting events            |                               |
| Attractions           | Banking services           | Education/training institutes |
| Man made              |                            |                               |
| Natural               | Reservation systems        | Recreation/sporting equipment |
| Food and beverage     | Automobile clubs           |                               |
| Restaurants           |                            | Food producers                |
| Fast food             | Entertainment/arts venues  |                               |
| Wine merchants        |                            | Advertising media             |
| Travel agencies       | Museums/historical sites   |                               |
| Tour companies        |                            | Cartographers/printers        |
| Souvenirs             |                            |                               |
| Luggage               |                            |                               |

*Source: Australian National Tourism Strategy 1992*

available for deconstruction. Alternative definitions promulgated by one or another author on the subject or by one country, while no less likely to be right, seem inferior to that of the WTO by the very nature of the WTO's espoused position as representing the world.

#### **The definition as a whole can be deconstructed**

What is the tour and travel industry? The travel industry is the nation's leading service export,<sup>4</sup> accounting for an estimated \$68 billion from foreign tourists visiting the United States and generating over \$480 billion in expenditures in 1997.<sup>5</sup> This activity created 6.3 million direct jobs with a payroll of \$110 billion, making tourism the second largest employer in the U.S.<sup>6</sup> These figures do not take into consideration indirect employment opportunities in areas providing

services to travel industry suppliers and those elements involved in the planning and development functions affecting direct services to travel industry suppliers and tourists.

“Every job in tourism generates three more jobs in businesses supplying goods and services to the industry and in government service promoting and servicing tourism.” Supporting businesses include the areas of advertising, public relations, legal and professional services, architecture, arts and crafts producers, cultural organizations, gift shops, and especially government and quasi-governmental organizations. (See Table 1)<sup>8</sup> The travel industry has a significant economic impact on everyone.

The definition may seem to be much too broad. In reality, however, it might be argued that it is too constraining. For example, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, as in many other locations, there are large theme restaurants which attract people from all over. Many patrons are on vacation in Fort Lauderdale. Many, too, live in the community and come to celebrate a special occasion. Often members of local retirement communities hire bus transportation and come for the evening, enjoying the experience more for its recreational value than to satisfy the need for sustenance. Who are the “tourists”? It might be argued that they all are, in fact, tourists. Yet the WTO itself is confused as to who may be a tourist.

WTO’s tracking system tries “to separate out the cups of coffee drunk by tourists from those sipped by Parisians,”<sup>9</sup> a system which most likely has counting errors in both directions. Given the Herculean task the WTO sets for itself, it may be argued at a macro level that the definition as being used is too restrictive. Yet this system has allowed the WTO to calculate that the world tourism economy, and its related effect on other industries, accounts for some \$3.6 trillion, or about 10.6 percent of the gross global product.<sup>10</sup>

The terms “travel” and “tourism” are effectively one and the same and are interchangeable when describing an industry, especially when that discussion involves the economic impact on a country, state, region, or individual destination. Tourism is synonymous with travel.<sup>11</sup> Taking this to a logical conclusion, using the terms travel and tourism industry is being redundant. However, most people are comfortable only when the terms are used together and so the industry continues to do so to the detriment of the industry and for the comfort of the individual.

### **Analysis of phrase gives it meaning**

A phrase-by-phrase deconstruction of the definition of tourism can be helpful. While most deconstructionalists look at a text word-by-word, it is perhaps more relevant at this early stage of the investigation into defining tourism to look at the next level of analysis down from the definition as a whole. Words within each phrase are analyzed, but within the context of the phrase itself.

**Tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling:** The subphrase “activities of persons” seems straight forward, talking about people – not cattle, sheep or inanimate commodities. Hence, freight, except for baggage handling, is outside the purview of the industry. It might be amusing to contemplate how the WTO tracks the costs related to passengers traveling on freighters, but the bulk of travel activities occur within the realm of those industries cited in Table 1.

Webster’s Dictionary defines “travel” as to “pass or make a journey from one place to another...” Just how long a journey must it be before it becomes a “travel” rather than a run to the store or a trip to drop off the kids is open to wide interpretation. Can one driving to a local restaurant for dinner be said to be traveling? Florida’s tourism authority counts day trips by auto in its tour and travel statistics. Surely any mileage limitation is arbitrary; it is the away-from-home experience which matters.

The experiential nature of travel is a subject of much interest. Numerous articles in travel literature discuss the mental processes travelers have. But the basic question of what mind-set separates a traveler from, say, someone ordering a pizza in order to experience a different culture that evening in the privacy of his or her home may be an issue of some importance. Why would a trip to the grocery store not be counted as a part of the tour and travel business while a short trip to the local park or public pool may be?

The philosophical issue of whether the travel must be physical or only perceived as such is of importance. For example, could a travel series on television be included as a part of the tourism industry? Such shows do generate business and so are often produced as a promotional activity by local tourism agencies. Certainly the number watching such shows far exceeds the number who actually book tours based on the shows. What portion of the show, then, is a tourism-related activity?

**... to and staying in...:** The “travel to” part of the definition is obvious. Travel is an important part of the definition, but it has overshadowed the rest of the definition. One might also take exception to the use of the term “to.” It can readily be argued that traveling “from” is probably just as important. Otherwise, the WTO would have to count only the outbound portion of the trip – clearly an unintended activity.

The phrase “staying in” implies an overnight experience at the very least, but “to stay” does not require any specific time period to become operant. The iconoclast might say that the phrase “to stay” precludes drive-through fast food as a part of the tour and travel business, but then there would be the absurd situation of having to measure where drive-through purchasers went to eat after purchasing their meals. If they drove to a park, than perhaps they would be engaged in a tour and travel experience. In any event, hotels, motels, inns, etc., are now

included in the tour and travel definition as being places "to stay." Day spas, day amusement park visits, and other non-overnight activities, too, would be placed within the WTO's definition if the term "stay" does not imply the need for any specific minimum time period to become operant.

