

## THE BENEFITS OF SHORT STAY CARAVAN TRAVEL BASED ON THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GREY CARAVANNERS IN AUSTRALIA

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Recently there has been an abundance of research on “grey nomad” travel in Australia and this subset of drive tourism is regarded as an expanding travel market segment. Grey nomads are older people, 55 years and older, who travel independently for extended periods of time. However, little attention has been given to short-stay travel by older adults who are members of a caravan club. Such membership involves attendance at monthly rallies over a weekend at a selected destination that is usually approximately 200 km from the club’s base location. A total of 30 interviews were conducted to explore the benefits of short-stay caravanning to older people’s lives. A number of motivations emerged from the interviews, such as friendship with like-minded travelers; discovering new places; and experiencing feelings of enjoyment. Overall, short-stay travel was strongly linked to the importance of making new friends and being part of a social group, as well as the enjoyment received from discovering new and exciting places to visit.

Key words: Grey caravanners; Older travelers; Short-stay caravan travel; Motivations; Australia; Rural

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### Introduction

Caravanning is a specialized form of drive tourism in which the vehicle serves a dual purpose of providing both transport and accommodation. Caravanning has been defined by Prideaux and McClymont (2006) as a “subset of tourism where the main form of accommodation used during a trip was a caravan. The caravan can either be stationary

and located in a caravan park or mobile and towed behind a vehicle” (p. 46). To support this subset of drive tourism, the development of an extensive network of caravan parks has been established throughout different countries around the world (McClymont, Thompson, & Prideaux, 2011).

Caravanning is a popular leisure activity that goes as far back in time as the 1880s when the gypsies roamed the English and European

countryside. After World War I horse-drawn vans were soon replaced with motor cars and the commercial manufacture of caravans began. In the 1930s caravanning became extremely popular in the US with an estimated production of some 400,000 caravans. In Australia the caravan industry was also booming, even though manufacturers were content to closely copy English designs. Some caravanning also became widespread in South Africa and New Zealand, mainly using local amateur-built vans (Whiteman, 1973).

In Australia, in particular, this popular form of holidaying can be traced back to the 1920s (Prideaux & McClymont, 2006). As a result, a number of large industries have emerged to service the caravan market including caravan parks, caravan manufacturers, attractions, and the retail and repair sectors. Today caravans have become more than just a "bedroom on wheels" as they were in the past, and now feature well-appointed kitchen spaces, internal shower and toilet features, and comfortable living areas, often focused around flat-screen televisions connected to the global media by satellite dishes (McClymont et al., 2011). "Empty nester" caravaners are now demanding Internet connections and en suite facilities, while gray and black water dump facilities are needed in rural areas.

Because of these contemporary trends, caravan production in Australia is now booming, with Gough and Gough (2009) noting that up to 70% of caravan sales in Australia have been made by persons aged 65 years and older. It has been estimated that 18,000 caravans are built each year (Brannelly, 2003). Carter (2002) further estimated that older couples have undertaken approximately 200,000 caravan trips in a single year for longer than 6 week's duration. As a result, the caravan industry has taken a significant upward trend, with new caravan registrations increasing at an average rate of 14% per year, contributing about A\$2 billion into the Australian economy every year (<http://www.caravanindustry.com.au/>).

This is because the world's population is aging. In Australia, the number of persons aged 65 years or older is presently estimated to be 2.6 million, or 14% of the total population. Significantly, this proportion of the population, referred to generally as the baby boomer generation, is also projected to rapidly increase to be over 26% by 2051 (Australian

Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Many tourism business operators are now being forced to quickly reposition their services and products to acknowledge the significant economic and social impact that the baby boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) are having on the tourism industry (Paxson, 2009). On a global scale, the travel options selected by baby boomers now account for an increasingly larger proportion of total dollar value of all vacation spending. The flow-on effect of such being a commensurate shift in travel behavior patterns with respect to the type of destinations chosen and the holidays undertaken (Patterson & Pegg, 2009). In the Australian setting, this change has been equated with a recent trend away from the traditional family holiday at the beach to one where many older travelers, colloquially referred to in this article as "grey caravaners," are traveling in social groupings to visit rural and remote areas of Australia, often on trips that take several months to complete (Prideaux & McClymont, 2006).

