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Site Planning at Tamborine Mountain, Gold Coast, Australia

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Abstract: Tamborine Mountain is a 25 square kilometre plateau located within the urban-rural fringe of the Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia. Renowned for its superb climate, spectacular views, lush farmland and subtropical rainforest, Tamborine Mountain offers a wide variety of nature-based tourism activities such as bushwalking, rainforest appreciation and wine tasting. This phenomenon requires the harmonious development of tourism and the environment. This paper examines site planning at Tamborine Mountain, with a focus on two of its main tourist attractions, namely the Winery and National Parks. A strategic approach is used to evaluate some of the strengths and weaknesses of their existing site planning against opportunities for tourism development. Documentations of local government laws and regional planning are collected from local authorities and libraries, and communications during field trips are analysed to evaluate site planning in these attractions. Some broad recommendations are made for future strategic site planning and development.

Keywords: Site planning; wine tourism; national parks; ecotourism

1. INTRODUCTION

Tamborine Mountain is a 25 km square volcanic plateau located within the urban- rural fringe of the Gold Coast in Queensland, Australia (see Figure 1). According to Davis *et al.* (1994), urban-rural fringe arises as a result of urbanisation, and the community (namely businesses and individuals) becomes attracted, and attempts to compromise the relative benefits of living in urban and rural locations.

Tourism has existed on Tamborine Mountain as far back as the late nineteenth century when the first guest house was built in 1898. Well known for its Gallery Walk, award winning wineries and National Parks, Tamborine Mountain is popular with day excursion visitors from Brisbane and the Gold Coast. Approximately 500,000 visitors are attracted to Tamborine Mountain each year [Weaver and Lawton, 2001]. Hence, sound development planning in Tamborine Mountain is paramount to environmental and tourism sustainability.

The purpose of this paper is to examine critically some tourism site planning issues of the Mount Tamborine Vineyard and Winery (or MT Winery in short) and the National Parks, namely the facilities, opportunities and residents' general concerns of Tamborine Mountain.

Local government regional planning documents, and communications with local authorities and winery management on field trips, are analysed to evaluate site planning in these attractions. Finally, some broad recommendations are made for future strategic site planning and development.

2. MT WINERY PLANNING

MT Winery has a friendly and cosy atmosphere because of its architectural design and landscaping, blending with its physical and local environment. It is situated in close proximity to Gallery Walk where an array of craft shops, art galleries, markets, accommodation and dining facilities are available.

In terms of location, MT Winery has a comparative advantage over the other wineries in the same region (namely at Canungra and Beaudesert), which provides an added incentive for visitors to combine their day trip to the national parks and/or rainforests.

The guidelines and requirements for implementing tourism projects are based on the Beaudesert Shire Council [1997] Development Control Plan (DCP) No. 1 and DCP Planning Study. However, no specific control measures were imposed on, and no environmental impact assessment (EIA) were required from, winery owners as these procedure were not enforced in the early 1990s. It seems that the guidelines for the site development and design of MT Winery followed the General Requirements for Commercial Developments.

In site development, minimum landscaping is usually required and encouraged by the local government to relate the site to the local environment [Tonge and Myott, 1989] and should preferably include native plants and previous existing features of conservation value as per the Visual Landscape Protection requirements [DCP Planning Study, 1997].

Adequate and safe public access to the premises should be provided for the handicapped, sensory-impaired and elderly visitors. For instance, features such as footpaths, rails, and ramps for wheelchairs, low-positioned fountains and interpretative devices should be incorporated in the overall structural design of the attraction [Inskeep, 1998].

Wheelchair access has been provided at MT Winery from the parking area to the premises. However, this does not extend to the sloping recreational grass area. Moreover, water fountains, interpretative devices and rails are not installed in the amenities.

All signage should be displayed attractively and appropriately to allow traffic to flow smoothly in, out and around the site. Signage for parking and other facilities such as toilet amenities, is either non-existent, inadequate or not well positioned.

Most standards for site design are stipulated by local authorities for conservation purposes or to minimise environmental impacts. Standards usually include architectural style, local building materials, drainage, sewage disposal, water and power supply.

The architectural design of the main building should convey the image of the tourist attraction

on display to give visitors a “distinct sense of place” [Inskeep, 1998]. MT Winery has a wine cellar with low ceilings, typical of wine storage areas. The timber frame blends with the local and natural environment.

The relationship between the physical environment and the site design is very important and should be attractive. The MT Winery land configuration of sloping landscapes conforms to the semi-rural character of Tamborine Mountain.

