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AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION INTO THE LEISURE CONSTRAINTS OF RESORT GUESTS

BY

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the constraints to participating in resort activity programs that some guests feel when they vacation at a resort. Though vacations are conceived by some as "sacred" and "free from everyday worries", this paper shows that many of the same constraints identified by leisure researchers, in studies of everyday life also exist on vacation. Further more, these constraints are shown to vary depending upon the age and family status of the respondents. Overall, the greatest constraint to activity participation was shown to be a lack of information about the programs though other factors such as price issues and a lack of time were also considered important.

INTRODUCTION

To many people the idea of a visit to a resort conjures up dreams of almost pure relaxation. Graburn (1975) says "Pleasure vacations are a sacred part of life and a special form of play free from everyday worries." Relaxing by the pool, sailing, biking, or golf and tennis are promoted in brochures as ex-

amples of an ideal vacation. Yet resort activity professionals often report less than full participation at scheduled activities. In order to understand these participation patterns, researchers must investigate leisure constraints.

Identifying and understanding leisure constraints has been an important area for study for years. Edgar Jackson suggests that the study of leisure constraints is expanding and becoming even more refined and specialized within the overall leisure studies discipline. Constrained leisure has been investigated in a number of settings from sports enthusiasts to outdoor recreationists and for different subgroups of the population (2).

Kay and Jackson (3) developed a list of twenty-two constraints used in a study comparing constraints with participation. Jackson (2) and Hultzman, (1) reported six dimensions of leisure constraints consistently identified in constraint literature. Constraint dimensions include: accessibility, social isolation, personal reasons, costs, time commitments and facilities.

When constraints are mentioned in the tourism field, they are usually considered as constraints (or barriers) to taking pleasure trips rather than constraints to activity participation while on vacation.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate constraints to recreation participation reported by guests at a large resort and to compare those constraints to recreation participation constraints previously identified in the literature by Jackson and Hultzman.

METHODOLOGY

Open ended survey questions were used to identify constraints to recreation participation. The questions were included as part of a comprehensive survey of resort recreation activities at a major resort located on the Florida Gulf Coast. The survey was developed in cooperation with the resort marketing and activities department and was included in an annual promotional mailing to 40,000 past resort guests. Due to the large number of questionnaires initially mailed, no attempt was made to conduct follow up mailings or reminders. Participation was encouraged first by explaining the value of the survey in developing future resort activities and secondly by entering respondents in a drawing for a complimentary weekend vacation at the resort.

Overall, 674 completed surveys were returned for analysis. One hundred-eighty five respondents answered the open-ended question "What factors prevent you from participating in recreation programs when you visit the resort?" Some respondents indicated multiple factors preventing participation yielding 214 separate comments. Content analysis was performed on the open-ended comments. Once analyzed, the comments

were categorized into the constraint categories suggested by Jackson & Hultzman and were entered into SPSS with other quantitative data.

RESULTS

Respondent profile

Of the 674 respondents, 348 (53%) were female while 316 (47%) were male. The average age of respondents was 44.6 years with the most common response being 41 years. Most respondents reported having children. One hundred one respondents (15%) reported having one child while 258 (38%) reported having two children and 116 (17%) reported having 3 children. Seventy-five respondents (11%) reported having more than three children while 129 (19%) reported having no children at all. Respondents were all from the United States. Overall, 479 (74%) of the respondents were from Southeast. The most common states of residence reported were Georgia 122 (18%), Alabama 98 (15%) and Florida (10%).

Analysis of research question

Constraining factors were grouped into six categories then analyzed by frequency. Issues such as price, lack of awareness, lack of interest and lack of time are similar to dimensions previously identified by Jackson & Hultzman. Physical limitations and having to take care of children were identified as separate constraint dimensions.

The constraints most often cited were "Lack of Awareness", mentioned 35% of the time; "Lack of Time", mentioned 23% of the time and "Price Issues", mentioned 21% of the time. (Table 1). "Lack of interest" or "Interested in other programs" was mentioned

11% of the time while “Having to take care of children” was mentioned 7% of the time and “Physical limitations” were mentioned 3% of the time.

The identified constraints were further analyzed by several demographic variables: gender, age group, and ages of children. There were no significant differences in frequencies of constraints reported depending upon gender. (Table 2) though there were differences based upon age of the respondent and ages of the children.

Table 3 indicates differences based on the age of the respondent. For respondents between the ages 20-29, lack of awareness was cited most often (55%) as a reason for not participating in recreation activities, followed by price issues (25%). Respondents ages 30-39, ages 40-49 and ages 50-59 reported lack of awareness (about 30% of the time) and lack of time (about 26% of the time) most often. Respondents over the age of 60 were more likely to report Lack of awareness (53%) and Lack of interest (15.4%).