Yet a significant component of the older adult travel market has been ignored by researchers to date, that is, of "short-stay caravan travelers." This emerging market is completely different from the grey nomad movement. This is because leisure and tourism trends indicate that older people are less likely to participate in extensive journeys as they approach old-old age (generally 75 years and older). Generally, this cohort group prefers to go on shorter visits, only being away from home for a short duration, especially if they still are in full-time employment (Cridland, 2008). However, the travel patterns of older short-stay caravan travelers have not been extensively studied, even though it has been suggested that their traveling behavior may be crucial to the economic survival of many small rural and regional destinations throughout Australia (Queensland Parliamentary Report, 2011).

As such, the aim of this exploratory study was to seek a greater understanding of the short-stay travel behavior of members of various regional caravan clubs and, in particular, those clubs formally affiliated with the Combined Caravan Club of Queensland (CCCQ). Approximately 35 clubs are currently affiliated with the State body with each having the responsibility of facilitating a monthly rally, whereby members travel as a group to a weekend rally location within regional and rural

Queensland. Normally the site chosen is within 200 to 250 km in driving distance from the club's regional location. Depending on whether they are retired, semiretired, or, in a small minority of cases still engaged in full-time employment, many grey caravanners may extend their monthly rally to stay an additional 4 or even 5 days if time permits, while others may possibly meet on a regular basis for mid-week dinners and fundraising activities in small groups attached to their specific caravan club. Attendance at these monthly rallies can be as high as 70% for caravan club members.

In addition to their regular regional rallies, most of the member clubs of the CCCQ congregate each year at a week-long Queensland State Rally, and every third year are invited to attend a similar length National Rally. Given the level of involvement is extensive and has not been previously documented; research that focuses on exploring the travel characteristics and tourism/leisure behavior of short-stay caravan travelers is warranted. This is because encouraging grey caravanners to travel benefits both state and regional economies, as they generally travel in off-peak periods to regional and rural areas rather than to coastal locations (Prideaux, Wei, & Ruys, 2001).

## Literature Review

### *History of Caravanning*

Caravans have existed long before the invention of the internal combustion engine. Their origins began in the horse drawn era and were particularly popular among gypsies in the UK. The most famous of such gypsy travelers was Dr. R. W. Gordon Stables, whose horse-drawn caravan was 2 tons in weight and was built in 1884. Even back then, the carts and wagons were gradually modified and transformed into dwellings on wheels, while elaborate models were fitted with coal heaters, lavatories, running water, and even pianos. The advent of World War I saw the end of horse drawn vans, and the commencement of the commercial manufacture of caravans. The 1930s further saw a rapid growth in the manufacture and use of caravans and the continued development of innovations, for example, bottled gas was used for the first time. The first caravan rally was organized in 1933, and

in 1939 the National Caravan Council was formed (Jenkinson, 2003).

### *Caravanning as a Popular Tourist Activity*

In other countries, the growth of the caravan industry has flourished, especially in the US because of its wide open spaces and relative scarcity of country hotels, a high proportion of motorcar owners, and low prices due to mass production. In the 1950s and 1960s the industry seemed to split, creating two types that we see today, that of the recreational vehicle (RV) industry and the mobile home industry. Today, travel trailers are classified as a type of RV along with motor homes, fifth-wheel trailers, pop-up trailers, and truck campers. Australia also developed an expanding industry, closely copying the main English designs. Some caravanning was also done in South Africa and New Zealand with mostly local amateur-built vans (Whiteman, 1973).

In Europe, a total of 67,620 new vehicles were registered on the European caravan market in 2013. This represented a decline of 7.6% compared to the preceding year (73,170 units). Unfortunately, all European countries registered declining registration numbers in 2013 compared to 2012, with the exception of the UK (+3.4 %) (European Caravan Federation, 2014). France was one of the most popular European countries visited, accounting for 43% of all camping and caravanning bed nights in Europe, and around 90 million nights spent by foreigners in the country.

Since the Global Financial Crisis, two factors have begun to turn the caravan sector around, making it a cheaper option resulting in it becoming popular form of travel. Firstly, because of the economic recession, holidaymakers found that they could not readily afford other types of holidays; and secondly, the caravan is now a much different product and has led to it becoming a more attractive form of holidaying (Ball, 2009). Today caravans are more than just a "bedroom on wheels" as they were in the past, and now feature well-appointed kitchen spaces, internal showers and toilet features, and comfortable living areas that are often centered around flat-screen televisions connected to the global media by satellite dishes (McClymont et al., 2011).

