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Francioni, Jennifer and Byrd, Erick T., "Beer Tourists: Who Are They?" (2016). *Travel and Tourism Research Association: Advancing Tourism Research Globally*. 30.

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Beer Tourists: Who Are They?

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ABSTRACT

Craft beer as an industry has been growing rapidly across the United States over the past decade. This growth and interest has created an emerging niche market in tourism, beer tourism. The purpose of this study is to expand on the knowledge of who a beer tourist is based on demographics, psychographics, and motivational factors. Also, this paper explored if this micro-niche could be further divided into more specific segments. Results from the study show that the main motivation for beer tourists to visit a brewery is related to experiencing/ tasting new beers and learning more about the beer, brewery, or industry. It was also found that visitor's whose main travel purpose was to visit the brewery were statistically significantly different on 5 motivational items than those visitors who had an alternative main purpose to their visit.

Keywords: *beer tourism, market segmentation, motivation*

INTRODUCTION

The travel and tourism industry is one of the largest industries in the world. In the United States leisure visitor spending totaled \$526 billion with U.S. residents taking 1.5 billion trips for leisure purposes (USTA, 2011). It is important to note, that no single destination or attraction can meet the wants and needs of all tourists. Therefore, tourism related organizations and businesses need to identify and market to specific market segments that are interested in their destination. Market segmentation is the dividing of a population (i.e., cultural tourists) into groups based on specific identifiable characteristics (i.e., motivation, demographics, interests). The division of the population starts with the identification of a characteristic to segment the market into a homogenous group. Segmentation assumes people are different and that the differences are related to a specific behavior or attitude and based on the differences people can be grouped into segments (MacKay, et al., 2002). The purpose of segmentation is to identify specific profitable market clusters of an industry, develop products and services to meet consumer's needs or wants, and market to them with relevant communications (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006).

Tourism niches can assist destinations and attractions in market segmentation. According to Robinson and Novelli (2005) tourism can be segmented into niches (macro-niches and micro-niches). Niche tourism refers to designing a specified destination to meet the motivations of a

certain group and market segment. Niche tourism focuses on the individual's interests and travel desires making it, the destination, more unique and marketable. A macro-niche can be defined as a niche that has a larger market segment (e.g., rural tourism, sports tourism, environmental tourism) while micro-niches are the larger segments broken down further and are normally the activities practiced by those in that particular group (e.g., cycling tourism, geo-tourism, gastronomy tourism) (Robinson & Novelli 2005).

One tourism niche that has become more popular is beverage tourism. Beverage tourism is similar to culinary tourism except instead of traveling for food, visitors travel for a certain beverage (Plummer, Telfer, Hashimoto, & Summers, 2005). Wine tourism is a prominent type of beverage tourism as evident that most literature is focused on wine (Plummer et al., 2005). Nevertheless, there is recent research in which authors (i.e. Jolliffe & Aslam, 2009; Plummer et al., 2005; Spracklen, 2011) have focused on whisky, bourbon tourism, tea tourism, sake tourism, and beer tourism. There are a very limited number of academic articles on beer tourism. Beer tourism is defined as tourism that results when a visitor's primary motivation to travel is to visit a brewery, beer festival, or beer show to experience the beer-making process and/or tasting of beer (Plummer et al., 2005). This niche market is a relatively new and growing trend in the tourism industry; this is especially true in North Carolina. Plummer et al. (2005) defines beer tourism as a visitor's primary motivation to travel is to go to a brewery, beer festival, or beer show to experience the beer-making process and/or tasting of beer.

Beer tourism, a subcategory of beverage tourism, is considered a type of niche tourism market. An understanding of the beer tourism niche is important in order to be able to successfully market to those who have this interest. More specifically, an understanding of who visits craft breweries and what motivates them to visit will assist marketers to effectively promote this new tourism niche. Determining what motivates and drives a consumer is an important component of identifying a market segment and developing a marketing strategy to grow an industry. The purpose of this study is to expand on the knowledge of who a beer tourist is based on demographics, psychographics, and motivational factors. Also, this paper will explore if this micro-niche be further divided into more specific segments based on the above variables.

