

Saimaa University of Applied Sciences
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Maria Rugojeva

Customer Experiences of Film Location Tourists in New York City

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Abstract

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Instructor: Ms Jaana Häkli, Senior Lecturer, Saimaa University of Applied Sciences

The purpose of the study was to create a development plan for film location tours arranged by On Location Tours in New York City. In this thesis the tours analyzed are film location tours based on the series Sex and the City and Gossip Girl. This theme was chosen because of the author's passion towards films and New York City. On Location Tours was chosen because it is the largest film tour company in USA with its thousands of customers each day. This company also has individual tours based on both series in question.

In the theoretical part terms around customer experience, customer satisfaction, special interest tourism and film tourism are explained. These are important terms from the point of view of this study and it is crucial to understand these before going into the analysis. A desk study was made by analyzing online reviews written in Tripadvisor about the film location tours based on Sex and the City and Gossip Girl. In the analysis both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used.

The reviews in Tripadvisor turned out to be mainly positive but there were many minor problems pointed out like the tours not stopping at important places or the tours being too commercial. After analyzing the reviews a development plan was made. The aim of the development plan was to improve the tours by changing something that already exists and to add new parts to the tours. The development plan can be implemented by On Location Tours. Also the results can be used in further research when planning to create new or to improve already existing film location tours.

Key words: New York City, film tourism, customer experience, customer satisfaction, online feedback

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1 Introduction

Film tourism is still a relatively new subject and only a small amount of research has been done in the field. Film tourism is based on all kinds of TV productions – TV series, feature films and documentaries. In this research the term “film” means all of these TV productions. Films are an excellent medium for marketing a location and they should be considered when talking about marketing a specific town or area. Nowadays TV affects people’s lives every day and there are hundreds, if not thousands, of films done every day around the world. The impact of these should not be underestimated. When people decide on where to go on holiday they remember locations that have affected them either in picture, on film or in other people’s stories.

The idea to do a thesis work based on film tourism came from the author’s passion towards movies, TV series and New York City. The idea proved to be challenging during the writing process but it was a very interesting theme to research. During the thesis process some surprising issues arose when reading all the reviews people had written about On Location Tours in Tripadvisor. While supposedly being a niche way of tourism, surprisingly many people take the tours.

The aim of this thesis was to research the reviews and analyze what people say about the film tours. After this a development plan was made based on the author’s ideas how to make the tours even better. It was clear that the tours get a lot of customers but since constant improvement is crucial in the business, the author believes that making changes in the tours can bring even more customers to the tours.

This thesis gives an idea on how the filming industry can affect the tourism of a location. Film tourism is a growing market everywhere especially with popular movie series being filmed in the same locations throughout the filming. Perhaps the best-known film location tours made are based on The Lord of The Rings saga in New Zealand, as well as theme parks and film tours based on the Harry Potter saga in Great Britain (Roesch 2009, p. 3). In addition to these film location tours are emerging all around the world in places where filming of popular

movies has taken place. It is difficult to say the exact numbers of people who visit film locations because only a part of them attend arranged tours – some are so passionate about a certain movie or TV series that they take the trip themselves. Maybe New York City does not need any additional marketing to get tourists, but the basic idea is the same everywhere and it can be applied anywhere. The author sees that film tourism has a bright future and it should be considered when planning the marketing of a certain region.

Before going further into the study some borders need to be set for it. Here are the delimitations chosen by the author to make the study easier to follow. The theme of film tourism is very interesting overall but the research was restricted to only handle New York City due to its large size and big amount of film locations available in the city. There are several film location tour companies in New York City but On Location Tours is the biggest and most successful one. Thus researching their customers gives a good idea of how customers experience the film location tours. While the results are specifically about some tour, the overall idea of the customers' expectations of film location tours can be gathered from here.

Researching all the company's tours would have been very complicated, thus the author concentrates on the tours made based on some specific series. The series *Sex and the City* and *Gossip Girl* were chosen due to both the series having their own film location tour in this company. Further reasons for choosing the two series for this research will be explained later in the thesis.

The official website of On Location Tours, the film tour company researched in this study, was considered to be the best option for information about the tours and their reviews. Unfortunately, the company does not have a place for leaving reviews on their website. There is, however, a link to Tripadvisor due to the fact that the tour company got a Certificate of Excellence for their services in 2014. Thus it was logical to get the reviews from Tripadvisor.

The reviews for this research were only gathered from Tripadvisor. There are several other sources of information and reviews on the tours in question but the author chose to only use one website. The author believes that Tripadvisor

is a good source of honest opinions of the tour company's customers. It is an unbiased website where people share their experiences with other potential customers. Tripadvisor is the world's largest travel forum website that people trust with their reviews. One of the reasons people trust the reviews on Tripadvisor is that the reviews are not encouraged or controlled by the companies being reviewed. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to analyze these reviews.

It is possible that more information with wider themes could have been gathered by surveys but it appeared to be next to impossible to find a way to contact customers of such a specified service. Also when doing surveys the answering rate is always really low, which means that the survey should have been sent to thousands of people just to get some hundreds of replies. All in all, enough reviews were gathered from Tripadvisor in order to get a relatively wide sample of reviews for the research.

2 Tourism in New York City

To understand the impact the film location tours have on the city of New York it is important to tell a little background about the overall tourism in New York. New York became the "melting pot of cultures" in the turn of the 20th century when immigration from Europe was booming and daily almost a million people entered the USA. Since then New York City has become one of the most versatile cities in the US. It is believed that this and the fact that it is on the very coast of the Atlantic Ocean, thus being very accessible, has been one of the main reasons for the huge interest tourists have in the city. (Lonely Planet 2014.)

According to the Wall Street Journal (Saul 2013) an all-time high in tourism in New York City was reached in year 2013 with a total of 54.3 million visitors, out of which 11.4 million tourists are international travelers. The 9/11 attacks affected the tourism in the city largely both negatively and positively. People are both scared and interested in the effects of the terrorist attacks that collapsed the World Trade Center towers. However, former Mayor Michael Bloomberg had set a target to increase tourism in New York City and his efforts were worth it, be-

cause since 2002 the amount of annual visitors to New York City has grown by 19 million (Saul 2013).

Based on a study made by OTTI Survey of International Air Travelers in 2010 as many as 60 percent of the overseas travelers coming to New York City came there for leisure and recreational purposes. Business purposes brought only 14 percent of the total amount of overseas visitors to New York. The rest, about 26 percent, came for other reasons like visiting friends and family or health tourism. This means that the demand for leisure activities in the city is relatively high. (Xenias & Erdmann 2011.)

New York City consists of five boroughs – Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens and Staten Island. There are tons of places to see in New York City but the most famous places to visit are the Statue of Liberty, Central Park, Empire State Building, Ellis Island, Battery Park, Rockefeller Center, Times Square, Brooklyn Bridge, 9/11 Memorial and the Flatiron building. American Museum of Natural History, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Museum of Modern Art are museums that are known worldwide. (Antell 2014.)

In addition to the basic must-see places and museums in New York there are, naturally, many places to explore according to one's own special interests. There are tours to the origins of hip hop, shops with authentic Brooklyn-made souvenirs, celebrities' houses to visit like the house of Louis Armstrong and memorial places for the era of immigration to New York like the Tenement House on the Lower East Side (Robbins 2012). All in all, if a tourist comes to New York City, they can find places to go to regardless of the length of their trip. One can travel to New York for two weeks and still there might be some interesting places left unseen.

3 Introduction of the series

The series chosen for this thesis are *Sex and the City* and *Gossip Girl*. *Sex and the City* will from here on be called either "SATC" or "Sex and the City". *Gossip Girl* can be either "GG" or "Gossip Girl". Both these series were filmed in New York City and even though their basic ideas are very different from each other,

they have a lot of similarities. In both series the city of New York plays a major role in the stories. These series could not be filmed in just any big city without changing the concept of the series significantly. New York City provides shelter, feeling of fear, friendship, a place to hide, a place to show off and a place to always try something new. The five boroughs play a part in judging people by their “home borough”. (Sex and the City 1998-2004; Gossip Girl 2007-2012.).

Sex and the City is a TV series about four women in their thirties. The series portrays their everyday life and questions everything from relationships to money and hobbies. The main character is Carrie Bradshaw who works as a columnist and all the episodes are directed so that the theme of her column for that week is the theme for that specific episode. Carrie spends most of her time with her three best friends: Miranda Hobbes, Charlotte York and Samantha Jones. The women eat brunch together almost every day and they always discuss their lives while sitting there. Naturally, they also go to bars, restaurants, the movies and other places together. They enjoy the possibilities the city of New York offers them. (Sex and the City 1998-2004.)

All the fans of the show have “chosen a girl” that they are. If, for example, a girl feels that she is “a Miranda”, she might be more interested in seeing the locations that are close to Miranda’s life on the film location tour. A Carrie girl would be excited to see the doorstep that led to Carrie’s apartment in the series. (Sex and the City 1998-2004.)

Gossip Girl is a TV series that tells the story of teenagers living and studying on the Upper East Side. The story starts when the main characters are juniors in high school and the series follows them until they graduate from Universities and start their own lives and businesses. During this whole time their lives are followed by Gossip Girl, a mysterious person who somehow knows everything about the people in the story. All their actions and secrets are posted online in the Gossip Girl blog and the teenagers are always having problems with privacy. In the series New York City is at the same time both their enemy and safe house because of its big size. (Gossip Girl 2007-2012.)

4 Definitions of special interest tourism

There is not enough research done in the field of film tourism. Although films have been actively watched for decades and travelling has been done for an even longer time, these two combined have not coexisted for long. Before going into detail of the study, it is important to explain some key terms of special interest tourism and its niche - film tourism.

Special interest tourism, or niche tourism, is a form of tourism that usually attracts groups of people because of their special interests. The special interest can be just about anything and usually special interest tourists are highly dedicated to their interests. Special interest tourism may be considered to be the opposite of mass tourism, but this can be argued due to the growing popularity of some “special interests”. Rather than explaining special interest tourism by the smaller number of people it affects, it is clearer to define that it is for people who want something more authentic than just the basic leisure activities like visiting the most famous sightseeing places. (Smith, Macleod & Hart 2010, pp. 160-161.)

According to Novelli (2005, p. 5-6) special interest tourism can be divided into macro-niches that can help marketers divide special interest tourists into categories in order to being able to create activities for them. These macro-niches can be, for example, cultural tourism, rural tourism, urban tourism, environmental tourism and other types of tourism. Each of these macro-niches can be divided further into micro-niches. For example, the macro-niche of urban tourism can be divided into micro-niches like business, conference, exhibition, sport, gallery and art (Novelli 2005, pp. 5-6). In the case of film tourism assumptions can be made that it could be a part of any of these macro-niches due to the wide variety of filming locations.

