

Leisure shopping

Key concepts

The main concepts covered in the chapter are:

- A typology of leisure-shopping facilities
- The nature of the leisure-shopping product
- The benefits sought by leisure shoppers
- Links between leisure shopping and other sectors of leisure.

Introduction

While most shopping is utilitarian in nature, undertaken to purchase the goods which are the prerequisites for everyday life such as food and household goods, there has always been an element of pleasure shopping for nonessentials. However, it is only in recent years that we have seen the growth of a sector of leisure which is solely concerned with retailing as a leisure activity. It is not the concept of leisure shopping which is new, but its rapid expansion and the growing provision of purpose-built shopping facilities.

These *leisure-shopping facilities* come in a number of forms, as follows:

- (i) *Major leisure-shopping complexes*, where all or most of the retail units sell products which are not essential to everyday life. They are purchased purely for pleasure as part of a leisure experience. An excellent example is the Albert Dock in Liverpool, UK, where it has been used to spearhead the

- regeneration of the economy of the city through leisure, on the model which has been used in US cities like Baltimore and San Francisco. This is interesting because the idea of leisure-shopping complexes or 'Malls' originates in North America with major centres such as the West Edmonton Mall in Canada.
- (ii) *Leisure-shopping areas which are found within established tourist destinations.* These can range from the shops in UK seaside resorts selling 'rock' (candy confectionery) and novelty hats at cheap prices to the chic retail outlets of the French Riviera. This aspect of leisure shopping has a relatively long history compared to the complexes we have just discussed.
 - (iii) *Industrial leisure-oriented shops in existing retail areas of towns and cities* which are not major tourist attractions. They are targeted both at locals and the relatively small number of tourists that visit the place, and are usually located in the districts which are most likely to be visited by such people.
 - (iv) *Craft centres* which sell craft goods and may even provide opportunities for visitors to watch the product being made. These centres are particularly popular in the major coastal resorts in Europe, as well as in rural regions in many countries.
 - (v) *Leisure-oriented outlets which are part of visitor attractions.* For many attractions, a significant element of their income is obtained from the sale of merchandise. This is equally true whether the attraction is a major theme park like Disneyland Paris, or a museum such as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.
 - (vi) *Outlets linked to home-based leisure activities,* such as garden centres and 'Do-It-Yourself' centres.

At the same time, a leisure dimension is also being added to more utilitarian retailing activity such as food purchasing and everyday clothes, as the following two examples illustrate:

1. People being encouraged to visit *food providers* as a leisure experience and buy some of their products directly. For example, in France, one can buy cheese from a farmer who makes it, and wine from the local cooperative. The pleasure is derived not just from the consumption of the product, but also from the experience of seeing where it was made and meeting the producer.
2. The phenomena of *factory shops* where producers, mostly of clothes, sell them directly from their premises. In the UK, coach trips are often organised by groups and coach operators to such factory shops. These are seen as a leisure experience as well as an opportunity to purchase clothes at below-normal prices.

Most leisure-shopping facilities are offered by the private sector whose *marketing objectives* are purely commercial. However, there is also a role for the voluntary and public sectors, whose objectives are broader than merely financial. For example, in the UK, one of the largest organisations involved in leisure retailing is the National Trust, a voluntary body. It uses the income generated from its retailing operations to fund its conservation work.

The leisure-shopping *product* varies depending on which type of leisure retailing we are considering, but in general it contains the following elements:

- the products which are on offer in terms of their design, aesthetic appearance, features, reputation and exclusivity value;
- the industrial retail outlet itself including the location, decor and reputation;
- the service element, and the attitudes and product knowledge of the staff;
- the methods of payment which are acceptable;

- the outlet's opening times in terms of how convenient they are for prospective customers;
- the areas in which the outlet is located in terms of its environment, fashionability, accessibility, car parking facilities, ambience, and the proximity of other services such as catering.

The customer pays *no price*, usually, for entering a leisure-shopping complex or an individual leisure-retailing outlet. For some people, therefore, leisure shopping is a very economical leisure experience. They gain pleasure from looking rather than buying.

Place or destination is relatively simple in the leisure-shopping sector, in general. Prebooking is not normal and therefore little use tends to be made of marketing intermediaries. In this case, 'Place' really does mean location, for it is often where the complex or unit is situated that is one of its major attractions for visitors.

The *promotional techniques* used tends to depend, as usual, on the size and budget of the organisation. A small rural craft centre may rely on simple leaflets and word-of-mouth recommendations while a major leisure-shopping complex may spend heavily on television and printed-media advertising campaigns, together with glossy brochures.

Many smaller leisure retailers rely heavily on repeat purchases, so that they need relatively little promotional outlay designed to attract new customers.