The majority of studies conducted on caravan travelers in Australia to date have focused on older long-distance travelers who stay away from home

for extended periods of time, who generally pursue a flexible itinerary, and are “following their dream” of traveling around the continent of Australia (Higgs & Quirk, 2007; Mings, 1997; Onyx & Leonard, 2005; Patterson, 2006; Patterson, Pegg, & Litster, 2011; Prideaux & McClymont, 2006). These older travelers are known as “grey nomads” and are generally attracted to traveling north away from the cold winters in southern Australia, and toward the warmth of northern Australia. This is a similar trend to the “snowbird” phenomena in Canada, where many older adults travel in their RVs away from the snow and negative temperatures to the warmer regions in the US and Mexico in the south (Coates, Healy, & Morrison, 2002).

#### *Short-Stay Caravan Travel*

Cridland (2008) noted that although a large number of older caravanners preferred to travel long distances and be away from home for long periods, others preferred trips of a shorter duration, only being away from home for a few days or a week, especially if they were still in full-time employment. (We have referred to this group as “grey caravanners”.) Cridland argued that such factors as the number of past visits undertaken, a preference to visit a particular place, their age, type of caravan, economic and health status, activity preferences while traveling, and length of time since retirement were influenced by the level of an older Australian’s mobility, and the destination(s) that they have chosen to visit. Cridland (2008) also concluded that traveling longer distances between destinations in Australia was becoming a more expensive option than staying at a specific destination for a longer period of time. He concluded that the rising cost of fuel would ultimately force some long-haul travelers to reduce their movement patterns as a means of reducing their travel expenditure. Such a notion is consistent with what has occurred in North America where the majority of snowbirds choose to stay at one particular holiday destination for an extended period of time as a means of saving money (Mings, 1997).

#### *Motivations for Caravan Travel*

Past research has provided clearer insights into the motives for traveling by caravan. The experience

of caravanning is characterized by extensive opportunities to meet, socialize, and to develop rewarding friendships within the communal atmosphere provided by caravan parks, in a manner not possible in other subsets of drive tourism (McClymont et al., 2011). Onyx and Leonard (2005) concluded that the most positive part of the traveling experiences for many older travelers was meeting other people, some of whom became long term and greatly cherished friends. Cridland (2008) noted that when friendships developed over the course of a previous trip, these destinations that had been previously visited became a strong pull factor for subsequent travel. Supporting such a contention, Trauer and Ryan (2005) found that when close social bonding occurred between travelers, this often led to a heightened level of enjoyment and a greater sense of connection with a particular destination.

Gross and Brown (2008) contended that the extent of social interaction between travelers should not be understated as a strong motivating factor for repeat visitation to a particular location. This was particularly true for those individuals who enjoyed similar activities or held the same moral beliefs. A flow-on effect of such social interaction was often the development of friendships that were maintained long after the holiday itself had ended. Obst, Brayley, and King (2008) found in their study that after returning home many respondents reported that they had kept in touch with the people they had met, indicating that they had developed a strong desire for enduring social networks as a result of their travels.

Onyx and Leonard (2005) suggested that for many older travelers, touring was a means of reconnecting with their country but could also be driven by more nostalgic reasons such as revisiting places that were special to people in their youth. The findings from Cridland’s (2008) study also supported the earlier image created by McGuire, Boyd, and Tedrick (2004), who concluded that many older travelers preferred to live a Ulyssean type of lifestyle, which often was premised by a strong desire to change their routine, to challenge themselves, to gain new experiences, and to go on an adventure so as to explore “their” country—Australia.

Older people who travel around Australia are not a homogeneous group in regard to their mobility patterns and choice of destination(s). Although some prefer to travel long distances and be away

from home for long periods, there is a growing niche group in the Australian tourism market referred to by the researchers as “grey caravanners,” who have a strong preference for shorter trips, are often members of a caravan club, and intend to be away from home for short periods of time. Cridland (2008) suggested that one of the main reasons for taking shorter trips was the expenses incurred in traveling long distances, and the cost of petrol between different destinations that are a long distance apart. Social bonding and the desire to make new friendships (Gross & Brown; Trauer & Ryan) were found to be particularly important for those who visited the same destination(s) each year.