Special interest tourism can also be described as passive, active, experiential, adventurous, creative, intellectual and/or relaxing. Passive special interest tourism consists of different spectator activities like watching sports or performances, whereas active interests are doing sports like diving. Experiential interests are very specified and they can be, for example, going to a theme park or even

to space. Adventurous interests can be about visiting some tribes or going jungle trekking. Creative tourism involves the tourist in dancing, painting and photography as the intellectual tourism interests people who like to learn languages or get acquainted with different heritages. Relaxing special interest tourism includes wellness tourism and, for example, bird watching. These descriptions imply that special interest tourism can be considered to be about gaining new experiences and self-improving whereas normal package holidays are about escapism and relaxation. (Smith *et al.* 2010, p. 163.)

Since special interest tourism usually needs to be carefully tailor-made on a small scale, the prices are usually quite high (Novelli 2005. p. 6). Thus there are some common characteristics that special interest tourists share. These tourists have more money to spend on their trip than an average mass tourist going on a package holiday and they are more likely to be middle-aged and travelling without children, also including DINKs (double income no kids). Some forms of special interest tourism can be done by low-income tourists like students and backpackers but their limited budget limits a lot of the activities out that can be seen to be special interest tourism activities. Often special interest tourism activities are done alone or just with one friend or relative because the interests need to be so specific in order to enjoy the same niche tourism activities. (Novelli 2005, p. 6; Smith *et al.* 2010, pp. 162-163.)

4.1 Film tourism

The niche of special interest tourism that is being concentrated on in this thesis is film tourism. It is a field of tourism that is growing and its importance is increasing with time. In this chapter the concept of film tourism is explained as it is not common knowledge for everyone.

Film tourism is a niche of tourism that makes people travel to film location areas during or after the production of a film (Roesch 2009, pp. 6-7). In a way, the film produced in a certain area unintentionally functions as a marketing tool for the area. Especially in the case of TV series the area is exposed on television for a lot longer time than in a single feature film. During that time people get familiar with the location through their televisions and some might make the decision of

visiting that place someday. In fact, this effect is the same both in actual location filming and basing a film on a certain location. Sometimes a film might be filmed in a studio or in a location similar-looking to the location the film is set in. For example, series like *Friends* and *How I Met Your Mother* were both filmed in studios in Los Angeles but they still attract visitors to New York City (Onlocationtours 2014).

The difference between “film tourists” and “film location tourists” should be made. This is an important refinement because these terms sound similar, but have slightly different meanings. For example, in the case of the series *Sex and the City* a film tourist would be someone who decides to visit New York City because of the city’s exposure in the series. However, a film location tourist is someone who is so interested in the series itself that they want to visit the actual locations portrayed in the series. (Roesch 2009, p.7.)

Film tourism can be divided into different forms which are on-location, off-location, commercial, mistaken identities, and one-off events. On-location and off-location film tourism are the most significant forms of film tourism. The difference between them is that on-location film tourism involves the tourists to go to actual filming locations where some films have been produced, but off-location tourism is mainly going to film studio theme parks or on generic studio tours where the tourists might see parts of their favorite film’s sets. On-location tours can be either the main motivation for visiting a location or it can be a planned part of the trip. (Beeton 2005, p. 11.)

Commercial film tourism is going on tours created based on a film, visiting both actual locations and locations built afterwards. When people go to places where they believe some film has been produced when it has not, their form of film tourism is mistaken identities. This can happen when a film was supposedly set in one place but filmed in another. One-off events film tourism is when people visit movie premieres or film festivals because of some specific film. In a way, all the movie stars and other cast can be categorized as film tourists because of their participation in one-off events. (Beeton 2005, p. 11.)

4.2 Film location tours

Going on a film location tour is the easiest way for a regular consumer to be a film location tourist. Film location tours are what the company concentrated on here, On Location Tours, is doing. Before analyzing the tours the topic needs to be explained.

Film location tours are often arranged by local, mostly small, companies that market their services and are easy to reach. As Roesch (2009, p. 46) states, a film location tour can last anything from a few hours to several days depending on the amount of filming locations available for visitors in the same area. The tours can be organized so that the guide moves with the group from one film location to another either by bus, on foot, by bicycle or even a helicopter. The tour has to be made professionally and with a lot of research done by the touring company because the people attending these tours are probably very devoted to their fandom of the film they are “following”. Also the tour cannot be just driving past locations that have been shown on the film in question, some background information, inside stories or image material has to be shown to prove that the place is authentic (Roesch 2009, p. 46).

Setting up film location tours is a risky business for a tourism company because there are two equally risky time frames for it. The company can either start initiating the tour before the film product is screened or they can wait for the feedback of the film and only start then (Roesch 2009, p. 47). The first option has the risk of the film not being as successful as assumed and the demand for a film location tour would be minimal. However, the second option is risky because the location visiting rights and various accessories from the film might be reserved very fast by other companies. Also, there is no guarantee that a film with good box office success will be so popular and effective that people will want to go on a film location tour based on it (Roesch 2009, p. 47).

5 Managing customer experience

Before analyzing the customer experiences of film tourists it is important to understand what customer experience actually is. It is more than just the situation

of being in the buying process – it starts with certain preconceptions about the company in question and it ends with the feeling the customer has after purchasing and after using the product or service.

According to Löytänä & Korteso (2011) customer experience is a term that first emerged in the book Experience Economy by B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore in 1999. With the exponentially growing use of the internet this term has become even more important as nowadays a customer experience is not only about the experience of being served in the physical store. Customer experience is about the impression the customer has about the company, the things the customer knows about the service and products beforehand, the service situation and the feelings the customer gets throughout the whole process. (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, p. 11.)

“A Customer Experience is an interaction between an organization and a customer as perceived through a customer’s conscious and subconscious mind. It is a blend of an organization’s rational performance, the senses stimulated and emotions evoked, and intuitively measured against customer expectations across all moments of contact.” (Shaw, Dibeehi & Walden 2010, p. 3)

As Shaw et al (2010, pp. 3-4) state, customer experience is about the emotions the customer feels when they are going towards the buying decision and while they are in the situation of buying or using the product or service. People have five senses and customer experience is about using all of these to form an opinion of the experience. Customer experience is also about the conscious and the subconscious. It is not only about what the customer sees and hears in the store, it is also about what they have heard about the enterprise beforehand, what opinions they have already formed and what expectations they have towards the product or service.

In the case of taking a tour by On Location Tours, which is the focus of this thesis, the customer experience consists of the customer noticing the following issues consciously: the reviews online are good which means that the tours are worth taking; the buses have personalized pictures on the bus which shows that the enterprise is successful; and the guides are good and they are professional

actors that like their jobs. Conscious notices can also be about hearing good music on the bus, smelling a clean bus and feeling warm on a cold day.

However, subconsciously the customer can be feeling safe when they see seatbelts on the other customers on the bus, they can feel not trusted when on the stops the guides keep an eye on everyone and they can feel relaxed when they see that everything is organized well. These are things that the customers do not think of thinking, it is more about the general feeling they have while being on the tour. Thus, a customer experience is a sum of everything that the customer feels before, during and after buying a product or a service both consciously and subconsciously (Shaw *et al* 2010, p. 4).

For a customer the total customer experience is formed more and more every time they visit a company's website, see reviews written about the company's services and products, interact with any company representatives and see advertisements the company has. Every time a customer is, in one way or another, in contact with the company their opinions are forming. According to all the experiences the customers either start trusting the company or trust it less. Since managing customer experience for a company is about forming relationships with their customers, trust is an essential part of this interaction. This is why it is extremely important for companies to be careful with the content they have in the public and what content is being created about them on different websites and forums. (Seybold, Marshak & Lewis 2001, p. 8.)

When a company wants to improve their customers' experiences, it is not enough to only train the serving personnel or improve the product or service. A customer experience consists of everything the customer sees, hears, feels, tastes and smells that is connected with the product or service. In order to improve the customer experience of a specific company it is necessary to look into everything the company does. First of all, the website of the company needs to be clear, easy to use and functional. If there are problems with the website, a customer can draw a conclusion that there are problems with this specific company. Also, for example, a problem with billing sends a message to the customer that not everything is well-organized in the company, thus decreasing the amount of trust towards the company. (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, pp. 14-15.)

In addition to these the obvious measures need to be taken to make the customer experience as good as possible. A lot of effort needs to be put into improving the customer service. This is, after all, together with the product and service itself the part of the company the customer sees most clearly. Training the personnel is very important as these are the people who the customer sees as the face of the company. Along with training it is also extremely important to keep the personnel happy. (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, pp. 14-15.)

A company's personnel is probably the most problematic part of all companies. The problem is not in the workers, it is more about the fact that the human resource departments need to understand how much the personnel actually affect the customers' opinions about the company. Very often the employees are stressed, tired or even unhappy with their job because their work effort is not always valued enough. This causes the employees to "rebel" against the product or service, thus creating bad customer experiences. In a way, the human resource departments of companies are also marketing departments. The employees they choose and have are directly what the customers see and experience. (Young 2010, p. 98.)

Naturally the product and service need creating and updating from time to time. Nowadays it is not enough to create a good thing and just sit back and look at the money flow. Customers are always craving something new. When the product or service is up to date and the personnel is happy with working with this product or service, the last thing for a company to improve is marketing. The field of marketing is constantly changing, thus the same marketing tricks do not work for a long time. (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, pp. 14-15.)

As before marketing campaigns were planned really carefully in order to run in the media for a very long time, nowadays it is the total opposite. Naturally, they are still planned carefully but there are possibilities to make slight changes to the content as feedback from the customers comes online. With the feedback written about the campaigns online companies have the opportunity to evolve the campaigns while they are still running. The placement, timing and position can be changed even though the campaign has already "gone viral". This is a great opportunity for the marketing business and it is made possible by the con-

sumers who fill online forums and chats with their opinions. (Young 2010, pp. 22-23.)

5.1 Customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction

In order to make a customer experience memorable the customer has to be satisfied with the service or product they have received when making a buying decision. In order to have satisfied customers a lot of effort has to be put in the whole customer experience. Here follows a thorough explanation of what is customer satisfaction and what, in turn, is customer dissatisfaction. It is important for a company to understand that there will always be both. One product or service cannot please everyone. Companies just need to learn to accept this in order to thrive in the business.

Customer satisfaction is about fulfilling the needs that a customer has towards some specific product or service. It is important for a company to know their customers since this can help the company in creating a product or service that is suitable for their customers. It is also important to constantly improve the product or service because the world is changing and something that used to be a nice addition to a necessary product or service may be an absolute necessity nowadays. Researching a company's customer satisfaction is an issue that companies should always be ready to put money into. (Bergman & Klefsjö 2010, pp. 315-316.)