Overall, a lack of awareness of resort activities was mentioned most often for every age group. In addition, respondents under the age of 49 mentioned price issues more often than the older groups. Generally, older respondents were more likely to report a lack of interest than younger ones. Time constraints were an issue for all groups older than 29 years of age. Taking care of children was reportedly a constraint primarily for respondents ages 30-39 while physical limitations were mentioned only for respondents aged 40 and over.

Constraints were also found to vary depending upon the ages of the children, as seen in Table 4. Though all groups indicated a lack of awareness was a major constraint,

those with children younger than 6 years of age were also more likely to feel price issues (25.8%) and having to take care of children (25.8%) were important constraints. Respondents with children aged 7-12 and 13-18 were reportedly more constrained by a lack of time (36.4%) than other issues.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Care must be taken in generalizing these of these findings. This data was collected from one coastal resort in the southeast and may not be true for other hospitality operations.

This paper supports the identification of core leisure constraints reported by Jackson and Hultzman. It is interesting to note the congruity between the general leisure constraints previously identified and the constraints found with pleasure vacationers. Apparently, in opposition to Graburn, the carefree resort vacation rather than being a “sacred time...free from everyday worries” carries many of the leisure constraints of ordinary life.

The most commonly reported constraint was lack of awareness. This finding, in itself is a major concern for resort managers. More effective ways must be found to inform resort guests about activities programs. The second most common constraint, lack of time, might indicate that some over-programming might be taking place. Perhaps activity programmers should consider a slower pace of programs to accommodate the “relaxed” vacationer. Price issues were somewhat important to respondents in this study. Some operations have addressed this by instituting “all inclusive pricing” for resort guests. Others should be cautious of price resistance from guests.

Further research into the leisure constraints of pleasure travelers should be conducted. This line of research should be replicated at a number of destinations. An area of further development might be to examine the relationship between these perceived constraints and overall satisfaction.

REFERENCES

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TABLE 1
FREQUENCIES OF CONSTRAINT DIMENSIONS

Constraint Categories	Frequency	Percent
Price Issues	45	21%
Lack of Awareness	76	35%
Lack of interest/Interest in other activities	23	11%
Lack of time	50	23%
Having to take care of children	14	7%
Physical Limitations	6	3%
Total	214	

TABLE 2
CONSTRAINT FREQUENCIES BY GENDER

	Male	Female
Price Issues	17 16.5%	28 25.2%
Lack of Awareness	40 38.8%	36 32.4%
Lack of Interest/ Interest in Other Activity	10 9.7%	13 11.7%
Lack of Time	26 25.2%	24 21.6%
Having to Take Care of Children	6 5.8%	8 7.2%
Physical Limitations	4 3.9%	2 1.8%
	103	111
	X²=4.03	p=.545

TABLE 3

CONSTRAINT FREQUENCIES BY AGE CATEGORY

	20-29 years	30-39 years	40-49 years	50-59 years	60 + years
Price Issues	5 25.0%	13 22.0%	19 24.1%	7 16.3%	1 7.7%
Lack of Awareness	11 55.0%	17 28.8%	27 34.2%	14 32.6%	7 53.8%
Lack of Interest/ Interest in Other Activity	2 10.0%	4 6.8%	7 8.9%	8 18.6%	2 15.4%
Lack of Time	1 5.0%	16 27.1%	20 25.3%	12 27.9%	1 7.7%
Having to Take Care of Children	1 5.0%	9 15.3%	4 5.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Physical Limitations	0.0%	0.0%	2 2.5%	2 4.7%	2 15.4%
	20	59	79	43	13
		$X^2=36.27$	$p=.014$		

TABLE 4

CONSTRAINT FREQUENCIES BY AGES OF CHILDREN

	No Children/ Adult children	0 - 6 years	7 - 12 years	13 -18 years
Price Issues	13 14.6%	8 25.8%	5 22.7%	19 26.8%
Lack of Awareness	36 40.4%	11 35.5%	6 27.3%	22 31.0%
Lack of Interest/ Interest in Other Activity	14 15.7%	3 9.7%	1 4.5%	5 7.0%
Lack of Time	21 23.6%	1 3.2%	8 36.4%	20 28.2%
Having to Take Care of Children	0.0%	8 25.8%	2 9.1%	4 5.6%
Physical Limitations	5 5.6%	0.0%	0.0%	1 1.4%
	89	31	22	71
		$X^2=44.13$	$p. < .000$	