Introduction

Along with transport and accommodation, attractions form one of the central components of tourism, providing a vital element in the visitors’ enjoyment and experience. They are important both at destinations and en route to a destination. One of the major problems in identifying attractions is that whilst they are patronized by tourists, more importantly, the scale and volume of visits are dominated by leisure and day trippers as well as local residents. In this respect the market for attractions is large, and it forms a vital part of the infrastructure of the destination area. Attractions provide a nucleus for visitor spending in destinations when they are linked to regeneration strategies. Thus a successful attraction industry is vital for a healthy tourism sector so that visitors have sufficient scope to undertake visits and spending during their stay. Attractions are also a major draw for many visits, especially in areas where the regeneration strategies by public and private sector agencies have underpinned future tourism development around such a hub of activity, as shown in the case study in Box 9.1.

Box 9.1 Case study: visitor attractions and tourism development – using heritage to regenerate an area

In the UK there has been a massive investment in visitor attractions using funding available through the Millennium Commission and lottery funds. In many urban and rural locations bids for these funds have been made to justify the use of tourism as a means to achieve urban regeneration objectives – a process that seeks to reverse economic and social decline after local employment has collapsed. This is shown in Figure 9.1, and highlights how many local authorities and public–private partnerships have sought to develop tourism as a means of harnessing new economic life in an area. Since the 1980s there have been both success stories and abject failures, where local authorities have invested upwards of £10 million in one attraction as the pivotal hub for tourism development in an area to stimulate economic development through tourism. However, in the new millennium there has been an over-investment in many areas, saturating the tourism market; this was shown in the case of the Millennium Dome, which cost £850 million and down-scaled visitor numbers from 12 million to 7 million for its year of operation. This mirrors the experience of many other attractions, which undergo a short-term interest-led boom after opening followed
by a decline by the second or third year after opening. In some cases bankruptcy and closure has resulted, and increased competition has meant that many attractions now have to invest in new exhibits and elements in the attraction to reinvent themselves (i.e. invest in innovation) in order both to compete and to remain attractive to the visiting public.

In Scotland, two new projects with substantial public–private sector funding are:

1 The £87 million Millennium Link project in Falkirk (funded by Scottish Enterprise, British Waterways, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and other agencies), which opened in May 2002, and a 68-mile restoration of the Forth & Clyde and Forth Canals, which has re-linked Glasgow and Edinburgh by canal.

2 The Lomond Shores development at Balloch, which is discussed below.
The focal point of the Millennium Link is the large canal lift, which is 35 m long, 35 m wide and 35 m deep, and has a large visitor centre and visitor experience designed around the new engineering project. This project seeks to promote tourism-related spending and development in a town that has experienced major employment loss, and is now seeking to reposition itself using tourism as a means towards reaching that goal. In October 2002, to extend the regenerative effect of the project, a £1.5 million television advertising campaign was launched to promote the attraction to Scotland and Northern England. This was part-funded by the ERDF Structural Fund (£700 000) to seek to expand visitor interest in the attraction (some 300 000 visited the site between May and September 2002) and encourage visitors to visit other places and the town of Falkirk.

The other large-scale that has acted as a catalyst for employment growth and economic change is the Lomond Shores project in Balloch, on the shores of Loch Lomond in the newly created Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. This £60 million project was developed as a gateway to the new National Park on a former gravel extraction site and derelict and polluted factory site, with 90 000 square feet of retail and restaurant space. The main feature is the new Kincairn Tower, with viewing galleries, eating areas, an audiovisual show and a tourist information centre nearby (see Plate 9.1). The development has learnt many of the lessons of similar projects in the 1990s (which failed), and has developed leisure shopping on the site to pull visitors in and retain them at the site while encouraging them to spend time and money on a wide range of goods. The gateway visitor centre, operated by the Argyll, Islands, Loch Lomond, Stirling and Trossachs Area Tourist Board, was also opened at a cost of over £2 million to develop a greater understanding of the National Park and visitor potential of the area. A linking sightseeing bus tour also extends the potential experience from Balloch to Luss, a small historic village that has been restored and is a television filming location on Loch Lomond.

The Lomond Shores development illustrates the regeneration process at work in Figure 9.1, since the first well-known visitor to Loch Lomond was the diarist Samuel Johnson in 1773. This began the interest and development cycle for tourism in the area. The Loch’s literary associations with the poetry of Walter Scott and the novel Rob Roy promoted the area to a larger international audience. This was followed by further development of the Romantic Movement in the nineteenth century with visits from other literary figures such as Wordsworth, Keats, Dickens and Eliot, further extending its growth potential and appeal. These initial interests were followed by substantial
development and increased access to the area after 1850. In that year, Thomas Cook organized the first group tour to the area, and the increase in Glasgow steamship visits began (see Chapter 2). These developments created both a day trip and a staying market, stimulating a local tourism industry. In the post-war period, this market gradually withered as car and coach tours bypassed Balloch and visitors passed through, although a substantial recreational boating base developed in the town as many vessels were moored on the shores of the Loch. Therefore, the creation of Lomond Shores is an attempt to recreate a destination for visitors on Loch Lomond, to encourage visitors to journey there as a destination in its own right or to stop en route at other areas in the National Park. The visitor attraction therefore combines the historical associations of the area and a modern-day visitor experience, building on the heritage and global interest in Loch Lomond and romantic images. The tourism development process has been stimulated, with assistance from public sector agencies, to capitalize on the strengths and appeal of the area, publicized by the creation of the new National Park, using Loch Lomond as the gateway to the area.