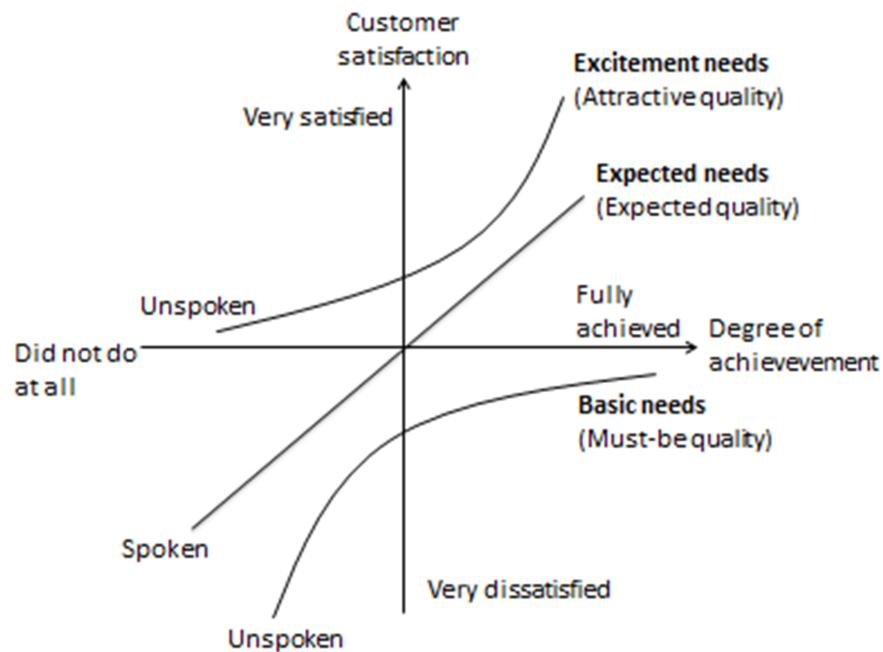


Figure 1. The Kano Model (Bergman & Klefsjö 2010, p. 318)

The Kano Model, as shown in Figure 1 above, was created by a Japanese Professor Noriaki Kano in 1995. According to this model customer satisfaction consists of three levels of human needs. When a person buys a product or service, their opinion and level of satisfaction are measured by their Basic needs, Expected needs and Excitement needs. All of these need to be fulfilled if a company wants to leave the customer totally satisfied with the product or service they provide. It is not enough to just satisfy the basic needs of a customer with the product or service. At least the expected needs have to be satisfied to have a content customer. However, if the company is able to add a little something and this way fulfil the customer's excitement need, the customer will walk away very happy and satisfied. (Bergman & Klefsjö 2010, pp. 316-317.)

If a customer is asked what they want to get from using a specific product or service, they will most likely answer with something in the category of expected needs. Both basic needs and excitement needs are unspoken. All three categories of needs have to be fulfilled in order to have a happy customer. Excitement needs is a category of needs that the customer has not thought of when purchasing the product or service. (Bergman & Klefsjö 2010, pp. 316-317.)

To make this theory clear it can be explained with the case of tours that On Location Tours provides to its customers. The basic needs for a customer are finding the meeting place easily, not having problems with the ticket, having a seat on the bus and having a guide who tells stories. The expected needs are being comfortable on the bus, having fun on the tour, learning secret stories about the series and seeing New York City overall. The excitement needs are fulfilled with a complimentary cupcake, the guides being actors who actually know the series or even the stars and getting discounts at places the tour stops at. (Tripadvisor 2014.)

With time the roles of needs change. Something that was expected ten years ago might be a basic need nowadays. Also something that has surprised customers by filling their excitement needs might already be such an old trick that it does not have the same effect anymore. This is one of the many reasons why companies should always look into improving their products and services. It is also good not to tell every little detail a product or service has, and leave these to fill customers' excitement needs. This, however, cannot be done with negative issues. Covering negative aspects of a product or service only cause trouble because eventually everything comes out. (Bergman & Klefsjö 2010, pp. 316-317.)

The Kano Model must be used to fulfil the customers' needs to the fullest. If only the basic and expected needs are fulfilled, the customer is rather not dissatisfied than actually satisfied. However, with the surprise and joy that fulfilling an excitement need a customer gets, he/she can be truly satisfied. It is important to understand the difference between a not dissatisfied customer and a satisfied one. When a customer is content with the product or service but is not convinced, there is a risk that they will search for the satisfaction elsewhere, among the company's competitors. (Bergman & Klefsjö 2010, p. 318.)

To understand how to fulfil customers' excitement needs further research has to be done by the company. A good start is to try and think like a customer – what do they expect to get from a product or service, what could be a nice surprise for them. Fulfilling excitement needs is about going the extra step to make a customer happy. For example, in a hotel a guest can be greeted with a bowl of

fruits on their birthday, on a plane a regular customer can get their preferred drink without asking and the preferred radio channels can be already programmed into the new car when trading an old car to a new one. All these are just small gestures from the company's part but a great joy to the customers. (Bergman & Klefsjö 2010, p. 319-320.)

Customer dissatisfaction is a problem that should be avoided but, unfortunately, cannot. There have always been and always will be customers who are not fully satisfied with what they get. Customer dissatisfaction can act as a reminder for a company to constantly update and improve their products and services. After repairing the problems a complaining customer has with the product or service the customer can become a loyal customer if the complaint is dealt with in a right way. A complaint can either be answered with an automated apology and a promise to improve the product or service, or the problem can actually be looked into and each problem can be solved individually. After service like this the customer sees that their opinion is valuable and they stay with the company. (Barlow & Moller 1996, pp. 20-21.)

The main problem with non-satisfied customers is that only five percent of them actually complain to the company itself. In these cases the company can try and explain the situation or solve the problem directly with the customer. However, the rest 95 percent who do not write complaints to the company tell about the problems to their friends and acquaintances. This way the problem cannot be solved by the company and bad word-of-mouth is being created by the non-satisfied 95 percent who do not care to solve the problem directly with the company. It is also an established fact that people are more likely to complain about their bad experience than tell about a good one. For some reason it is more natural for a person to complain about a slight problem than tell about good service or products they have used previously. Naturally, the very good experiences get told but the good basic service is considered to be self-evident. (Barlow & Moller 1996, pp.46-47; Bergman & Klefsjö 2010, pp. 331-332.)

By listening to customer complaints a company can not only hear how they have failed in serving their customers, they can also understand what their customers want from the company. Customer complaints can even bring up sur-

prising points on what the customers are expecting to get from the product or service. Listening to the customers' wishes can bring more revenues and market share to a company. (Barlow & Moller 1996, pp. 29-30.)

Any company can research the satisfaction rate of their company by surveys. However, very often the survey papers are not done with careful consideration of what is important and what is not, thus causing negative impressions of being asked to fill in a survey. Also the way of getting the survey answers is often wrong. It is clear that a customer is more likely to fill in a survey of the service in a hotel if a survey paper is put on their bed with a piece of chocolate than a pile of survey papers and pens in the reception area of the hotel. It is also very challenging to find the right balance between the right questions, the right way of asking them and not annoying the customers while doing this. A basic rule is to keep it simple – nobody wants to fill a survey of one hundred questions. (Bergman & Klefsjö 2010, pp. 335-336.)

5.2 Importance of online feedback to a company's corporate image

Every person sees thousands of advertisements every day – in color, in black and white, on TV, on the radio, on the internet and on the streets. No matter how good a marketing campaign a company makes, most probably the consumers will not believe it blindly, they will still want to research the information online. With search engines such as Google, Bing and Yahoo looking into some product or service is extremely easy for consumers. In a way, the search engines open a back door to the information available thus democratizing the product information (Young 2010, p. 91).

In the current clutter of advertising and marketing campaigns it is very hard to make buying decisions. That is why consumers use the internet to help them make these decisions. Online any kind of information can be found – reviews, prices, complaints, praises and recommendations. When the information is so easy to find, people do not see any reasons anymore to go to physical stores or offices to ask something they want to know about a product or service.

When looking for information online the amount of clicks is important – the easier the information can be found, the faster a buying decision can be made (Mo-

lenaar 2010, p. 39). For any company it is always a good thing if as much information as possible can be found on the official website, thus it is important to plan the official website carefully. Online there are the official websites of companies, there are forums, there are themed websites with reviews on the specific theme and there is the social media. All these combined are bound to have a lot more information available about the products and services available than any one salesperson in the physical store could have. (Young 2010, pp. 89-90.)

Based on a study made by comScore and The Kelsey Group a conclusion can be drawn that online reviews affect people's buying behavior a lot nowadays. The study was made in 2007 but the results are still in effect, if not even more than before. The study researched how people are affected by online reviews and the results are surprising – people are not only willing to buy a service or product that has good reviews, they are also willing to pay more for a service or product that has gotten five or four stars in the reviews. (Lipsman 2007.)

In the study 24 percent of the people admitted to searching online for reviews of a service or a product they were planning on using. Out of these people as many as 40 percent used the services of the hotels and restaurants they looked into. In the case of travel services 27 percent of the researched services were used after looking into the reviews. Here the percentages seem low but in the case of hotels and travel services the amount of money in question is relatively high which means that people consider carefully what they invest into. In the case of restaurants there is simply so much supply compared with the demand that the decision-making requires a lot of considering. (Lipsman 2007.)

Out of the people who use reviews in their decision-making process more than three-quarters told that the reviews had a major impact on their purchase. In the case of hotel (87%), restaurant (79%) and travel services (84%) as many as 79-87 percent told that the reviews they had seen online affected their buying decision. In addition to this almost everyone, meaning 97 percent of the studied people told that their experience was similar to the ones described in the reviews. (Lipsman 2007.)

Especially in the case of a film location tour arranged in New York City the feedback given online is crucial – New York City gets millions of travelers from abroad and film location tours are so specific that usually they attract very specific people from different places. Thus the people only have the internet to search for information on the tours. In addition to the official website of the tour company people are very likely to search for information about the company on different forums and chat websites. This is the reason why for a company like On Location Tours it is extremely important to keep their customers satisfied or at least try to solve any and all problems directly with the customer.

Conducting surveys can be done to get an overview of the customers' opinions about the company but nowadays the social media and internet are far more powerful than the traditional surveys. If companies were to put a few hours into researching what is said about them online, they would get the same information as from surveys but a lot more effectively. Before the rise of the social media people had conversations about companies, products and services only face-to-face, which made it impossible to control or see what is said about a company. Now when everybody uses the social media to air their opinions it is rather easy for a company to read what is written about them and from these write down suggestions on how to improve what they are offering. (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, pp. 137-138.)

The good thing about letting customers write their personal opinions about a company's product or service online is that they feel that they can write anything, thus they write their honest opinion. This naturally adds to the risk of any and all problems being told online before the company has time to repair the damage. However, it should be seen as a possibility to take action very fast. Before the social media companies needed to wait and see the results with time or conduct ineffective surveys to see if there are problems with their product or service. Nowadays as soon as a problem is described online the company can try and solve the problem.

In addition to this, customers can get into conversations with each other. If one customer had an exceptionally bad experience and writes about it online, other customers are likely to jump in and add that the service or product is not always

bad like in that case. This way the happy customers keep up the image of the company without knowing it. It is clear that if a company has a really bad product or service, it is always bad. However, if it is mainly good, a few bad reviews do not destroy the reputation because there are always so many good ones to overrule the few bad ones. (Seybold *et al* 2001, pp. 124-125.)