The use of building materials, such as timber and brick, should relate to the architectural style of the buildings. Furthermore, the materials should be sourced locally to blend in with the environment. As per the local government requirements, the materials used for the external structure of MT Winery main building is made from cedar, with sloping corrugated metal roof. The adjacent building is built with bricks and has a timber verandar. Supplies of the building materials are obtained locally and from the Gold Coast.

To minimise impact on the environment in relation to irrigation, drainage, water supply, waste disposal and landscaping, MT Winery uses solar energy, insulation, natural ventilation, automatic shut-off lights, environmentally friendly sprays and compost wine waste.

The absence of inter-industry integration often leads to the lack of cohesion and market research by wine makers, as evident in New Zealand and the Canberra District in Australia [Macionis and Cambourne, 2000]. Unlike the adjacent wineries, MT Winery does not operate a restaurant or hold special events like jazz festivals and wedding receptions.

By establishing accommodation and conference facilities in MT Winery, they could enhance its competitive position in the provision of an integrative wine experience. The latter includes wine, food, accommodation, festivals and other special features, which are implemented in the Leeuwine Estate (Margeret River, Western Australia) and Seppeltsfield (Barossa Valley, South Australia).

The hosting of special events can raise awareness and visitations to wine regions, as in the case of Waikato or the Bay of Plenty in New Zealand [Hall and Johnson, 1998]. Hence the organisation of events and festivals through rigorous marketing and promotional campaigns can draw visitors to the MT Winery. The former could also serve as a drawcard for international tourists to Tamborine Mountain, particularly the Japanese market which

accounted for about 20% of all arrivals to Australia.

Education and interpretive centres are also absent at MT Winery. Organised tours around the winery for visitors are only conducted by appointment. An education centre could be established to educate visitors in all aspects of the winery's operations. MT Winery could also develop a theme to distinguish itself from its competitors. There is a need to undertake market research to establish the profile of the winery's visitors and demand, for future strategic site planning of the attraction.

3. NATIONAL PARKS PLANNING

The functions of national parks include the protection and conservation of nature, provision of nature related recreational activities, research and education, and tourism development. National parks are important for protecting natural reserves. They conserve habitat areas and biodiversity, maintain ecosystem functions, protect geological and geomorphologic features, and preserve natural landscapes.

Tamborine Mountain has nine national parks with tropical rainforest and sanctuaries where distinctive fauna, flora and a multitude of wildlife exist. The national parks offer a range of recreational activities such as bushwalking, bird watching, photographing, back camping and barbecue. Each national park presents a natural recreation offering with different types of park setting and theme.

Ecotourism is another function of national parks. They provide opportunities for public appreciation and sustainable visitor use of environmental resources. Disturbance of national parks may come from both natural and human factors, including among others, fire, storm, littering, back camping, introduced plants and animals.

Proper planning, management and monitoring are required to minimise disturbance to national parks so as to conserve natural habitats and host environment. Weaver and Oppermann [2000] argue that the planning of national parks should be based on the principles of ecotourism. First, tourism should not endanger environment. Second, tourists should acquire knowledge about nature and finally, tourists should be educated to be eco-sensitive. Tourism without any of these three aspects is not ecotourism.

National Park needs to be developed in a sustainable manner. Moscardo [1998] summaries the three core principles of sustainable tourism, which are quality (i.e. providing a quality experience for visitors), continuity (i.e. ensuring continuity of the natural resources), and balance (i.e. balance the needs of hosts, guests and the environment).

Balancing conservation and appropriate level of recreational use is critical in the planning and sustainable management of national parks [Noe *et al.*, 1997]. Many national parks in the UK and USA have struggled to balance public interests in outdoor recreation with protection of natural environment, and most national parks in the two countries lack proper site planning.

The following discussion refers specifically to site planning in three national parks, namely the Knoll, Joalah and Palm Grove National Parks. Some of the strengths have been identified as follows:

- Location

Renowned for its superb climate, spectacular views, lush farmland and subtropical rainforest, the National Parks offer a wide variety of nature-based tourism activities such as bushwalking and rainforest appreciation. Therefore, the location and offerings of these parks attract visitors from South-East Queensland and ensure that tourism development in the area has sufficient visitor volume.

- Bush Walking Tracks and Settings for Lookout View

The walking tracks and settings for lookout view are well planned and established according to the Queensland Ecotourism Plan. The communities, environmentalists and professional developers have been involved in the planning process.

The small paths and steep slopes are deliberately constructed by the environmentalists and developers to control tourist flows into the key resource protection zone of the national parks.