METHODOLOGY

During the fall of 2011, a study of visitors to North Carolina craft breweries was conducted throughout North Carolina. A questionnaire was developed to collect the information for this study. The questionnaire was based on past beverage tourism research with modifications to fit craft breweries to help insure validity. The questionnaire was sent to those in the academic field and the NC Brewers Guild. Based on feedback, adjustments were made to the survey. Once the adjustments were made the questionnaires the survey was pilot tested at a NC brewery. Based on suggestion modifications were made to the instrument and then distributed at 20 breweries in North Carolina. A visitor intercept methodology was employed at each brewery location, where a convenient sample of the visitors to the brewery was used. Visitors to the brewery were approached and asked if they would be willing to participate in the study. If they agreed, they were given the survey to complete and return.

Descriptive statistics were analyzed to determine the demographics of the brewery visitors including: age, gender, marital status, race, income level, education level, and zip code. Descriptive statistics were also used to investigate and describe a tourist profile, including psychographics, responses to marketing, and motivational information of the brewery visitors. Independent sample t-tests and cross tabulations were also conducted to uncover differences between subgroups of respondents.

RESULTS

Of the 505 respondents to the questionnaire 68% were local residents while 32% were considered tourists to the region. For the purpose of this study all other results look specifically at the 198 tourists respondents. For 36.7% of these respondents the beer/ brewery was the main reason for their visit to the destination. Beer tourists' travel party size averaged 3.27 adults and they planned to stay at the destination for about 3.16 nights. The majority (60.7%) were males and highly educated (75.3% had a college degree). Almost 3/4 of the respondents were employed fulltime (72.9%) and over half of the respondents (51.4%) report a household income over \$80,000.

Table 1. Motivations for Beer Tourism Travel Decision

Item	Total Sample Mean	Main Purpose of Trip was Visiting the Brewery	Main Purpose of Trip was not Visiting the Brewery
To taste new beer	4.52	4.53	4.52
To experience NC beer*	4.24	4.43	4.10
To increase my beer knowledge**	3.98	4.26	3.85
So I can be with friends/family	3.75	3.79	3.75
To buy beer*	3.54	3.79	3.38
To enjoy the entertainment	3.22	3.33	3.14
To get away for the weekend/day	3.19	3.45	3.04
To relieve stress	3.15	3.10	3.12
So I can meet people with similar interest*	2.76	2.98	2.56
To help bring the family together more*	2.40	2.75	2.21
For food tasting	2.11	2.07	2.15
To get drunk	1.72	1.65	1.72

* p-value less than 0.05

** p-value less than .01

To measure the main motivations for the beer tourists' visit to the area 12 Likert-style items on a five point scale were employed (see Table 1). Results from the study show that the main motivation for beer tourists to visit a brewery is related to experiencing/ tasting new beers and learning more about the beer, brewery, or industry. This is followed by motivations related to relaxation. Of interest culinary tourism (i.e. food tasting), which is often thought of as a similar niche to beer tourism was the second lowest motivator with the average respondent indicating that it was not important.

Comparing tourists whose main purpose was to visit the brewery with other tourists sampled it was found that there was a statistically significant difference with five of the items (see table 1). Individuals whose main purpose was visiting the brewery found almost all items to be of more importance with the exception of stress relief and getting drunk.

CONCLUSIONS

A local brewery can be considered a strong supporting attraction for a destination. As the literature indicates beverage tourism and in this case beer tourism is a viable niche for destinations with breweries or brew pubs to target. Also, for destinations looking to diversify and/or expand their tourism attractions a brewery could be a viable option. NC has a critical mass of brewery visitors, substantiating the need to focus resources on marketing this industry. The results showed that 13% of the tourists to NC breweries expressed the main reason for traveling was to visit a NC brewery.

Beer tourists are motivated by more than just simply drinking beer. The beer is obviously important, but its importance is in the uniqueness and individuality of the beer and brewery. Those attempting to attract beer tourist to their area or attraction should focus on the uniqueness of the beer offerings they have and include information about the brewing process and the history of the beer and brewery. This is especially vital to destinations that plan to use the brewery as part of their attraction mix. The results of this study show that individuals that would be willing to travel specifically to visit a brewery find these items more important than those that might consider the brewery an additional part of the overall destination package.

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