All in all, the expanding social media does not have to be the enemy of a company. It is a helper due to the fast flow of information. Before people started talking about everything online the companies needed to plan expensive marketing campaigns that tell about all the improvements made to their products or services but nowadays all this information reaches the customers a lot faster anyway. Before the internet revolution the aim of marketing campaigns was to get people to go to the physical stores to buy the products or services. Nowadays the marketing campaigns are rather encouraging the customers to research the product or service online and based on this make a buying decision (Young 2010, p. 179). This cannot be considered a “free pass” from making campaigns - this just gives a possibility to create better campaigns in a new way (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, pp. 137-138).

6 Film location tours by On Location Tours in NYC

On Location Tours is a company that was founded by Georgette Blau already 15 years ago in 1999. It started off as a small start-up company that had tours on weekends for over 50 customers and Blau herself did the guiding on these tours. The company has since grown to be the world’s largest TV and Movie Tour Company. The turning point came in 2004 when the company’s bus tours featured in the Sex and the City Finale Special after the series finale. After this the tours got very popular and Blau saw an opportunity to expand the company. She hired more guides and more employees to the company’s offices. All the guides hired are actors and actresses. Between 2003 and 2008 the revenues grew from \$500,000 to over \$3 million. (Szhulzke 2012; Blakely 2011.)

Now On Location Tours is one of the most popular attractions on the East Coast of the USA. It serves over 100,000 customers annually, a big part of them being tourists from outside of New York City and the USA. The company operates in

New York City and in Boston. On Location Tours has gotten a Certificate of Excellence from Tripadvisor in 2014. This is a very remarkable honor for a company since Tripadvisor is the largest and most significant tourist feedback site on the internet. On Location Tours is a part of ATTAM, the Association for TV and Movie Tours. ATTAM was, in fact, founded by Georgette Blau. ATTAM is an umbrella organization that represents film tour companies around the world. (Onlocationtours 2014.)

On Location Tours offers tours mainly in New York City, only two of their tours are in Boston: Boston TV & Movie Sites Tour and Boston Movie Mile Tour. The others are arranged in New York City and they include: TV and Movie Sites Tour, Sex and the City Hotspots, TMZ Tour NYC, Gossip Girl Sites Tour, TCM Classic Film Tour, Sopranos Sites Tour, Central Park TV & Movie Sites Tour, Uptown TV & Movie Sites Tour and Holiday Lights & Movie Sites. They also offer tours in French and German. Since the topic of this thesis is film tours in New York City, the Boston film tours will not be described here. Tickets for all the tours cost around \$40 with the exception of the Central Park tour that is only \$30. All the tour buses are equipped with little TV screens that are used to show clips from movies and series to jog the customers' memories of the places they are seeing. (Onlocationtours 2014.)

The TV and Movie Tour as well as the Sex and the City Hotspots Tour can both be taken in French and German. On Location Tours has three tours that are based on some specific TV series. These three tours are Sex and the City Hotspots Tour, Gossip Girl Tour and Sopranos Tour. The Sopranos Tour is, in fact, located in New Jersey but since it is so close to New York City it is rather logical for the company to have tours arranged based on the popular series. (Onlocationtours 2014.)

7 Research methods

The main research method used for this thesis is qualitative research. Some quantitative research was done when analyzing the results. There is still not enough literature written in this field of tourism, so some internet sources needed to be used beside the few literature sources for researching the theory of this

topic. Also, the author of this thesis visited New York City during the thesis process and thus personal observations are included in the analysis. The study itself was mainly done as a desk study. This was done by reading internet forums and collecting reviews from there into an Excel Spreadsheet. Only reviews written about the two chosen series were collected. The reviews were gathered from Tripadvisor to an Excel Spreadsheet in order to have all the information accessible at once. This also ensured that the author used information gathered on the same day – there are no possible changes in the reviews if they are all collected on the same day.

After gathering everything into one list the reviews in Excel were color coded. Even though Tripadvisor has a five-star rating system, it is not enough to indicate the true opinion of the reviewers. The color codes used were green, yellow and red. Whole reviews were color coded with one color, separate sentences were not coded. Green reviews were overall good with nothing special to add to the material of the thesis. Yellow reviews were those that had useful information for doing the thesis. A good or a bad review could be a yellow review – as long as it helped in creating the analysis in this thesis. Red color coding was given to reviews that were about a bad experience. Majority of the reviews were green.

8 Analysis of customer experiences of film tourists in NYC

The tours on the series Gossip Girl (GG) and Sex and the City (SATC) are focused on in this thesis because they are both series that were both situated and filmed in New York City and in both series the city of New York has, in a way, an own role in the series. In order to review the customer experiences the author made a list of reviews written on Tripadvisor about either of the series. On the page of On Location Tours on Tripadvisor there were 907 reviews on all their tours by 14th September 2014. These all were sorted out and only the reviews on SATC or GG were picked. A list of these was made in an Excel Spreadsheet. There were 389 reviews on the Sex and the City Hotpots Tours and 65 reviews on the Gossip Girl Sites Tours. Altogether these two series had 454 reviews from the beginning of 2008 until 14th September 2014. These re-

views are used here as an indicator of customer satisfaction on these tours. (Tripadvisor 2014.)

In Tripadvisor the reviews are mainly positive – out of all the 454 tour reviews 307 have a five star rating, 95 have four stars and the three worst star ratings have altogether 52 ratings. Below is a chart, Figure 2, which shows the division of the star ratings. This indicates that the tours are planned and done well. Tripadvisor is a place for tourists to write their own reviews – a Tripadvisor rating and recommendation is always more truthful than any advertisements or recommendations on the official websites of the companies or third parties that promote the company or service. (Tripadvisor 2014.)

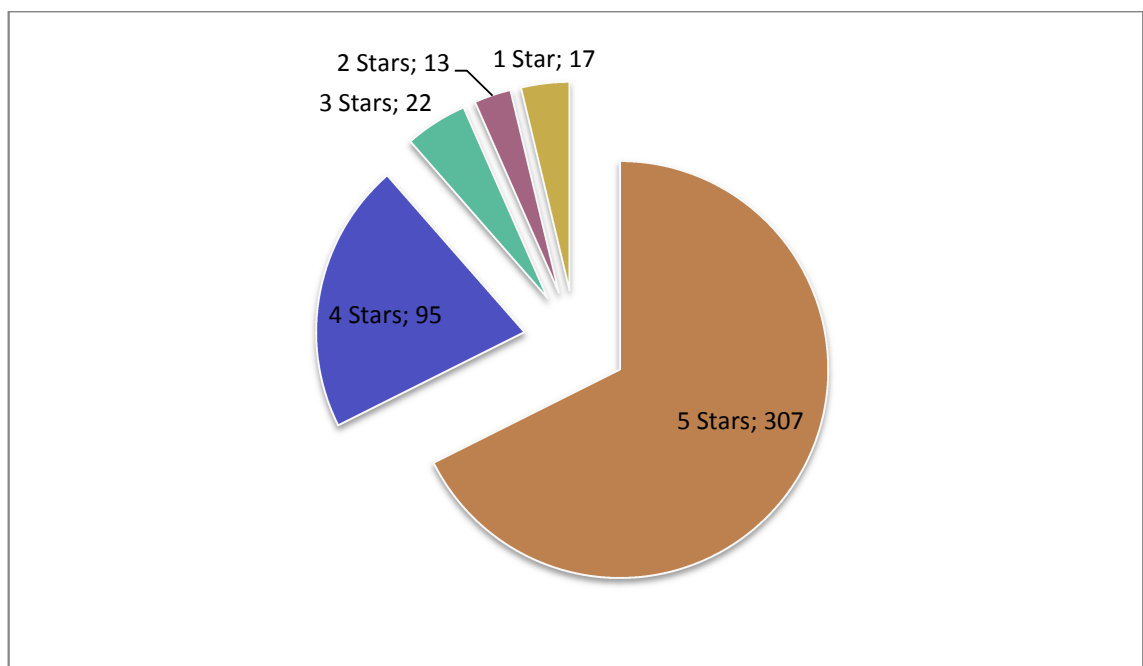


Figure 2. Chart of the review star ratings. (Tripadvisor 2014)

Out of the 389 reviews written on SATC Tours 258 are rated with five stars, 83 have four stars and only 48 have three star ratings or less. With Gossip Girl the ratings are even more positive – out of 65 as many as 49 ratings have full five stars, 12 ratings have four stars and only four ratings have three stars or less. (Tripadvisor 2014.)

After analyzing the reviews in more detail it was concluded that 318 of all the 454 reviews are overall good. These reviews are mainly about how much fun they had on the tours, a little listing of the places they saw on the tours and how

they would love to go again or recommend the tours to their friends and/or family. (Tripadvisor 2014.)

The difference between the tours based on Sex and the City and Gossip Girl is clearly in the age group of the viewers. First of all, the target group of Gossip Girl is women of ages between 15 and 25 years. The show has also finished only recently, so the target group is still young. People in these age groups usually have minimum wages or they are studying, which means that they cannot afford to travel to New York City to take a \$40 tour. However, in the case of Sex and the City the target group then was women of ages between 20 and 40 so from the very beginning they have a higher probability to travel. It has also been 10 years since the finale of the series, so the target group has gotten older.

In addition to the original show time reruns of Sex and the City are constantly shown on the TV. This adds to the amount of fans of the show since the younger generation is now watching the same series as people did ten years ago. This explains why there are so many more reviews on the Sex and the City Hotspots Tour than there are on the Gossip Girl Tours. When the amount of feedback is so much larger, naturally also the amount of negative feedback seems larger. In the SATC reviews the amount of two-star-or-less reviews is seven percent out of the whole amount of reviews. In the GG reviews this same number is four percent of the whole amount. This is not a big difference and any tours are always bound to also get bad reviews. Thus, even though there is more negative feedback about the SATC tours, it does not automatically mean that the GG tours are that much better or vice versa. (Tripadvisor 2014.)

8.1 Sex and the City Hotspots Tour

The Sex and the City tour starts in front of the Plaza Hotel and the Pulitzer fountain. Most of the tour, however, happens in Lower Midtown Manhattan in neighborhoods such as the Meatpacking District, SoHo and West Village. The tour drives for approximately three-and-a-half hours around the areas that were used for filming the series and the movies. Most of the locations are only driven by and the guide shows them to the customers. The little TV screens on the bus

show the customers short clips from the series to remind the customers of the places they are seeing.