Other caravanners preferred a sense of adventure associated with reconnecting with their own country, and/or exploring new places (McGuire et al., 2004; Onyx & Leonard, 2005). Higgs and Quirk (2007) concluded that there is a need for further research on the tourism-related behavior of grey caravan travelers in Australia. They hoped that this would shed further light on encouraging government support for improving the quality of life and healthy lifestyles of older adults, as well as determining whether this type of travel is an appropriate model to promote successful aging. As such, this study has attempted to meet this call for further research, by specifically examining the motivations and satisfactions of older members of caravan clubs who regularly undertake short-stay travel within the state of Queensland, Australia.

The following research questions were developed to guide the line of inquiry:

1. What is the principal reason for your involvement in the caravanning club?
2. What role does the caravanning club play in your life? Can you describe a recent activity that you and other members of your caravanning club participated in?

### Method

For this study, a qualitative research design was adopted, which included undertaking in-depth, semistructured interviews that were completed during an annual State-wide Caravan Rally. This study used a qualitative research methodology as the most appropriate design to identify the full range

of issues, views, and attitudes that individuals have regarding a specific issue (Jennings, 2010; Veal, 2011). This also enabled the interviewers to follow up on questions or to clarify any queries to ensure that detailed and accurate responses were obtained on specific questions (Jennings, 2010; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). The researchers implemented this model in an effort to minimize bias and allow the rally participants to clearly communicate with the research team about their lived experiences when engaged in caravan-related activities.

### *The Interview Schedule*

The questions used in the study were loosely based on previous studies by Mings (1997), Onyx and Leonard (2005), and Patterson et al. (2011), which in some cases were further modified and/or changed to be consistent with the expressed wishes of the Management Committee of the CCCQ. A pilot test of the interview schedule was undertaken in conjunction with an expert panel consisting of eight senior members of the CCCQ before the formal process began. Post the pilot test, several questions were modified and the sequencing of items varied slightly to allow a more natural flow of questioning to occur. In all, the final interview schedule used in the study comprised 10 questions, which were based on research questions that were suggested by previous researchers on this topic.

### *Study Sample*

The sample for this study consisted of participants who were registered and attended the annual state rally for the CCCQ. For the purpose of this research, a suitable study respondent was defined as any individual having the status as a financial member of the CCCQ and registered as an attendee at the annual state rally. The rally was staged in the regional township of Beaudesert, 69 km from Brisbane in South-East Queensland, in the latter half of 2012.

In terms of accessing prospective respondents, on the opening night of the rally, when participants had collectively gathered for the opening night welcome, members of the research team were introduced and the purpose of the study was outlined to those in attendance. As part of this introduction,



a call was made for interested parties to volunteer for an interview when the research team was again on site in the final days of the event. To facilitate this process, a sign-up sheet detailing 1-hour blocks was made available at the rally office for interested parties to indicate their willingness to be interviewed at their convenience, by nominating a particular time and day. On the actual day, each prospective respondent's name was called over the rally's public announcement system to ensure that each individual arrived at the designated interview location on time.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by The University of Queensland, and in each case the process of informed consent was completed prior to the commencement of the formal interview. In all, 39 respondents (21 individuals, and 9 couples) agreed to be interviewed with each conversation digitally recorded for later transcription. All the study respondents were aged 55 years or older, with each holding current membership of a specific caravan club that was located in Queensland.

#### *Data Collection Through Semistructured Interviews*

Creswell (2009) stated that interviews provide the opportunity of listening to the true feelings of an interviewee. Thus, an interview allows for a thorough examination of the experiences, feelings, and opinions of respondents that may not be otherwise achievable through the use of other methods of data collection. A semistructured interview was selected as the best approach with respect to the stated aims of this study as the interview schedule provided the researchers with specific open-ended questions, as well as the option of exploring unanticipated topics when the opportunity arose (Riddick & Russell, 2008). Thus, this type of interview was considered to be ideal given the form of research undertaken, as it provided the research team with the opportunity to obtain deep and rich insights into the attitudes and perceptions of each respondent attending the caravan rally.

#### *Data Analysis*

The average length for each interview was approximately 30–40 minutes and was transcribed verbatim

into a word document. Given the huge quantity of data collected, in excess of 100 pages of individual interview data in all, NVIVO® was used to manage these sources. Following the open stage, "axial" coding was conducted (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The axial coding process involved using keywords drawn from the literature, which had earlier informed the interview protocol. Others were identified from the prompts and key concepts used as themes and probes during the interviews. These were supplemented by those that were identified during this software-facilitated analysis. In the final step of the analysis, "selective" coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was used to reduce the number of key themes that related to the research questions being explored. During this deductive and iterative process, themes were interpreted and reinterpreted by continually moving back and forth between the literature and the interview transcripts in an effort to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the process.

