Tourists’ Perceptions of Eco-Sustainable Practices While Traveling

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ABSTRACT

The economic influence, leveraged with the positive environmental implications associated with sustainability practices, has resulted in the emergence of eco-sustainability as an up and coming area of study. Further research implies consumers are willing to seek out eco-sustainable businesses. This study aims to examine whether or not tourists who employ eco-sustainable practices in their daily routines also maintain these practices while traveling for pleasure. The research will essentially bridge the gap between conflicting research which indicates a willingness to pay more, and studies which exhibit price sensitivity in relation to travelers green practices. While tourists may indicate they are environmentally-conscious in their personal lives, research scrutinizing the extent to which these habits are applied during travel will be valuable to businesses seeking to identify themselves as eco-sustainable. Furthermore, this study will help to ascertain whether tourists seek out environmentally-friendly hotels and restaurants, or whether these entities are viewed as simply a convenience while travelling.

Keywords: Eco-Sustainability, Tourist Behavior, Green Tourism, Preservation, Protection

INTRODUCTION

Eco-Sustainability is a growing and firmly recognized spectrum in the hospitality field. Worldwide tourism receipts indicate tourism had a positive economic impact of over U.S. $944 billion (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2009, p. 3) Eco-sustainable tourism accounts for approximately 1 percent of all tourism receipts or a $9.4 billion economic impact annually (Block, 2009). The National Restaurant Association recently published findings which indicate “4 out of 10 full service and 31 percent of quick service” restaurants have set goals of implementing eco-responsible measures in 2010 (Lawinski, 2010). Major international hotel chains have implemented eco-preservation initiatives as well. Merriot announced in early 2010 its goal to have over 9% of their 3,300 hotels LEED certified within five years (Eilperin & Sachs, 2010). The economic influence, leveraged with the positive environmental implications associated with sustainability practices, has resulted in the emergence of eco-sustainability as an up and coming area of study.

According to the U.S. Travel Association, over 75% of adults in the U.S. believe they are eco-conscious (U.S. Travel Association, 2010). However, this same study, in addition to research
conducted by Travelzoo.com and the U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, revealed consumers have difficulty finding affordable eco-friendly hotels, and are often unwilling to pay extra for green accommodations (U.S. Travel Association, 2010; PR Newswire, 2010; U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1999). Conversely, Mambo Spouts Marketing, a leader in green product marketing, found up to 60% of tourists are motivated to pursue eco-friendly products and services related to travel (Mambo Sprouts Marketing, 2007). Data exemplifies eco-conscious travelers in the U.S. are “willing to spend, on average, 8.5% more for travel” on environmentally sustainable tourism operators (Wright, 2001). Similar results indicate nearly 40% of respondents to a TripAdvisor eco-sustainability survey would be willing to pay an additional premium to stay at an eco-sustainable property (Hotel-Online, 2006).

Numerous studies have been conducted regarding how companies may achieve an advantage through eco-sustainability practices and the potential benefits, such as financial savings, upon implementing ecologically sound measures (Bohdanowicz & Martinac, 2007; Chan, 2009; Laing & Frost, 2010; Wallace & Russell, 2004). Previous research has focused on hotel resource consumption, environmental management systems, hosting green events, and minimizing the impact of tourists on environmentally sensitive regions. Research in this area is imperative, as businesses and travelers are increasingly adopting green interests and lifestyles (Scarpa, 2009).

Purpose

This study aims to examine whether or not tourists who employ eco-sustainable practices in their daily routines also maintain these practices while traveling for pleasure. The research will essentially bridge the gap between conflicting research which indicates a willingness to pay more, and studies which exhibit price sensitivity in relation to travelers green practices. While tourists may indicate they are environmentally-conscious in their personal lives, research scrutinizing the extent to which these habits are applied during travel will be valuable to businesses seeking to identify themselves as eco-sustainable. Furthermore, this study will help to ascertain whether tourists seek out environmentally-friendly hotels and restaurants, or whether these entities are viewed as simply a convenience while travelling. This research is unique in its approach, since it will examine which traits consumers are looking for in a green hospitality business, and whether these firms will benefit financially from increased demand if environmentally conscious policies are adopted.

The instrument for this study was a survey which consisted of 23 questions geared toward the previously mentioned eco-sustainability objectives, and 11 questions pertaining to demographics. The survey was distributed electronically via Qualtrics to residents residing in 7 pre-determined cities. The cities surveyed included: Salt Lake City, Oklahoma City, San Antonio, Dallas, Houston, Phoenix, and Denver. The cities were selected based upon geographic location, allowing a general consensus the states should be considered part of the southwest region of the U.S. Furthermore, these destinations were selected as they maintain the highest populations in their respective states. Due to the geographic size of Texas, three locations were selected in this state in an effort to achieve a more representative sample.
The survey utilized a variety of measurements to gauge respondents’ answers. For questions pertaining to environmental preservation, eco-sustainable travel habits, recycling behavior and attitudes, environmental concern, and eco-sustainability measures, a 7-point Likert-type scale was used. The measurements for the Likert-type scale ranged from the answer of 1 = Strongly Disagree, to 7 = Strongly Agree. Demographic questions were categorical or dichotomous in nature.

Data analysis will involve multiple statistical measurements including t-tests, calculations of mean variables for demographic questions, and ANOVA analysis. ANOVA analysis will be utilized to compare responses of independent groups of respondents. Due to the geographic locations encompassed in data collection, it is expected location will serve as at least one component for establishing independent samples.

REFERENCES