Currently the bus stops four times during the trip. These stops are: Pleasure Chest, an adult store that was showed in one episode of the series; Magnolia's Cupcakes, a bakery that was depicted several times in the show; Buddakan, a restaurant that was used in one of the SATC movies; and O'Nieals, a bar that was named Scout in the series and was owned by two of the male characters. The tour finishes near Buddakan and the store of Diane von Furstenberg, where the High Line Park starts. The stops are for 15-30 minutes each, thus out of the three-and-a-half hours of the tour about 1-1.5 hours are outside the bus. Figure 3 below is showing the route this tour makes. (Onlocationtours 2014; Tripadvisor 2014.)

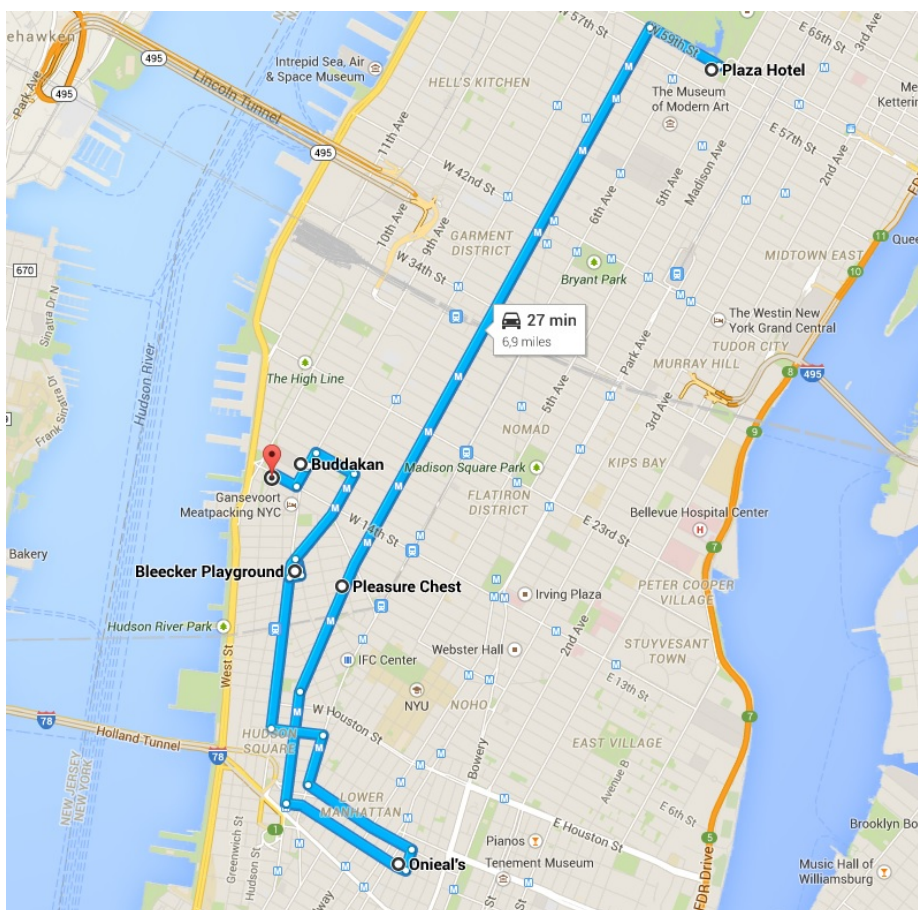


Figure 3. Route of the Sex and the City Hotspots Tour. (Google Maps; Tripadvisor 2014.)

8.1.1 Most common reviews

Most of the reviews show that the customers are really happy with the planning of the tour. 87 percent of the reviews have given either five or four stars to their experience. This can be assumed to be a really good thing for the company. These 87 percent of the reviews are mainly listing what they saw and how much they liked it. Also very many of these reviews mentioned their guide on the tour and most commonly the guide was also complimented a lot. The reviews below are what the average reviews are like. (Tripadvisor 2014.)

“I was on the tour by myself but managed to make friends along the way. The tour was a great way to see NY and our tour guide Lou, was great fun and enjoyed pointing out the sights and their reference to Sex and the City along the way. Would definitely recommend the tour be you on our own or as part of a girly group.” (Tripadvisor 2014.)

“As big SATC fans we had big expectations - and everyone one of them was met by Lou, our guide for the day. We were met at the Plaza Hotel and from there for the next 4 hours we were kept entertained. We had just the right amount of stops to keep us interested and discounts at some amazing places. I expected to enjoy the tour but not to love it as much as I did. Highly recommended.” (Tripadvisor 2014.)

8.1.2 Negative reviews

Out of the 31 bad experiences most negative feedback was given to the locations used in the tour, both the stops as well as the locations that are shown when driving by in the bus. It is said that most of the drive-by locations are some irrelevant restaurants that were used in one episode and the outside of the restaurant was not even shown in the episode. The stops are clearly planned commercially and On Location Tours probably has some kind of marketing or sponsorship deals with the stops and with the drive-by locations. On the next page is a chart, Figure 4, which shows the amount of negative issues mentioned. The combined amount is more than 31 because some negative reviews have several of the issues mentioned. (Tripadvisor 2014.)

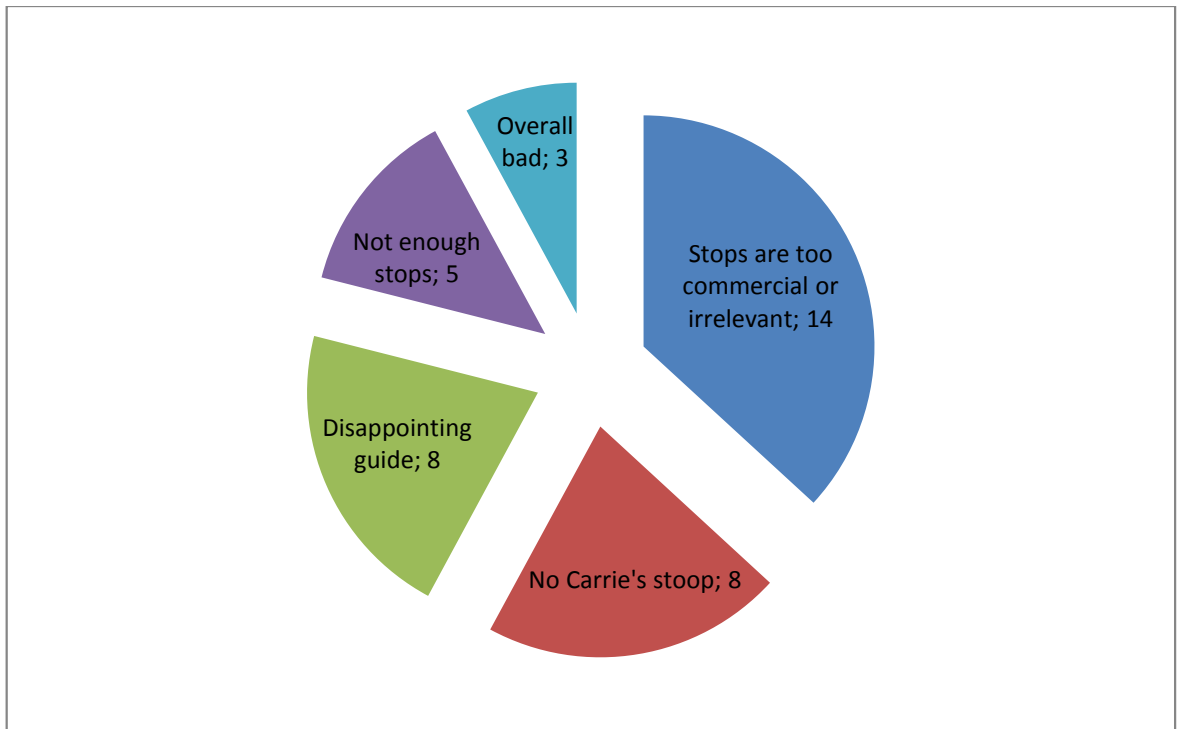


Figure 4. Chart of the negative reviews. (Tripadvisor 2014)

“I’m so disappointed [sic] of your SatC Tour! Instead of beeing [sic] at the real Hotspots of the Serie [sic] or the Movies it was only a commercial cooperation of different Bars, Restaurants, Shops and You. On every stop we were animated to spend more money with your “special deals” and the “unbelievable discounts”. But the only thing I cannot believe: we stop at Bleeker Street - and instead of going to Carrie’s house which is just around the corner (!) we were leaded to Michael Kors to spend even more money (and enjoy the discount if we buy for more than 250\$).” (Tripadvisor 2014.)

There are negative reviews that show how the customers are clearly very fanatic about the show but who were not happy with the tour. They claim that it would have been easier for them to do some research and go to the interesting locations themselves. In this case the problem might both be in the tour and in the customers themselves. The author thinks that these fans simply have had such huge expectations about the tour that their disappointment simply feels bigger than it should be.

“I am a huge fan of the show so was very very disappointed in the Sex and the City tour!! You sit on a bus for over 3 hours and only get off 4 times to see places you probably have no interest on visiting from the show” (Tripadvisor 2014.)

In many of these thoroughly disappointed reviews people also tell how they have waited to get on this tour for such a long time, for some the tour being the highlight of their trip to New York City. It is easy to see how disappointment in something this anticipated can ruin the whole experience. Also, very often these fans know a lot about the series and the actors, thus they do not get any new insider information when attending the tour. However, here nobody in particular can be blamed – it is clear that simply the supply and demand do not meet.

8.1.3 Miscellaneous reviews

The reviews show how different people’s expectations affect their perception of the tours. For some people three-and-a-half hours spent on a film location tour feels very long, for some it is very short. Some people like the fact that they see many places while sitting on the bus, while some people would rather visit more places and not sit on the bus so much. However, not everyone’s wishes can be met by the tour company. An efficient halfway option has to be chosen and that is done by the tour company when they combine sitting on a bus with a few stops.

Many of the reviews mention that this tour is best when taken with a girly group, as a mother-daughter trip or when having hen or other parties with a lot of women on board. This is really good advice as the theme of the tour is very close to the atmosphere of the series – women gossiping about everything in their lives. The author was pleased to see as many as 10 reviews mentioning this, five recommendations for a girly group and five for a hen party. This is positive since one of the main reasons for reading the reviews is to find out if, when and how the service or product should be used. In these reviews the atmosphere of helping others is clearly visible. There are also three helpful reviews that recommend buying the tickets in advance as they tend to sell out.

“...A real girlie experience even though there were some brave gentlemen on board.” (Tripadvisor 2014).

“...I went with my mom, it was a great mother daughter outing!” (Tripadvisor 2014).

“Get your tickets in advance online - they sell out quick!” (Tripadvisor 2014).

A couple of the reviews tell a little more about the atmosphere of the tour. According to these as the series are for mature people, also the tour is. Apparently there is a lot of cursing on this tour, talking about sex and visiting the sex shop. For most people this does not seem like a problem, but there are some reviews that mention how awkward it is to go to the adult store with their mother/daughter or simply with a group of strangers.

“...sidenote, there was kid on the tour... 10 or MAYBE 12 and this was super inappropriate and awkward for people sitting around her when going to the pleasure chest and just the general language used. I'm no prude but not sure how this was ok with her parents” (Tripadvisor 2014).