## Results

### *Profile of Respondents*

A total of 30 interviews were conducted with 39 respondents over a 2-day period by the research team. Twenty-one people were interviewed individually (11 males, 10 females) and nine couples were interviewed together. Their ages ranged from 55 to 83 years (average 68 years). Most of the interviewees had been retired for between 4 and 14 years, and participated in caravanning activities for varying lengths of time ranging from 2 to 43 years. Consistent with this level of involvement, membership with a caravan club also ranged from 2 to 37 years.

Three major themes were identified in the analysis process and were labeled as following: (1) Relationships with like-minded travelers, (2) Traveling to discover new places, and (3) Enjoyment received from short-distance traveling (see Fig. 1). Each of these themes has been discussed in greater detail in the following section. To ensure the confidentiality of the study participants, pseudonyms have been used for actual names in the next two sections.

*Relationships With Like-Minded Travelers.* The most popular responses related to the friendships that

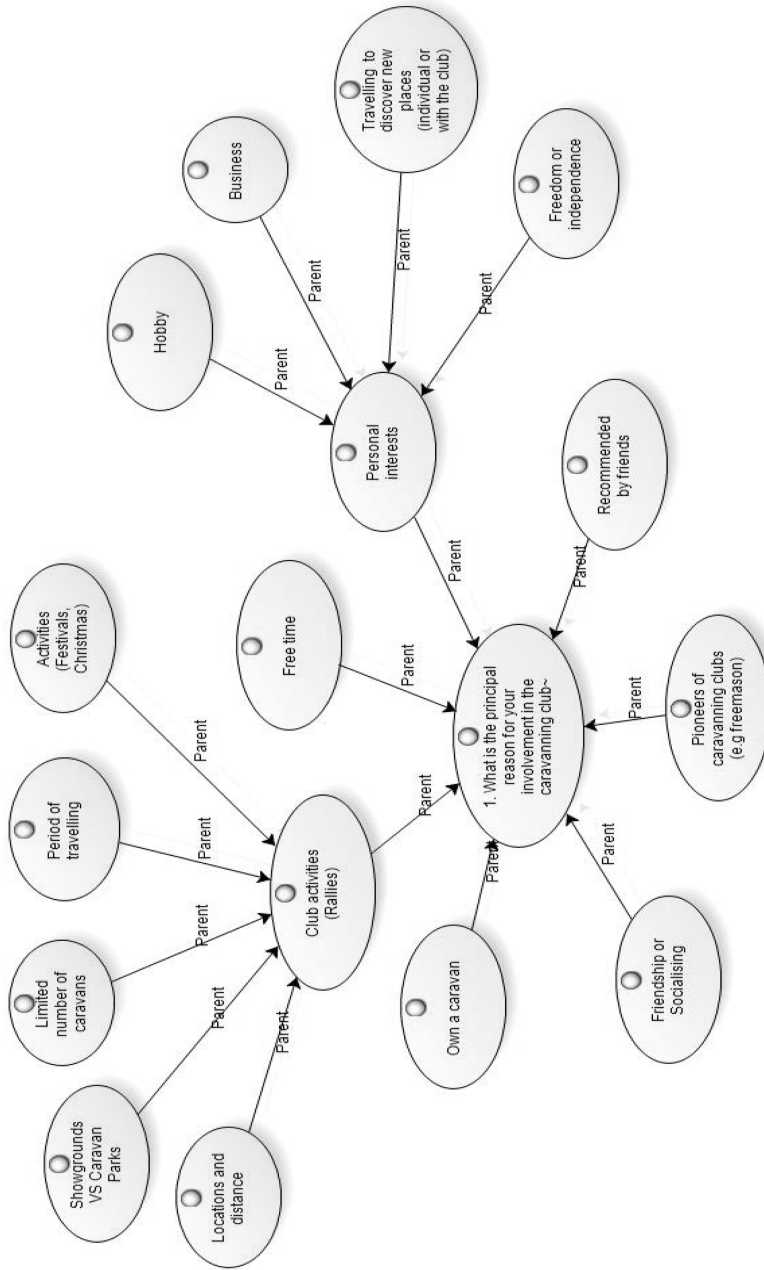


Figure 1. Major themes associated with the benefits from joining a caravan club.

they made with people who shared common interests, and the camaraderie that resulted from enjoying each other's company. Joseph (68 years) stated that "I have been a member of the caravan club for 35 years. I love the social activities and meeting people." Diane (64 years) also agreed when she replied,

Oh for the companionship . . . I travel with my husband and we just love it. . . . I've never felt alone since I have been in a caravan club. It is always nice to travel in a group. The social element is most important.

