

Avoiding the Caribbean Bargain Bin: Pity the poor consumer looking for a Caribbean destination

by Hugh Hough

Pity the poor consumer looking for a Caribbean destination.

He's (or she's) walking down Aisle 7, the Caribbean section, looking for something to buy. There are 32 brands to choose from, but they all look alike! They all feature the right ingredients—white sand beaches, pristine blue water, sun and happy people—but how do you tell one product from the other?

All the Caribbean products seem to look the same—in other words, they are generic.

In fact, you could argue that it's easier to shop for cereal than a Caribbean destination.

The good news is that Awakening Consumers don't rely on just packaging when purchasing a country. They will probably go online to do a little research, and see what each country has to offer.

The problem is that today's Caribbean destinations are so eager to tell consumers about the generic features (beach, water and sun) that they neglect to mention what makes them different. They become parity products.

And we know the Awakening Consumer is also looking for more than a parity product.

When you become a parity product, you end up in the basement in the bargain bin—and you attract consumers that only shop for bargains. For example, if Aruba has the same beach, water and sun as Bahamas—but is cheaper—why not get Aruba? It's the same as Bahamas, but cheaper.

But when destination starts to differentiate itself—that is, give a reason for the consumer to buy its product—then you can attract the right visitor and charge more for your product.

Look at most luxury items. They aren't selling the bells and whistles (sand, water, sun) of their products. They are selling a promise that consumers will experience something different that will exhilarate them and make them feel better about themselves. They make an emotional connection. They can charge more, because their consumers are willing to pay more for that product experience.

We know Awakening Consumers are willing to pay more for authentic, real experiences. They travel to enrich themselves, to see new and different cultures. They want an active adventure, to learn new things, come back more knowledgeable. They are looking beyond the bells and whistles. They are looking for a deeper experience. Travel is what makes them tick, so they'll go somewhere that will fulfill their needs.

This offers a great opportunity for countries that are willing to look deeper into themselves and define what it is that makes them different. What is it about their product that is real and unique—something the Awakening Consumer wants.

So unless Caribbean countries are willing to look at what makes them different, they will be relegated to the basement and be at the mercy of bargain hunters.