“...The only weird part was going into the pleasure chest with my daughter!!” (Tripadvisor 2014).

There also seems to be a little problem with the length of the tour since many people come to New York City for a short visit, very often just to spend a prolonged weekend in the city. Some of the reviews mention this being a problem, but there are also reviews that say that this is strength of the tour. Some people do not like spending their limited time in the city sitting on a bus, but some people understand that this is a bus tour among others. There are five negative mentions about the length of the tour and four mentions that it could be longer. While the tour is based on the series, it is still a bus tour around the city that shows different neighborhoods.

“...The tour lasts for around 3.5 hours, but the time flies by.” (Tripadvisor 2014).

“...It also went for 3.5 hours which I thought was a little too long. 2 hours would have been better without o [sic] many stop offs.” (Tripadvisor 2014.)

The rest of the miscellaneous reviews about a bad experience on this tour are about personal problems with the personnel, too much sitting in the bus and not enough stops. Apparently, if one part of the tour is great for one person, it may be totally the opposite for another. For example, watching parts of the episodes on the small TV screens is a good thing for most people, but there are some who are disappointed as they “spent most of the time on the bus watching re-runs of Sex and the City, instead of stopping for photos of significant places from the show.” (Tripadvisor 2014.)

8.1.4 The guides

As mentioned before in this thesis all the guides in this film tour company are actors and actresses who have actually appeared on scene of movies or TV series in minor roles. This is an important point because these tours are not just about driving by places and mentioning what can be seen on the right and on the left. The guides act their part as if they are a part of the series. This is noticed by many of the reviewing customers. Most of them write positive feedback about this fact but not everyone is satisfied. For some this is too much and they are annoyed by the actor/actress that is their guide. There are four positive and six negative mentions about the guides. (Tripadvisor 2014.)

“...Our tour guide was called Lou whom I was really disappointed in too – She only interacted with the loud ones’s [sic] on the coach no one else. I also think the fact that she constantly mentioned she was an actress was un wanted [sic] information.” (Tripadvisor 2014.)

“...our guide was what you could call a ‘wannabe actress’ so we found it quite annoying to listen to for 3.5hours” (Tripadvisor 2014).

“...We were also disappointed with the tour guide. She talked a lot about herself and her singing career, including passing around a sign up [sic] sheet for her personal email newsletter.” (Tripadvisor 2014)

8.1.5 Carrie's stoop

After the irrelevant and bad stops on the tour the next two equally disappointing issues were the guides and the tour not stopping on Carrie's stoop. Most of the complaints about the guides are as mentioned before – they market themselves as actors and for some people this is too much. However, the issue with Carrie's stoop is a serious issue to many reviewers. Only in the reviews about bad experiences as many as eight people mention not seeing Carrie's stoop. This was also mentioned in other reviews but with the other reviewers the issue did not seem to ruin the tour. Some of the reviews mention that On Location Tours is not allowed to take people to Carrie's stoop anymore because it is a privately-owned property and the new owner has forbidden this. (Tripadvisor 2014.)

"...FYI- You do not stop at Carrie's door step. They're no longer allowed as people actually live there.." (Tripadvisor 2014.)

"...One block up from there on the rite[sic] is perry st, this is where carries [sic] apartment is filmed (number 66) It's easy to find as there is a chain across the steps." (Tripadvisor 2014.)

"...The only downer we had was we couldn't visit Carrie's stoop because apparently the owner no longer allowed it and was very strict about trespassing. The tour guide said she wasn't allowed to even give us the address or she would be at risk of losing her job." (Tripadvisor 2014.)

Apparently this has been an issue between the tour company and the residents of Perry Street, the location that was used as Carrie's stoop. On Location Tours has been helping the community by funding renovations in a playground close by, paying for a new streetlight in the area and using more nature-friendly buses on their tours. Also when the tour was allowed to go to Perry Street the guides never allowed the customers to talk, litter or take photographs on the street so the residents would not be disturbed. However, this was not enough to the residents of Perry Street and after a lot of pressuring On Location Tours took the stop at Perry Street off their Sex and the City Hotspots tour on 15th July 2008. (Wiltermuth 2008.)

8.2 Gossip Girl Tour

The Gossip Girl Tour starts at the iconic The New York Palace Hotel which was an important location in the series as well as in many other films made in New

York City. From The Palace the tour goes on to drive around the Upper East Side, as it is the part of New York City that the rich kids in the series live in. The stops include: Henri Bendel's and Bergdorf Goodman, expensive stores the characters liked to shop at; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, due to its constant appearance in the series as a sitting place for the characters; Museum of the City of New York, the location used to portray the school the Upper East Side kids go to; Dylan's Candy Bar, a sweet store shown in the series; and The Empire Hotel, which was owned by one of the characters in the series. The tour ends by Grand Central Terminal, the starting location of the whole series. Below is a map created by the author, Figure 5, which shows the route of the tour. (Tripadvisor 2014.)

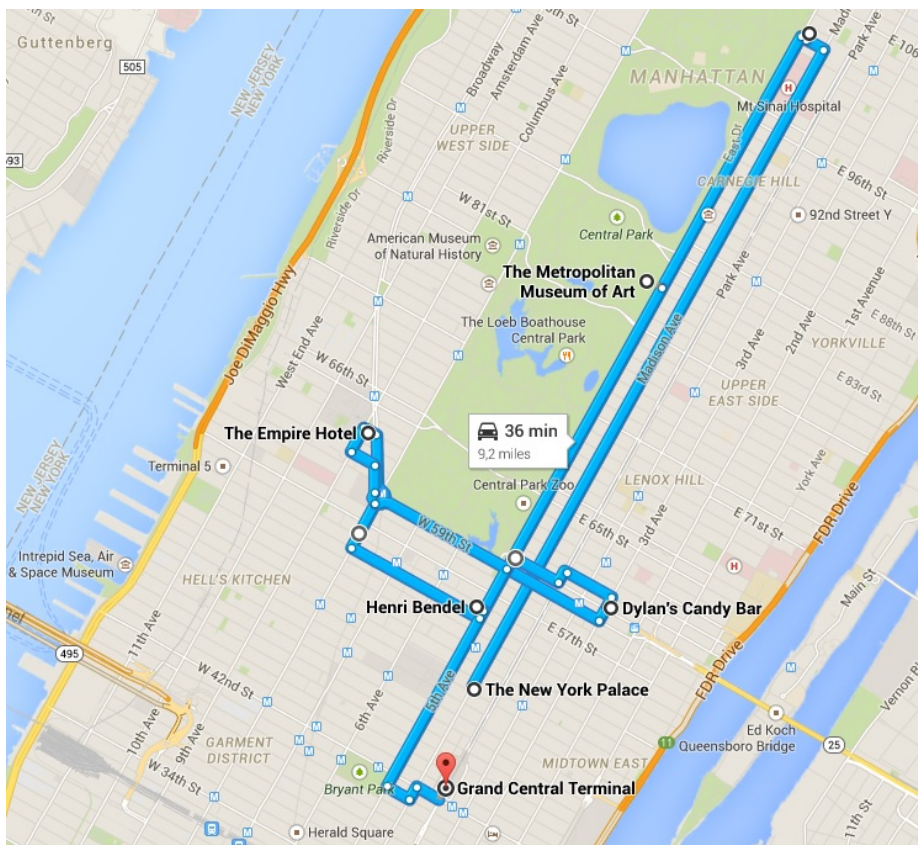


Figure 5. Route of the Gossip Girl Tour. (Google Maps; Tripadvisor 2014.)

8.2.1 Most common reviews

Out of the reviews written about the Gossip Girl Tours 75 percent gave the tour a five-star-rating, which means that the tour is up to the standard the customers are expecting to get. As many as 18 more percent of the reviews give the tour four stars, thus leaving only 7 percent of the reviewers that give three stars or

less. After further analyzing, only two of the total of 65 reviews were actual bad experiences. One of these was actually a problem with the customer being late from the pick-up point and thus missing the whole tour. The other negative review mentions about the bus driver and the guide having some problems with each other, thus causing delays and illogical order of the series clips shown. Otherwise the reviews are mainly positive. Below are a few average reviews. (Tripadvisor 2014.)

“You know you love it! => I went on the Gossip Girl Tour July 26th, 2009, and as Gossip Girl's biggest fan, I would recommend this tour for any Gossip Girl fan. Lindsey was very knowledgeable and friendly, willing to help you with anything and any insider info. Overall, I found the tour to be a worthwhile experience. :)” (Tripadvisor 2014.)

“If you are a fan of Gossip Girl, then this tour is for you. We got to see many of the sights used in the show, the bus tour showed us clips from actual scenes, a true NY experience. XOXO” (Tripadvisor 2014.)

8.2.2 The experience for non-fans

Since Gossip Girl has only ended recently there are many fans that have not seen all the episodes due to the country they live in or simply not having time to watch all of the episodes. Because of this the tour guides have to make sure if there are people on board who have not seen the series finale. If there are people like this, the content of the tour's commentary has to be changed slightly so the ending will not be spoiled to the fans. The tour is also a good way to see the city as the tour visits and passes by many places that are well-known even outside the series. Very often people from outside of New York City come to visit the city with someone else and since the city is so big, these people tend to do everything together. In many of the reviews it is mentioned that the boy-friends/husbands/fathers are “dragged” to the tours and it is always concluded that even these “forced” people enjoy the tour because the locations are interesting even without the fan factor. As many as ten out of the 65 reviews mention a non-fan enjoying the tour. All in all, this tour is interesting to the true fans, to the slight fans and to people who just happen to be on the tour because of somebody else. (Tripadvisor 2014.)

“...My dad, who never watched the show, came with me and said he had a great time” (Tripadvisor 2014).

“...I would highly recommend this tour for Gossip Girl fans, and think it would be enjoyable for the boyfriends/dads/husbands etc that get “dragged” along too – the stops are interesting enough without the gossip girl trivia!” (Tripadvisor 2014).

“Apart from the Gossip Girl stuff, Rachel pointed out quite a few other places of general interest and she gave us tips on stuff like how to spot when filming was going to be taking place in the streets soon” (Tripadvisor 2014).

8.2.3 The guides

The Gossip Girl Tour has a very interesting factor to explain its success – one of the guides has actually worked on the show in a minor role for two whole seasons. This means that she can tell inside information that she herself has witnessed while being in the filming locations together with the actors of the show. (Tripadvisor 2014.)

“...I enjoyed the tour guide who actually had worked on Gossip Girl the 2 first season [sic] so I found her legitimate in telling us anecdotes” (Tripadvisor 2014).

“...Our tour guide was Lindsey who was the stand in for Vanessa on the show so she knew every little detail” (Tripadvisor 2014).

Being able to hear real-life experience from an experienced actress must be really exciting to the customers. Inside stories are always interesting and they get even better when the storyteller has been witnessing the situation themselves. Three reviews mention this fact.

