International Journal of Contents Tourism

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Book Review

森岡　毅 (Morioka Tsuyoshi). 『USJのジェットコースターはなぜ後ろ向きに走ったのか？』 *(Why does a roller coaster at USJ run backwards?).* Tokyo: Kadokawa, 2014. 256 pp. ¥1,400 (+tax), ISBN 978-4041106976.

Reviewed by: Philip Seaton (Hokkaido University).

Morioka Tsuyoshi is the chief marketing officer widely credited by the Japanese media with turning around the fortunes of Universal Studios Japan (USJ). USJ visitor numbers dropped from eleven million, when it opened in 2001, to between seven and eight million in 2009-2010. Morioka joined USJ from cosmetics giant Proctor and Gamble in 2010 and was the marketing brains behind a number of innovative attractions which saw visitor numbers climb steeply in the period 2010-2014 back to over ten million. These included the idea, as in the book's title, of having a roller coaster that ran backwards (Hollywood Dream – The Ride – Backdrop), but also the introduction of horror attractions during Halloween, the development of an area for young visitors (Universal Wonderland), and The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, a forty-five billion yen attraction that opened in 2014.

While this is not an academic book, Morioka is a tireless researcher of his target markets and the contents/brands associated with USJ attractions. Furthermore, he presents a clear method/ framework for generating business ideas and putting them into practice. As such, it is a hugely important book presenting corporate perspectives on contents tourism written by a leading practitioner. Written in an accessible style for a general audience, it gives a fascinating insider account of how contents tourism is designed, managed and marketed at one of Japan's top theme parks.

Morioka starts by debunking media representations of him as the man who turned around USJ. He credits Glenn Gumpel, the CEO who hired him, for starting the turnaround. The book focuses on the period after Morioka arrived and how he got the ideas for new attractions that resulted in home run after home run (this baseball analogy appears repeatedly throughout the book). In Chapter 1, he describes three 'rockets', or fundamental aims: first, making USJ appealing to a wider audience than just film fans; second, introducing the 'wow' factor by creating spectacular, unforgettable attractions; and third, shaking up USJ corporate culture.

Chapter 2 describes Morioka's battle to change corporate culture. He wanted to continue a strategy begun by Gumpel of making USJ more than just an American film theme park. For Morioka, film was only one format among many. He saw USJ's role as being a site of entertainment using the best brands and attractions available. This required shifting the corporate culture from brand name (Universal) to brand quality (world-class entertainment) (p. 43). In effect, this changed USJ from a site of American-film-induced tourism to a site of American film plus Japanese contents tourism. Morioka's first full year at USJ, 2011, was the park's tenth anniversary year, but the mood of 'self-restraint' (*jishuku*) following the 3/11 disaster caused a massive drop in visitor numbers. However, a successful campaign of allowing children to enter for free (supported by local politicians also keen to break the mood of self-restraint) and the introduction of horror attractions, such as zombie actors wandering the park after dark, during the Halloween season later in 2011 proved highly popular.

The next three chapters introduce various case studies. Chapter 3 describes the development of the Monster Hunter attraction based on a Japanese computer game. The hundreds of hours Morioka spent playing the game in order to understand fans' perspectives indicate his dedication to fan/guest research. Chapter 4 describes the achievement of the first 'rocket' of making USJ a park for all ages by having a themed zone especially for three- to six-year-olds: Universal Wonderland. Chapter 5 describes how USJ sustained growth in visitor numbers into 2013 despite very little cash being available (The Wizarding World of Harry Potter was by now under construction) by successfully renovating The Amazing Adventures of Spider-man - The Ride 4K3D and introducing the backwards roller coaster.

Having introduced these case studies of successful attraction development (albeit not without opposition to Morioka's ideas from some USJ employees, and often at the cost of great personal stress for Morioka), in Chapter 6 he introduces his 'innovative framework'. This is the practical heart of the book, which is sold as a how-to manual for business people seeking good business ideas. There are four keywords: framework, reapply, stock and commitment.

The framework section introduces three methods: the first is a strategic planning approach in which goals are set, a strategy to achieve them is considered, and then the plan is put into action; the second is a numerical approach in which the solution is found by a process of elimination and deduction; and the marketing approach focuses on building brand recognition. Meanwhile, 'reapply' means not being afraid to borrow/adapt ideas of other people that have worked; 'stock' refers to developing a large reservoir of experience; and 'commitment' speaks of the need to not give up. While none of these techniques are particularly revolutionary, they need to be well planned and methodically applied. Furthermore, not all good ideas result in complete success. The chapter ends with Morioka describing some of the practical problems faced when creating the critically well-received but financially unsuccessful Biohazard The Real attraction.

Chapter 7 is really a preview of the soon-to-open Wizarding World of Harry Potter (the book came out around the time the attraction opened). This chapter is more promotional than analytical, but restates the commitment of USJ to producing attractions of high quality with meticulous attention to detail. The conclusions restate the main points of the book and Morioka's commitment to push continually for new, innovative ideas and to open new markets.

In sum, this is an accessible and engaging first-hand account by someone who has had considerably more big hits than misses when creating contents tourism attractions. It is a salient reminder to academic researchers that theory does not need to be complicated. Sometimes simple concepts and methods work best. Morioka's numerous successes demonstrate that the real skill is being able to apply simple theory well in practical situations.

About the *International Journal of Contents Tourism*

The *International Journal of Contents Tourism* (www.cats.hokudai.ac.jp/ijct) is an open-access, refereed scholarly journal exploring the phenomenon of 'contents tourism', defined as travel behaviour motivated fully or partially by narratives, characters, locations and other creative elements of popular culture forms, including film, television dramas, manga, anime, novels and computer games. IJCT publishes articles of various lengths, from original research papers through to short blog entries. It is based at Hokkaido University, Japan, and the editors-in-chief are Professor Philip Seaton (Research Faculty of Media and Communication) and Professor Takayoshi Yamamura (Center for Advanced Tourism Studies).