PORTS OF CALL:
IN SEARCH OF COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

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ABSTRACT: Cruise tourism is one of the fastest growing components of tourism. As cruise companies begin to look for diverse itineraries, in order to gain a competitive advantage, Britain, especially the South West (Gibson and Bentley, 2007), is becoming more desirable due to the range of varied products it has to offer. As the number of cruise ports of call continues to increase, it is important to gain a competitive advantage over other ports and encourage these companies to visit, due to the benefits a cruise-ship visiting can bring to the local economy. The research examined the factors that may affect port-of-call selection. This study used triangulation: data collection of interviews, content analysis and archival analysis. The findings concluded that ports need to have sufficient berth depth to accommodate cruises, help and support from local authorities for improvements needed for the expanding cruise ships, and natural assets such as attractions within easy access for visitors. Keywords: cruises, destinations, competitive advantage, ports-of-call.

RESUMEN: El turismo de cruceros es una de las vertientes del turismo que de forma más rápida viene creciendo. Como las empresas de cruceros empiezan a buscar itinerarios diversificados, con el objetivo de obtener una ventaja competitiva, la Gran Bretaña, especialmente en la zona del sur oeste (Gibson & Bentley, 2007), se pone cada vez más atractiva, debido a los productos variados que tiene para ofrecer. Como el número de puertos de escala de cruceros sigue aumentando, es importante ganar una ventaja competitiva en relación a otros puertos e incentivar esas empresas a visitar, debido a los beneficios que la visita de un navío de crucero puede traer a la economía local. La pesquisa analizó a los factores que pueden afectar la escoja del puerto de escala. Este estudio recurrió a la triangulación: recogida de datos de entrevistas, análisis de contenido y análisis del archivo. Los resultados muestran que los puertos necesitan tener profundidad suficiente para acomodar muelles de cruceros, ayuda y apoyo de las autoridades locales para las mejorías necesarias para el número creciente de navíos de crucero, y activos naturales, como atracciones de acceso fácil para los visitantes. Palabras clave: cruceros, destinos, ventaja competitiva, puertos de escala.

RESUMO: O turismo de cruzeiros é uma das vertentes do turismo que mais rapidamente tem crescido. Visto que as empresas de cruzeiros começam a procurar itinerários diversificados, a fim de obter uma vantagem competitiva, a Grã-Bretanha, especialmente a zona do Sudoeste (Gibson & Bentley, 2007), torna-se cada vez mais atrativa, devido à gama de produtos variados que tem para oferecer. Como o número de portos de escala de cruzeiros continua a aumentar, é importante ganhar uma vantagem competitiva em relação a outros portos e incentivar essas empresas a visitar, devido aos benefícios que a visita de um navio de cruzeiro...
pode trazer à economia local. A pesquisa analisou os fatores que podem afetar a seleção do porto de escala. Este estudo recorreu à triangulação: recolha de dados de entrevistas, análise de conteúdo e análise de arquivo. Os resultados mostram que os portos precisam de ter profundidade suficiente para acomodar cais de cruzeiros, ajuda e apoio das autoridades locais para as melhorias necessárias para o número crescente de navios de cruzeiro, e ativos naturais, como atrações de fácil acesso para os visitantes. Palavras-chave: cruzeiros, destinos, vantagem competitiva, portos de escala.

INTRODUCTION

More than a decade ago, Wood (2000) observed that it was remarkable that so little research existed pertaining to the cruise industry, particularly given that Foster (1986:217) had remarked, fourteen years earlier, on the paucity of studies, asserting that “cruising and the cruise industry is a major frontier for tourism research”. The cruise sector grows annually around 7% (Lester and Weeden, 2004) meaning it is one of the fastest growing components of the tourism industry. It was expected that by the end of 2011 the total numbers of cruise passengers would be approximately 19.2 million (Wahlstrom, 2010).

Although a few well-known brands, such as Princess Cruises, Norwegian Cruise Line and Cunard, dominate the industry (Gibson, 2008), there are many more small ship operators. Almost without exception, ports of call are an integral part of the experience for passengers on these lines and, not surprisingly, they are continually looking for diverse itineraries to offer their passengers, in order to gain a competitive advantage over other companies.

In recent years, there has been a development of British ports of call; websites such as Cruise Britain illustrate recognition of the importance within the ‘product offer’; indeed, Cruise Britain is a joint venture between VisitBritain and the Passenger Shipping Association (Cruise Britain 2011). Particularly, South West England has shown opportunities for cruises (Gibson and Bentley, 2007), especially after the creation of the Destination South West initiative, which consists of thirteen ports working with local authorities and attractions to promote the region as a cruise destination. This research focuses on four ports: Plymouth, Falmouth and Fowey, all in Destination South West, and Southampton, the largest cruise port in the United Kingdom.

The aim was to investigate characteristics of cruise ports of call and to identify what creates competitive advantage. The research involved tape-recorded interviews with key individuals at the ports, content analysis and archival analysis. The first section identifies the pertinent literature relating to ports of call; this is followed by a brief review of the concept of competitive advantage and, then, findings and discussion.