

Shopping

Shopping may be part of the travel experience or it may be the primary focus of travel. Shopping is an activity that crosses all market segments. “As long as cities have existed, the pattern of ‘going into town’ has included a leisure experience, and visiting towns is an essential part of the tourist market” (p. 12).²⁷ Whereas some visitors, like Marie in the chapter opener, simply pick up necessities or souvenirs as reminders of their travels, gifts for friends and relatives, or conversation pieces and evidence,²⁸ others may travel to specific locations for the primary purpose of shopping. “Nearly nine out of ten, or 87%, of overseas travelers report that they shopped during their visit to the United States, according to a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Commerce and Taubman Centers Inc.”²⁹

“Shop till you drop.” This statement applies to more than just local shoppers as more and more malls are turning to tourists in search of new customers and growth. Shopping malls have increasingly become popular tourist attractions. Despite “placelessness” (homogenized, modern, synthetic landscapes) assumptions, shopping malls, and the experiences they facilitate do increasingly matter to those visiting them.³⁰ For some travelers, a visit to a mega-shopping mall has become reason enough to take a trip, especially as these malls are transforming themselves into tourist destinations by adding amusement parks and other cultural attractions and entertainment activities.³¹

In fact, the number-one tourist attraction in Minnesota is a shopping mall. The Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota, attracts over 43 million visitors a year. Based on its resounding success as a tourist attraction, plans are underway to more than double the size of the mall by adding more retail and office space, and entertainment opportunities as well as additional hotel rooms and other services.³²

What brings visitors from far and wide to these shopping meccas? It’s more than just the wide array of retail shopping alternatives. For example, the Mall of America comes complete with an 18-hole miniature golf course, a 14-screen theater, and 9 nightclubs.



Night markets as popular tourist attractions in many countries. Antonio Gravante/Fotolia