9 Development Plan for an improved customer experience

Overall the tours by On Location Tours have gotten positive reviews but there is always a possibility to make them better. Here is a plan on how to correct small faults and how to add something to make the tours even better than what they currently are. It has to be understood that all the customers have their own preferences and ways of seeing things, so suggestions made here might not satisfy everyone. The aim is to please the majority of the customers and leave the rest at least a little happy about attending the tour.

Several of the reviews written about Sex and the City mention that the complimentary cupcakes offered on the tour are not from Magnolia's Bakery anymore, which is the original place where Carrie and Miranda from SATC eat their cupcakes at. This is a slight problem and many of the reviews that mention this are otherwise positive and the cupcake issue does not seem to ruin the trip. (Tripadvisor 2014.)

“Only disappointing aspect was that they don't give you a cupcake from Magnolia anymore but get their cupcakes from Elenis - no big deal though” (Tripadvisor 2014).

“However - we sat in the park eating sub-standard dry cupcakes while everyone else was eating Magnolia's....guttered! Apparently there is a problem between On Location/Magnolia.” (Tripadvisor 2014.)

There seems to be an actual problem between On Location Tours and Magnolia's Bakery because the tour used to stop in for Magnolia's Cupcakes but the bakery has been taken off the itinerary due to lack of supply these tours demand. Apparently, the bakery was a part of the tour from the beginning of the tours until sometime in 2010. Currently the tour does stop nearby Magnolia's Bakery but the bakery itself is not mentioned on the tour. The complimentary cupcakes come from Billy's Bakery nearby. (Pilon 2010.)

This is a good example of a problem solved well. Even if there are some personal problems between the companies the change is explained by having issues with demand and supply. Cupcakes are still offered on the tour but now they are not Magnolia's cupcakes, they are just cupcakes the tourists can enjoy like the characters. In this chapter the aim of the development plan is to either solve problems in a diplomatic way like in the case of these cupcakes or to create totally new services for the film location tour to offer.

9.1 Sex and the City Hotspots Tour

In the tours based on Sex and the City the most complaints are about the stops being irrelevant or simply too commercial. After this the worst issue is not being happy with the guide. Equally as annoying is the fact that Carrie's stoop is not included in the itinerary of the tour. In addition to this the customers are not too happy with sitting in the bus so much and watching the reruns on the small TV

screens. Following are suggestions on how to correct these things to make the tour more enjoyable for the customers.

In the issue with the guides there is not much that can be done – they are hired actors who guide while acting a role. Mainly the reviews mentioning the guides are very positive and people seem to be happy with the guides. None of the reviews use the actual words claiming that the guide is not good at his/her job. In the case of negative feedback about the guides the reviews are either overall negative about the whole tour or the reviewers simply did not like the guides personally (Tripadvisor 2014). It is probable that in the reviews mentioned last these people simply do not like the actors with extrovert personalities. Thus this problem cannot be corrected anyhow – there will always be people who do not like extroverts and vice versa.

9.1.1 Change of locations

As many as 14 of the negative reviews and even more of the somewhat positive reviews inclined that the customers are not happy with the locations they were shown. The official website of On Location Tours states that there are over 40 locations from the series and the movies that are shown during the tour, four of which are used as stops (Onlocationtours 2014). This list, however, mainly contains restaurants and shops that occur in the series once or twice. Also many of these are never actually shown from the outside in the series. Thus it is simply pointless to show places like this to the tourists while driving by on a bus. An assumption can be made by the author that On Location Tours probably has some kind of sponsorship or marketing deals with at least some of the locations they are showing. It is understandable that the company would show locations that bring more money to them, but it is clearly disturbing the customers.

In correction to this there are many locations that can be driven by on the tour instead of the commercial restaurants and shops. The plan consists of suggestions for locations that are more relevant to the storyline. These suggested locations can either be added to the tour or simply replace some of the irrelevant ones. Here are some that the author thinks to be more relevant to the fans of the show:

- Charlotte's apartment on 930 Park Avenue in the Upper East Side
 - The Paris Theater on 4W 58th Street
 - Manolo Blahnik store on 31 W 54th Street
 - Vogue office in the Condé Nast building on 4 Times Square
 - Jefferson Market Garden on Greenwich Avenue between 6th Avenue and West 10th Street
 - Samantha's apartment on 403 West 13th Street in the Meatpacking district
 - Trapeze School on Pier 40 on the West Street
 - Louis K. Meisel Gallery on 141 Prince Street
 - Miranda's apartment on 148 Henry Street in Chinatown
- (Reeves 2014; Blake 2009.)

These locations are relevant to the show because of the storyline, not because of what was seen and when. The Paris Theater is one of the places where the main character, Carrie Bradshaw, likes to go to when she feels like being in Paris. This is one of the show's many tributes to the versatility of New York City. The Manolo Blahnik Store is an important place to show to the customers because Carrie always wears high heels and Manolo Blahnik is the designer she loves the most in the series. Carrie works at Vogue in the Condé Nast Building for a short period of time and this is a worthwhile place to show the customers while on the bus.

The Trapeze School is a place where Carrie goes to "take a leap of faith" she is so scared of. This is the symbol of letting go of problems in her life and since SATC is a series that symbolizes the power of females, this is a great place to show to the customers of these tours. Louis K. Meisel Gallery was used as Charlotte's gallery in the beginning of the series and it must be an interesting place to see for the fans.

In addition to these places, naturally, the tour must include the locations of the four main characters' homes. All the homes have fake addresses in the series. However, there are actual locations where the exterior filming took place and the bus can drive past all the four homes. It is understandable that due to the

problems with “Carrie’s stoop” it is not possible to walk big groups of people across the street, but the bus can just drive by without stopping. Below is a map, Figure 6, created by the author to show the suggested additional or replacing locations for the tour. Figures 3 and 6 can be compared and it is clear that the new locations would not change the route a lot as most of the locations are still in Lower Manhattan.

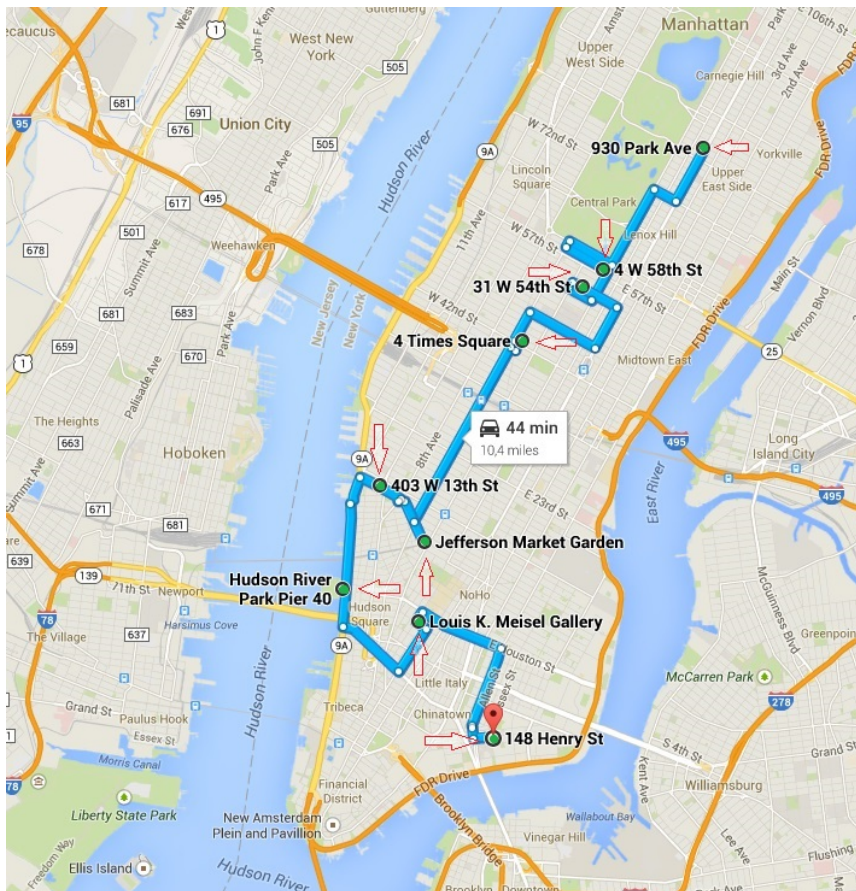


Figure 6. Marked with arrows are the added locations. (Google Maps 2014)

9.1.2 The stops

Currently the tour stops in the Pleasure Chest, Buddakan, Magnolia’s Bakery and O’Nieals. Out of these only Magnolia’s Bakery and O’Nieals appear in the series more than once and they are good stops. The other two only appear once each. The Pleasure Chest is not at all relevant to the storyline of the show and it does not seem to be a relevant stop on the tour. Buddakan is an important place because it was used as the main character’s rehearsal dinner scene. (Sex and the City 1998-2004.)

The author suggests taking Pleasure Chest off the itinerary and instead adding the Manolo Blahnik store on the route. It is highly possible that many of the tourists cannot afford to buy something in the store but it can surely be a great experience to look at Carrie's favorite shoes and maybe try on a pair or two. Nearby there are also many other brand stores so the customers can walk around a little if they wish. Due to the high prices it is not likely that many people will want to stay for shopping, so the stop can be about 15 to 20 minutes long.

9.1.3 A balance between being on and off the bus

Currently the tour stops at Bleecker Street near Magnolia's Bakery and the customers are encouraged to do some shopping in the boutique stores on the street. Many reviews say that on this stop it feels unnecessary to spend approximately half an hour wandering around the expensive stores. (Tripadvisor 2014.)

In order to make the balance better the author suggests making a part of the tour a walking tour. Most of the locations on this tour are in the same areas in Greenwich Village so it is a good idea to walk some parts of the tour. The walking distances have to be short in order for disabled and older people to be able to attend the tour. The author suggests that instead of leaving people in front of Magnolia's Bakery and encouraging them to do shopping everyone can walk along Bleecker Street and feel like they are Carrie walking in her neighborhood.

The name of this stop can simply be Bleecker Street. On this stop the customers get off the bus in Washington Square Park where they have a moment to take pictures of the beautiful park with its Arc. After this the guide gathers everyone and walks them along Bleecker Street to Bleecker Park which is right next to Magnolia's Bakery. Here the bus is parked and fresh complimentary cupcakes are waiting for the customers. As showed in the map, Figure 7, on the next page, the distance between Washington Square Park and Bleecker Park is just a little under one kilometer, only 11 minutes of walking.