The *market* for leisure retailing can be segmented in a variety of ways but is usually based on geographical and demographic factors, including:

- where people live, as most complexes or units have local, regional, national or international catchment areas;
- stage in the family life cycle, in other words, children, couples, families and older people, for example;
- sex, as women are seen to be far more enthusiastic leisure shoppers than men, for example.

The benefits sought from leisure shopping by consumers differ between these different types of leisure shopping. However, typically they might include:

- the chance to buy a unique and unusual product that is not available elsewhere;
- the pleasure of 'window shopping' without buying anything;
- the opportunity to purchase a product directly from the producer at a lower cost than it would be available in a shop in the person's own area.

However, leisure shopping can also offer some more fundamental benefits. It is often the core attraction of trips made by people who are depressed; the so-called 'depression shopping' is becoming more widely recognised as an issue in some parts of Europe. For many people, leisure-shopping trips are social activities which involve travelling with a group of friends. This can represent a break with routine, a form of 'escapism'.

In many cases, the benefit sought is not an individual element but rather the overall experience, including:

- the journey to and from the retailing area;
- the company of friends;
- the pleasure gained from looking at goods or buying something special;
- a meal in the middle of the trip in an attractive restaurant.

Competition takes a number of forms in leisure shopping, including:

- (i) Between different types of outlets and complexes within a particular geographical area.
- (ii) Between similar types of outlets and complexes in a wider geographical area.

- (iii) Between leisure shopping and utility shopping.
- (iv) Between shopping and other forms of leisure pursuits such as gardening, reading, eating out or sporting activities.
- (v) Between shopping and other forms of leisure spending on a day out, such as entrance fees to attractions, and food and drink. As we can see, the form of competition will largely depend on the type of leisure-shopping outlet or complex one is considering.

As well as marketing themselves, leisure-shopping facilities are also *often promoted by organisations in other sectors of leisure*. For example:

- The excursions organised by tour operators often feature a leisure-shopping experience. This may be a rural craft centre in Ireland, gift shops on the Costa del Sol, a garden centre in the UK, or a Christmas market in Bavaria.
- Hotels often promote leisure-shopping facilities when they are trying to sell their weekend break packages. This is true of destinations from London to Los Angeles, Paris to Istanbul, Hong Kong to Minneapolis, Dublin to Dubai.
- Transport operators such as the ferry operators offering services across the English Channel, Le Manche, who promote off-peak season shopping trips from the UK to France, for example.

These examples lead us into a broader discussion of the *links between leisure shopping and other sectors of leisure*. These links take a number of forms, including the following:

- Many accommodation establishments have installed retail outlets featuring largely up-market leisure-shopping products.
- Leisure-shopping complexes and units often enhance their attractiveness through the provision of catering facilities. Particular types of catering have become associated with leisure shopping such as 'tea rooms' or *Salons de Thé*, coffee shops, wine bars, and unusual ethnic restaurants.
- Conference social and partners programmes often include leisure-shopping trips.
- Airports, airlines, and ferry companies are developing leisure-shopping facilities of their own to increase income. This is particularly important following the loss of duty-free sales.
- Shops selling the equipment required for hobbies and recreational activities, such as painting or skiing, have grown considerably in recent years.

Consortia play a limited but significant role in some areas of leisure shopping, notably the two which follow:

1. voluntary groupings of individual retailers within individual leisure shopping areas or complexes who combine to mount joint promotional campaigns;
2. consortia of similar types of leisure-shopping outlets, such as craft centres, which aim to promote their particular type of retailing and product.

Conclusion

Overall, leisure shopping is a growing area of activity within leisure. It has strong links with other sectors in these three fields, but it also has some interesting characteristics of its own, from a marketing point of view. It seems likely that in the future it will become increasingly recognised as a separate sector within leisure.

Discussion points and essay questions

1. Identify the main types of leisure-shopping facilities which exist, and examine the differences between them.
2. Discuss the different markets that exist for leisure-shopping products and outline the benefits each of these markets might seek from leisure shopping.
3. Examine the nature of competition within the leisure-shopping sector.

Exercise

Choose an example of a leisure-shopping outlet, complex or facility which you are able to visit. You should visit your chosen outlet, complex or facility and spend some time there, looking at the product it offers and finding out the opinions of its customers. You should also endeavour to talk to the manager or owner about their marketing activities.

On the basis of evidence gained from this research, you should:

- evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the outlet, complex or facility, from the point of view of both customers and the manager or owner;
- identify its main competitors in the opinion of both the customers and the manager or owner.

Finally, you should compare and contrast the views of customers with those of the manager or owner, in relation to these two issues, identifying, where appropriate, those areas where their opinions differ markedly.