

the workings of the overall tourism system: for example, they are key “gateways” for both international and domestic tourists and, as key nodes in the air transport system, act as staging posts for multi-destination trips” (pp. 1032–1033).<sup>36</sup>

Most cities will attempt to attract tourists because of the economic benefits these travelers bring to the local economy. However, travelers do not consider all cities to be tourist destinations. What is it that sets some large urban areas apart from others and makes them stand out as special tourist destinations? It is a strong desire on the part of city planners, civic leaders, and businesses to attract and serve the needs of visitors.

Using a research technique that is popular among marketers, the Canadian Tourism Commission, through the help of **focus groups**, has identified what tourists consider to be some of the key attributes of a destination city:

For some people it was a feeling, a flavor, or an image, that made the city a beloved destination. For others it was something more concrete: an ocean or a waterfront setting, beautiful architecture, great food, a sense of history, or friendly people that give a city its appeal. . . . For many people it's the range of interesting things to see and do that makes a city a great destination (p. 8).<sup>37</sup>

What we can learn from this research is that tourist destination cities have their own unique character. Tourists are attracted to these locations because they are special places to visit and enjoy, and they offer a wide variety of accommodations, attractions, entertainment, restaurants, lounges, and other activities and amenities that tourists desire. Many cities are tapping the benefits of potential increased tourism traffic by building major league sports stadiums or large convention centers. The local and visitor traffic they generate helps bring restaurants, theaters, and excitement back to city centers.

## Building on Success

As the opportunities for leisure travel for workers in industrialized countries grow and the number of mature travelers continues to increase, travel to resorts and other destinations will continue to grow in popularity. To remain competitive and attract more guests, these destinations may need to focus on attracting more than one market segment as well as increasing or improving their service offerings. To meet these needs, indoor resorts, such as Ocean Dome in Seagaia, Japan, create an endless summer environment, whereas Ski Dubai creates a variety of ski terrains in the midst of an arid desert climate.<sup>38</sup>

Through market segmentation, resorts are meeting this challenge by developing packages that appeal to a variety of specific guest segments. At the same time, destination resorts are focusing efforts on specific segments such as group tour business, incentive travel, meetings, and conferences. Many resorts are also breaking these focused markets into smaller segments. For example, a property might focus first on attracting association meeting business in general and then target members of one association such as the American Association for Retired Persons. These efforts are generating more year-round business and leveling out the traditional seasonal fluctuations in cash flows.

The complex task of developing, marketing, and managing tourist destinations goes well beyond the physical location itself. Other concerns, such as employee housing and labor availability, capital investment requirements, recreational and attraction development, infrastructure requirements, social and cultural effects, environmental impacts, land use, tax receipts, and other public benefits and problems, must be considered by private developers, citizens, and government officials. Tourist destinations thrive on positive relationships between residents and visitors, and these relationships must be encouraged and sustained for future success. We will be exploring these issues in greater depth in future chapters.