**...places outside their usual environment...:** This phrase is open to many interpretations. The most restrictive would be to take it literally and say, for example, that a person visiting the city's parks or other recreation facilities for the day would not be a tourist. This is clearly too restrictive an interpretation, but what of a cruise trip to the Caribbean by someone living in Miami? Would it not be counted as being within the purview of tour and travel since the Miami environment is certainly consistent with much of the Caribbean? Obviously, any reasonable person would include such a trip in the tour and travel business.

So what, then, should the term mean? A sensible use would be to exclude any tour and travel done on a usual and constant basis. Hence, someone who eats out at a famous restaurant such as Joe's Stone Crab every night, or at least several times a week, might be excluded, while someone from nearby Miami driving over to Joe's for a once-in-a-season meal might be included as participating in a tour and travel experience. Maybe not all the Parisians drinking coffee in that café mentioned in *The Economist*<sup>12</sup> should be excluded from the calculation of what constitutes tour and travel. Here again, as in the last phrase, the definition is in need of much further debate and discussion.. What the definition says and what it is are clearly at odds.

**...for not more than one consecutive year...:** While the inter-temporal measurement is obvious, its meaning is not. Would a two-year expedition up the Nile be excluded? More importantly, why would it be excluded? It may be assumed that the time limit was placed on the experience to preclude those stationed in foreign locations for business or other reasons. Also, hotels whose guests stay for more than one year can easily blur into an apartment house mode of operation. Allowing for the need to measure tour and travel, the one year time limit seems appropriate but should not be judged as an absolute measure of time.

One may ask why this phrase is included in the definition and why a corresponding phrase concerning the lower bounds of the trip is not. Perhaps, when coupled with the prior phrase, "staying in," one may assume a lower bound of greater than one day. This assumption would have a profound effect on the calculation. Many obvious tourism destinations cater predominantly to one day travelers. Here, again, the definition is vague, but perhaps reasonably so.

**...for leisure, business and other purposes:** This broad phrase includes any activity one could think of, so it leaves the door wide

open to include virtually any activity done outside the home. One may wish to define leisure and likewise define business. But the final subphrase "and other purposes" makes such an exercise moot. This catch-all phrase opens the definition up to include just about anything a human being does while away from home.

### **Definition has broad implications**

The definition is a maddening mixture of phrases that are quite all-encompassing with those that may be needlessly restrictive. One could include just about any activity within the purview of the tour and travel industry, but only once a person qualifies him or herself as a "traveler." This pre-qualification process becomes much clearer when the traveler stays away from home for at least one night, but eliminating less than over night travel seems absurd.

These problems with the definition may be the root cause of many of the problems facing the industry. How can the industry effectively recruit workers and managers when the nature of the business remains so vague? Where will these new entrants be trained; what schools and programs might be best for their training, and what formal degrees may be appropriate for these entrants? How can the industry be taken seriously by the public when the popular definition does not include business? Studies have shown that the business portion of the definition is not usually associated with the industry. Finally, how can those within the industry work together when who should be in the industry cannot be defined?

Articles have appeared recently in travel publications lamenting how in the good old days, "getting there was half the fun," while now the travel portion is often so inconvenient. Obviously, a seamless travel experience is preferable to the disjointed experience facing so many of today's travelers. Yet how can industry leaders meet and discuss solutions when so many view themselves as being in discrete industries?

The definition may also be at the center of why the industry generates such interest on the part of developing nations. Being so broadly defined, those interested in economic development see the tour and travel industry as both the end user necessitating improved social infrastructure and as the generator of hard currency needed to pay for infrastructure improvement as well as general economic improvement. The large public and private investment used in developing destinations has historically been the catalyst for many nations to lift themselves up the economic ladder.

The wide gulf found between the industry's true nature and the public's perception of what the industry is and, most especially, what job opportunities exist within the industry is distressing. This is not an industry comprised only of travel agents and amusement park

employees. Some highly-trained professional managers have found positions in the industry and many more are needed. The definition is especially disruptive when those who should know better, i.e., those in academe, put up artificial barriers, in effect stratifying educational opportunities into low-level travel and tour jobs and higher-level hospitality occupations. An argument can be made that the definition is inadequate in many ways and that its own inadequacies are the root cause for the general vague misperception of the industry so rampant in the general population.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Summers, Debra, David Boje, Robert Dennehy, and Grace Rosile, "Deconstructing the OB Text," *Journal of Management Education* 21, no. 3 (August 1997): 345.

<sup>2</sup> For more information about deconstruction see J. Culler, *On deconstruction: Theory and criticism after structuralism* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> World Tourism Organization, *Definitions Concerning Tourism Statistics* (Madrid: WTO, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> Expenditures by tourists are "injected" into a destination's economy, providing money that was not there before. As such, these expenditures represent the invisible export of the tourists' travel experiences when they leave the tourist destination and return to their own domiciles. The tourist destination exports travel experiences. See R. W. McIntosh and C. R. Goeldner, *Tourism: Principles, Practices, Philosophies*, 7th ed. (New York: John Wiley Sons, 1995), 319.

<sup>5</sup> *Travel Industry Association of America Travel Forecast* 1, no. 1 (April 1997).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> McIntosh and Goeldner, 6.

<sup>8</sup> World Travel and Tourism Council, *Travel & Tourism: Jobs for the Millennium* (January 1997): 4.

<sup>9</sup> "Home and away," *The Economist* (January 10, 1998): 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*: 3.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Travel Data Center, 1987, Appendix B.

<sup>12</sup> "Home and Away."

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