Some respondents joined the caravan club because their friends were members. Pamela (66 years) stated this perspective,

We actually fancied the idea of joining a club, our friends tried it before us and they talked to us about it and invited us along. We decided that we would join the club mainly because of our good friends so as to spend more time with them.

Gary (69 years) also mentioned the fundraising aspect was important combined with working with good friends from his club.

Being in the Masonic Touring Club gives us many interests and a large part of Masonry is philanthropy which involves raising money for charities, yeah! In the last few years we have donated at least \$6,000 every year to a particular charity.

*Traveling to Discover New Places.* One of the benefits of being a member of a caravan club was often acknowledged by study respondents was that it motivated them to travel, and to seek out and discover new and exciting places. Mark (67 years) and his wife Donna (63 years) remarked,

The main reason was to travel around Australia at our own pace. One of the conditions of buying the caravan which came from Heather was that I had to join a club. We didn't want the caravan to just sit in the driveway and be used once a year and we now utilize it most of the year. We go along to monthly club rallies and we also attend the State Rally, and next year will be our first National Rally.

The club rallies assisted members to discover new places to visit. Thomas (63 years) and Nancy (61 years) agreed,

The other thing we like about the caravan club is the fact that we've gone to a lot of places that we would never have chosen to go ourselves . . . we tend to be traveling caravanners, independent and we keep on moving. We'll go to a place and might stay two nights but then we move on. We both work, so for the club rallies we try to get away for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

Judy went on to state that, "I work on Thursdays but as soon as I finish school we set off and go at least part way there, and come home on Sunday afternoon."

Another couple, Timothy (67 years) and Elizabeth (65 years) were adamant about the importance of seeing the Australian "bush,"

It's one way of seeing our country; you've got to see it in your lifetime no matter what you go through. We are not in a hurry so we take the time to go down side roads and have a look. That's where the real experiences are. One of our people went down a side road for an overnight stop. They ended up staying for 3 weeks.

Other members also liked to travel outside Queensland when they had the time. Gary (69 years) stated that,

It is very rare for us to go on holiday and sit at a place for 4 months. We've traveled to Broome at the top of Western Australia for about a week then we went to the 80-mile beach for 4 to 5 days, then Banrock Station for 4 to 5 days, Darwin for a week, and Katherine for 4 to 5 days to get a glimpse here and there, and then we move on.

*Enjoyment Received From Short-Stay Travel.* Many members described the enjoyment that they received from going on the weekend rallies. The rallies are a regular part of caravan club activities and are held once a month. One respondent, Karen recounted that the last rally that her club went to was at Kilkivan, which is 54 km west of Gympie, and is a tiny town with only a hotel and butcher shop.

We had a bush retreat which a young couple from the local area organized. I think we had 23 vans there. On the Saturday morning they provided us with a complimentary pancake breakfast for the group, and in the evening they cooked a magnificent camp oven dinner that only cost \$20 a



head. It was ridiculously cheap as the main course included as much as you could eat, as well as a beautiful dessert. It was one of the best weekends we've had for a long time.

Other respondents talked about the fellowship and fun that they received from going to places where they had never had been before, and joining in with all the social activities on offer. William (67 years) and Debra (66 years) recounted the time that they went to Warwick where they held a social night in which we had to dress up as characters from a famous movie, "We had lots of 'Men from Snowy River' in their 'Driza-Bone' clothes. Everybody had a good laugh, as most of the members got dressed up and joined in, it really surprised me." Another respondent, Linda talked about the last monthly rally she went on to Kingaroy of which 28 caravans attended. "We had a program that included a sausage sizzle, playing baseball, taking a local tour, visiting a winery, and we also had dinner out, it was so much fun." Thomas (63 years) and Nancy (61 years) recollected the time when their caravan club bush camped at Cherax Park Red Claw Farm at Theebine between Gympie and Maryborough.