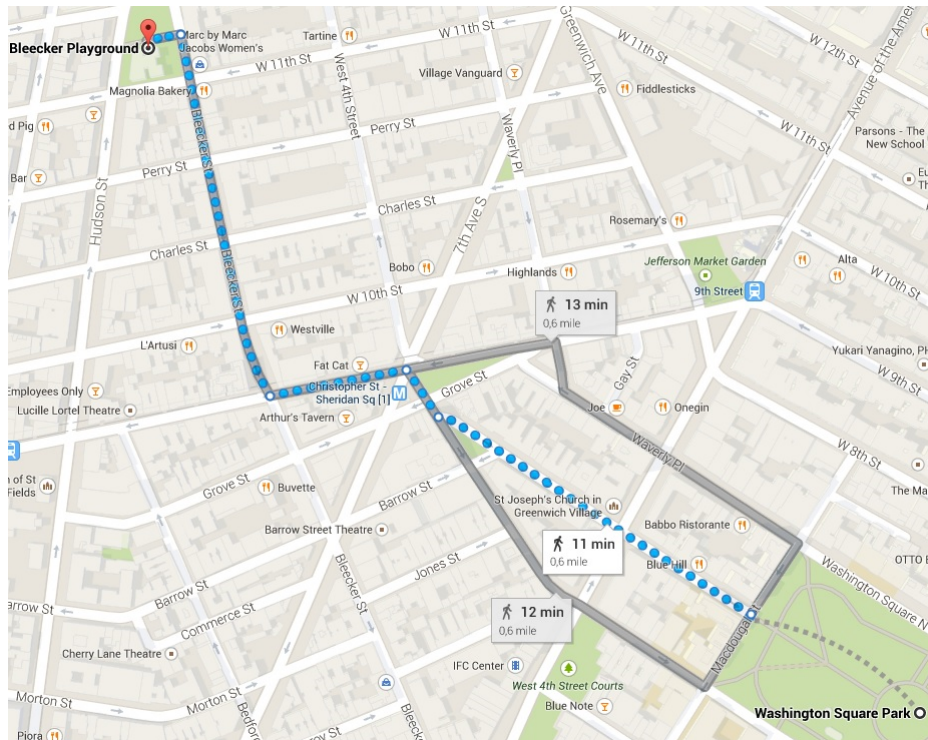


Figure 7. Suggested route for a walking part added to the tour. (Google Maps 2014)

9.1.4 Carrie's stoop

Due to the legal problems on Perry Street it is clear that On Location Tours cannot walk their customers through the street to show the steps that are used as the main character Carrie's stoop. On Location Tours was forced to stop taking people to Perry Street in 2008. Previously they used to walk people through the street and, without stopping for photographs; the customers were able to see the infamous stoop. (Tripadvisor 2014.)

Now for the developed tour the regulations can be gone around by driving the bus slowly through the street. The company must create a strict rule for the guides so that they never mention the name of the street. According to Tripadvisor (2014) in the end of the tour the tour guide gives a booklet about the locations that were shown during the tour. In the case of Carrie's stoop it can just be left out of the booklet and the guide can honestly tell the customers that they are not allowed to tell the exact address.

However, the possibility of this not being a legal thing must be acknowledged here. After this the last option is for the guides to tell the customers the reason why Carrie's stoop is not on the itinerary. From the business point of view it is

better to leave this information to the end of the tour to avoid people leaving the tour. In many of the reviews on Tripadvisor (2014) the customers complain about the fact that Carrie's stoop was not even mentioned. Surely the customers must understand if they were told that the tour company cannot let them walk around the street or if they cannot show them the area at all. The main thing seems to be that this issue should not stay unmentioned on the tours.

9.2 Gossip Girl Tour

The author took this tour while visiting New York during the thesis process and for her this tour felt very well done. The tour had just the right balance of being on and off the bus, the stops were frequent and there was a lot to learn about the series on this tour. The guide was very good as she is a fan herself, thus she was very enthusiastic about everything. By the end of the tour it was surprising that over three hours had passed so quickly. Even though the tour was very well done, there is always something that can be improved or added to make the experience even more exciting. Here are some suggestions for these changes.

9.2.1 The trivia

The guide gives out macaroons, one of the series' main character's favorite treat, to everyone on the tour. By the end of the tour when there are a few leftover macaroons there is a little trivia game where everyone has a chance to win themselves more macaroons. For each right answer a macaroon was offered as a prize. This is a fun addition to the tour and it is good for keeping people's interest up. It was clear that everyone enjoys this trivia a lot.

However, the trivia part felt more like something that is done only in case there are leftover macaroons. It is also something done to waste the time spent by standing in traffic. The author thinks that this is something the tour needs improving in. The trivia could take a bigger role in the tour and it could be developed more. There could be more questions and more treats to give out. There could even be some bigger prize for one very difficult question.

9.2.2 The souvenir postcard

Since the series Gossip Girl is still quite current and the actors of the series are at the peak of their acting careers, it could be very exciting for the fans to get postcards signed by these actors. This is an idea that could work perfectly for fans of this series but not so much for the fans of Sex and the City. In the case of SATC the fans like the storyline and are more interested in the characters than the actors themselves. The fans of GG are still young and they like to follow their idols' lives. They would be excited to get a postcard that is signed by their favorite actors.

The tours arranged by On Location Tours are taken by thousands of people each week. Thus it would be illogical to ask the actors to sign each postcard to make it more personal. A picture where all the main characters are can be chosen and all the actors just sign once on one picture. This signed picture can just be copied and these copies can be handed out on the tours. Already now the tours include a brochure about the tours and the characters so this postcard can be an addition in this. Even the copied picture is an exciting addition to the tour.

9.3 Evening tour

Since Sex and the City is a series about four adult women the series shows the characters in many of New York City's bars and night clubs. Even though Gossip Girl is a series about teenagers growing up they still like to party and go to clubs and bars. A great idea to attract customers would be to create separate evening tours that are like a pub crawl but with class. The customers can be taken from bar to bar and stories about the series can be told while doing this. Separate tours should be created for SATC and GG fans. On SATC Evening Tour conversations about men, fashion and womanhood, and of course New York City, can be encouraged by the guide since these are the big issues in the series. The GG Evening Tour is all about gossiping, meeting new people and seeing the Upper East Side.

This kind of tour cannot be done for the same size groups as the day tours attract. Since these tours take people to crowded bars and from there to the next ones, the ideal group size is 10-15 people. Also in order not to break any alco-

hol laws the guests, naturally, pay for their own drinks. The guide is with them to show them to the next bar and to keep the conversation up. Since the different bars are all around New York City it is wise for the tour to use a minibus that drives the customers between the bars.

This tour is ideal for customers from outside of New York City, especially the ones who have arrived alone. With this tour everyone gets to be in good company and it is a lot safer to be in bars with someone rather than going there alone without knowing the local ways and places. The guide works from 9 p.m. to midnight, when the customers can either stay in the bar or leave with the guide. During the three hours everyone gets a chance to make friends on the tour and they can possibly spend the rest of the evening with them.

The tours need to be separate because of the different style of bars and clubs visited on the Evening tour. On the SATC Evening Tour the bars visited are more retro and chic whereas the bars visited on the GG Evening Tour are very elegant and high-class. Also the clients are from such different age groups and possibly even backgrounds that it would be illogical to combine these people on one tour.

10 Summary and discussion

The aim of this research was to find out why people go on film location tours and what they like about them. After finding out the answer to these questions development plans were made for both tours in order to improve them. This thesis mainly helps the film location tour company in question but these findings can be used for further research in the area of film tourism. Even though the theme changes when applying this research to other film location tours, there are still the basic, expected and excitement needs that people have when attending theme tours. Understanding this can help a film tour company in creating their service.

This thesis researched reviews written by people who had taken film location tours by On Location Tours. This is New York City's largest film location tour company and it has big significance also outside the city. The reviews were tak-

en from Tripadvisor, travelling website where the content is created by the users. By reading these reviews the author could draw conclusions about the people's needs and wishes. After analyzing these reviews the development plans were done for each tour. Even though both tours are clearly planned well by the tour company, small improvements are always welcome.

There are not even nearly as many reviews about the Gossip Girl Sites Tour as about the Sex and the City Hotspots Tour. Gossip Girl had only 65 reviews on Tripadvisor by 14th September 2014. This can be explained by the fact that the series Gossip Girl just finished in the end of year 2012. Thus the series does not have the nostalgia factor yet and also the tour simply has not been running for so long. Overall the reviews are very positive and only a few negative reviews are written about the tour. (Tripadvisor 2014.)

Gossip Girl Tour got slightly more positive feedback than the tours based on Sex and the City but that does not necessarily mean that they are better or worse in any way. The difference is only three percent. Overall, these tours get a lot of positive feedback due to good planning and implementing from the part of On Location Tours. However, the results about Gossip Girl Tour need to be viewed critically due to the tour being quite new and due to the fact that there are a lot fewer reviews than about SATC Hotspots Tour.

Generally these film location tours get very positive feedback. The tours based on Sex and the City also get a lot of positive feedback despite the fact that the tour does not stop at the most iconic place connected with the series, at Carrie's stoop. It is clear that both these series are made with good screenwriting and planning since they are so addicting to the viewers. The viewers are so impacted by the series that they not only like to watch the series but also want to see where and how the series were filmed. For fans like this it is important to see filming locations that are highly relevant to the series. It is not enough to see a restaurant where one scene was shot; it is more relevant to see some character's home door or a restaurant regularly visited by the characters. This is why not seeing Carrie's stoop is so disappointing to the tour goers.

All in all, people's satisfaction with the tours depends a lot on their expectations and preferences. Some people are used to take guided tours everywhere they go and they enjoy it when a guide is talking a lot and showing them interesting places. However, some people are the opposite and they would rather see the places themselves by walking tours or no tours at all.

The most surprising finding in this thesis process was that a lot of people take film location tours. Since this is a form of niche tourism, the author expected to get less material to research. Since thousands of people use tours made by On Location Tours weekly, there are a lot of reviews. This makes the research more reliable because the sample of people is big enough. Another interesting finding was that since the tours cost around \$40 per person, people expect to get very good service. For this price it is not enough to get "okay" service. Thus when planning a tour like this it is important to either decide on a cheap price or plan the tours very carefully to give people the money's worth.

Research cannot be done without having the knowledge of the theory. First of all, special interest tourism and film tourism as a part of it were explained due to these themes not being common knowledge to everyone. After this a closer look was taken into customer experience because it was the main thing researched in this thesis. It is important to understand the basic, expected and excitement needs, and how to fulfil them, before going into the analysis.

This research is mainly helpful for On Location Tours because the specifics about the tours are about their tours. However, the reviews can be taken as a guideline to other already existing, as well as to future film tour companies. Filming in specific cities or locations functions as a marketing tool for the area. Thus this is an opportunity not only for private persons to create businesses but also for city or region administrations. This thesis shows how film tours are made by On Location Tours which creates a guideline to how it can be done.

In this research the development plan suggests how On Location Tours can improve their services. However, the development plan is not described in too much detail. The suggestions made here are all somewhat realistic and possible to execute. In order to research the possibilities of these suggestions a mar-

keting plan can be done. The aim of this thesis was only to list ideas that can be further implemented by the company in question. Also further research can be done about the possible productization of the suggestions made in the development plan of this thesis.

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