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Finding Happiness Through Globetrotting: Push Factors of Long-Term Travellers

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STUDY TITLE: “Finding Happiness Through Globetrotting: Push Factors of Long-Term Travellers”

INTRODUCTION: In addition to attitude, perception, personality/self-concept and learning, motivation is a crucial psychological factor that impacts tourist behaviour (Boo & Jones, 2009; Chen & Uysal, 2003; Fodness, 1994; Jang & Cai, 2002; Maslow, 1943; Yuan & McDonald, 1990). Since people have travelled more and more in recent years, the necessity of understanding the motivational factors of travel has also become increasingly important (Yuan & McDonald, 1990). Knowledge, in return, helps stakeholders better accommodate the needs of future travellers of all kinds, in the planning of transportation infrastructures, accommodation, retailing, dining and entertainment (Li, Law & Wang, 2010). Thus, tourism research benefits the economic, environmental and cultural sustainability of touristic destinations, especially in rural areas and in developing countries (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2015).

LITERATURE: Travelling in general is commonly linked to happiness, a search for a ‘getaway’ or a recurrent modern way of escaping from daily stress. Many believe that it increases quality of life due to the many benefits travelling induces (Hsu & Huang, 2008; Cai & Jang, 2002; Chick, Durrenberger, Ribeiro & Yarnal, 2009). But while most studies have put focus on the mainstream travellers, almost none have shown interest for the long-term travellers that dedicate a big part of their life to exploring the world. The term long-term traveller refers to a person who travels widely (Merriam- Webster Dictionary) and spends more time travelling than a traditional holiday period would allow, most often longer than a year (Elsrud, 2001, cited in Brun, Larsen & Øgaard, 2011). This particular way of extended holidaying has gained popularity since the 1960s (Brun, Larsen & Øgaard, 2011), but because this trend is relatively new, literature on the topic is still rare.

METHODS: The current study was inspired mainly by the work of Brun, Larsen & Øgaard (2011) who conducted one of only few studies on backpackers and other individualist travellers, and Klenosky’s (2002) unique qualitative study on the push and pull factors of travellers. It was intended to pursue the exploration of long-term travellers’ motivation and help clarify how long-term travel affects their subjective wellbeing. There were two research questions: 1) Why do people travel long-term? and 2) How does long-term travel contribute to happiness? Semi-

structured interviews were conducted with 22 participants using a purposive sample. Interview transcripts were triangulated to external sources (participants' websites and blogs). Data were coded and analyzed in the NVivo qualitative software program using a mixture of intuitive and methodological (constant comparison) processes.

FINDINGS: Findings revealed that old misconceptions surrounding long-term travel still exist. For example, misconceptions such as dated definitions, that this type of travel is best suited for single men, journey as an escape and as a way to achieve fame and glory) still persist. The current study contributes to existing findings by shedding a new light on what long-term travel is, why long-term travellers prefer the road to the modern Western lifestyle, and how the journey enriches their lives. The study highlights the pursuit of freedom and personal growth, open-mindedness to the world and its incredible diversity, and a life path for a self-fulfilling life.

CONCLUSION: Although long-term travellers represent a marginal percentage of the total number of travellers worldwide, their impact is nevertheless significant, particularly in rural areas and developing countries. Long-term travellers are more likely to travel to remote areas than the mainstream tourists, they are more willing to endure hardship, and they spend more time travelling than any other types of travellers. Findings on this utopian alternative to the modern Western life increase our understanding of travel and, maybe most importantly, on humankind's pursuit of happiness.

KEYWORDS: Travel motivation, leisure travel, happiness/wellbeing, push factors, globetrotters/long-term travellers

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