- Educating the Local Communities and Next Generation

A series of educational booklets for the public have been produced by the local government. Field study and classroom activities are also conducted to assist the community to learn about the value of national parks.

- Protection of Water Catchment from Erosion

Some waterways in Palm Grove National Park have been developed into riparian zone model. Such planning is beneficial to soil stability,

ecology of both aquatic and terrestrial environments, and water quality.

- **Guidelines on Safety and Care in National Parks**

Guidelines on how visitors should behave in national parks have been developed by the relevant authorities. The guidelines also contain educational information on safety and care in the forest.

The study has also identified several weaknesses of the existing planning of the national parks, which include:

- **Lack of Planning on Zoning**

Buffer zone is the land outside the core area in a preserved region, intended to minimize human impact in the region. There are indications of improper zoning of the national parks. For instance, Joalah National Park is the most affected region by disturbance caused by major traffic flows from Brisbane to Tamborine Mountain.

Traffic noise penetrates through Joalah's forest because the latter is too close to the major road. Moreover, as Queensland State Forest argues, the lack of town and road planning is adversely affecting the preservation of habitats in Tamborine Mountain.

- **Absence of Planning on Education and Interpretation for Visitors**

Ecotourism without interpretation is not ecotourism. [Charters and Law, 2000]. Interpretation is defined as "an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objectives, by first hand experience, and by illustration media, rather than simply to communicate factual information" [Tilden, 1977, cited in Moscardo, 1998, p.3]. The aims of providing interpretation are to enhance visitor experience, encourage appropriate tourist behaviors, and attain sustainable tourism development. Unfortunately, the interpretative materials for visitor education can only be found in the local library, with no interpretation available on site.

There are no signage to inform the public that smoking and feeding of animals/birds are not allowed in the Joalah National Park. Such behaviors can cause danger to the preserved areas such as fire threat and aggressive animal behavior.

- **Inadequate Garbage Bin and Disposal Facilities**

Waste management is important in developing ecotourism facilities. National Parks should provide environmentally sound methods of waste

removal and treatment, and adequate disposal facilities.

There are inadequate provision of waste collection facilities in the national parks. For instance, only 1 to 2 bins are provided at the entrance of each park. The instructions for visitors to bring their leftovers out of the parks are carved on a very small wooden board near the entrance. Not surprisingly, garbage has been left along the walking tracks and some visitors have picnic in restricted areas.

The weaknesses of existing planning need to be addressed in the future development of the national parks. Some suggestions include:

- A proper ecotourism plan that involves environmentalists and the community needs to be developed regarding the provision of interpretation and educational information on the national parks.
- Developers and rangers need to reconsider the zoning of the parks. Dangerous human activities should be prohibited in the parks so that the natural habitats are not endangered.
- Various facilities such as rubbish collection and signage need to be improved.

4. CONCLUSION

The focus of the research is directed at analysing the strengths and weaknesses of existing planning of three national parks (the Knoll, Joalah and Palm Grove National Parks) and a winery on Tamborine Mountain, which are in close proximity to Gallery Walk. The weaknesses have to be addressed in future development of the two attractions.

Some aspects of site development and design of MT Winery have been examined. They generally comply with the local authorities' standards and regulations. The wine and tourism industries need to improve cooperation to monitor and sustain wine tourism in the region. Collaborative planning can maximise customers' satisfaction and encourage repeat visitation.

Ecotourism and national parks are closely linked. Developing tourism without endangering ecosystem is the problem that most national parks are facing, and harmonious planning of tourism and national parks is the responsibility of all relevant planners.

Accessibility to Tamborine Mountain is facilitated by bus and mountain shuttle services for visitors.

But traffic congestion especially on weekends, and near scenic lookouts and hand gliding areas, pose a problem to visitors accessibility and a major concern to local residents.

The detailed study by Weaver and Lawton (2001) on resident attitudes towards tourism on Tamborine Mountain, shows some dissension within the local community. Based on questionnaire survey, the results show that the majority of the 462 household participants either support or have neutral attitude towards tourism. Those who opposed tourism tend to be long-term residents who have minimal contacts with tourists.

According to Inskip [1991], adequate infrastructure such as roads and transport, is very crucial in the development of tourism. Furthermore, proper infrastructure management not only serves the needs of tourists and the local community, but it also reduces the negative environmental impacts on the surrounding area.

Planning is a dynamic process. Improvement on planning will surely enhance both tourism and environmental protection in the Tamborine Mountain region.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Figure 1
Tamboorine Mountain in Gold Coast, Australia