One of the activities of the weekend was a tag-along tour, which is an old style car rally where you answer questions as you travel along the way. We stopped for morning tea at Dickabran Bridge, which was classified as an historical site. The history of it was so interesting—just amazing.

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine what were the main motivations and satisfactions derived from short-stay caravan club membership, and what were the particular benefits they received from their travel experiences. Our findings have attempted to address the gaps in the existing literature about older adult's experiences while traveling by caravan, so as to help explain the main motivations and satisfactions that they perceived as important when traveling shorter distances and less time between smaller rural and remote communities.

There is little doubt the principal reason for older people's involvement in the caravanning club is strongly linked to the intensive socializing with other like-minded individuals of a similar age,

making new community connections, and being part of a social group that encourages companionship and camaraderie among its members. Over 90% of the responses enthusiastically chattered in their interviews about the importance of developing friendships and participating in social activities with like-minded travelers in their club. This is particularly important as people as they grow older and move into retirement, and as their social network of friends and relatives begins to diminish in size and frequency of visits (Adams, Sanders, & Auth, 2004; Pettigrew & Roberts, 2008).

Onyx and Leonard (2005) found that the most positive part of the caravanning experience was meeting new people, some of whom became life-long friends. Several spoke of the importance of companionship and traveling as part of a social group, while others felt that caravanning was an important part of their life because they could spend time with their friends in a relaxed atmosphere and travel to lots of different places. Trauer and Ryan (2005) concluded that close social bonding between travelers was often reflected in a heightened level of enjoyment among travelers at that particular destination. This, in turn, created positive feelings that reinforced a strong bond toward that destination, which later served to encourage further visitation to that region in the future.

The second theme that emerged from the study data was related to the main role that caravan club membership played in older people's lives. Most of those interviewed appreciated that their caravan membership provided a means of traveling to new places, and many enjoyed reconnecting with Australian bush landscape. Many discussed their strong desire to see Australia, while several saw it more as an outdoor adventure. McGuire et al. (2004) used the concept of an "Ulyssean" type of lifestyle to describe older people's desire to go on an adventure and visit places that they hadn't been to before. One couple spoke about the main thing that they liked about being a member of their caravan club was that they visited lots of new places that they would never have chosen to go to by themselves.

The third theme was associated with feelings of enjoyment that older caravanners received from short-stay travel in their caravans. Their responses indicated that the development of positive emotions through the camaraderie established between caravan

club members (such as enjoyment, fun, humor) was seen as an important element of short-stay caravan trips. One couple talked about the caravan club being a great source of entertainment and pleasure for them. Positive emotions were found to be a valuable aspect of the tourist experience (Graburn, 2011), and to motivate the social behavior of mature adults (Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990). Yarnal and Ker-setter's (2005) study of a group cruise experience provided an example of participants who described their cruise as enjoyable and relaxing.

### Conclusion

There is little doubt that the main reason/s that older people join caravan clubs is because of the strong friendships that they developed and the level of social interaction that was facilitated from being a member of the caravan club and attending their regular monthly outings. When asked what their main reason was for involvement in the caravan club, respondent replies included: "the social aspect," "the people you meet," "camaraderie," "companionship," "good friends," "love the social activities," "people with common interests," and "to enjoy each other's company." Although many stated that they had been caravanning for many years with their families, several revealed that they had only recently joined a club. This suggests that a number were motivated by a desire to make new acquaintances, perhaps because their present circle of friends were diminishing, or because they now had more time at their disposal having recently retired from the workforce. Many respondents also stated that they loved visiting new places and seeing more of outback Australia. Others commented that the club newsletter was an important motivator as it provided information on the monthly rallies, which in turn encouraged them to "get on the road" rather than having their caravan sitting in the garage and only being used perhaps once or twice a year.

There is an immediate need to conduct further research on this "ignored group" of short-stay grey caravanners in an Australian setting. Clearly, research that seeks to determine the economic and social contribution of this group to rural and remote communities in Australia is warranted. Additionally, and consistent with much of the recent community health research about the critical importance

of active engagement as people age, an extension of this present study that focuses particularly on whether this type of lifestyle is a significant contributor to the long-term positive health and well-being of older adults engaged on caravanning is deemed advisable.

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