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# Exploring Older Adult Educational Tourism Experiences, Satisfaction and Well-being: A Pre-Post Travel Approach

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# **Exploring Older Adult Educational Tourism Experiences, Satisfaction and Well-being: A Pre-Post Travel Approach**

## **Purpose of the Study**

As a direct consequence of global ageing patterns, older travelers are contributing to an increasingly significant proportion of international vacation spending. An ageing population has also brought with it a shift in the types of travel experiences older individuals choose. Recent research indicates educational and cultural touristic experiences are preferred options for many older travelers, as they offer opportunities to be meaningfully engaged in activities while gaining skills and knowledge that serve to enrich their lives. In this context, older educational tourists are defined as older adults (aged 50 years and older) who participate in an organized trip led by a skilled guide, where leisure-travel and learning activities occur simultaneously through interactions between related stakeholders. This study seeks to assess the relationships between older educational travelers' decision making, experiences sought, and the satisfaction derived from the educational travel experience. Findings drawn from this study may contribute to the preliminary development of a conceptual model of successful ageing that more fully acknowledges the significant impact that emotionally-engaging educational tourism experiences have on the well-being of older adults. This study will serve to provide new insights for tourism operators to facilitate, improve, and enrich their current educational travel offerings for this niche market segment.

## **Literature Review**

Educational tourism is a growing niche market, especially for older adults (Bodger, 1998; Gibson, 1998; Patterson, 2006; Ritchie Carr, Cooper, 2003). Broomhall, Pitman, Majocha, and McEwan (2010) emphasised that travel provides one of the most evident environments in which lifelong learning can be applied. Hosany and Gilbert (2010) highlighted the importance of assessing the relationship between motivation to travel, emotional experiences and post-consumption evaluations. A number of studies have examined the relationships between motivations, perceived benefits or satisfaction with the trip and how they affect tourists' behavioral intentions (revisit intention and willingness to recommend to others) (Frochot, 2005; Hosany & Prayag, 2013; Jang, Morrison & O'Leary, 2002) or actual travel behavior (Chen & Petrick, 2016).

Existing older adult educational tourism studies have contributed to the academic literature by examining learning and leisure motivations (Abraham, 1998; Ahn & Janke, 2011; Arsenault, Andersen & Swedburg, 1998; Brady & Fowler, 1988; Harwood, 2007; Knowlton, 1977; Roberto & McGraw, 1990; Romaniuk & Romaniuk, 1982; Szucs, Daniels, & McGuire, 2002), program choices (Roberto & McGraw, 1990; Szucs et al., 2002), participant typology (Arsenault, 1998; Harwood, 2007; Romaniuk & Romaniuk, 1982), learning outcomes (Brady & Fowler, 1990; Pitman, Broomhall, McEwan, & Majocha, 2010), leisure satisfaction (Abraham, 1998) and perceived travel benefits (Ahn & Janke, 2011). However, there have been limited empirical and theoretical studies which assess the factors influencing older adults' travel-decision making or their travel experiences and outcomes as a whole.

To enhance an understanding of the antecedents and consequences of tourism consumption experiences, this study attempted to bridge the gaps in previous studies by developing a conceptual model to assess the relationships between older tourists' decision making (self-determined motivations and preferred travel attributes), their relationship to the evaluation of actual travel activities (memorable experiences and emotions) and travel outcomes (overall satisfaction, behavioral intentions and life satisfaction) in an educational tourism context. This research was designed to investigate four key objectives (RO):

**RO1:** Examine the effects of self-determined motivations and preferred tour attributes on older educational travelers' memorable experiences and their emotions.

**RO2:** Explore the most memorable elements of the older educational travelers' experiences.

**RO3:** Investigate the extent to which the attributes of memorable experiences and emotions contribute to older educational travelers' overall satisfaction and behavioural intentions for future engagement in educational tourism.

**RO3:** Assess the mediating effects of factors involved in post-travel phase of educational tourism experiences on life satisfaction of older educational travelers.

## **Methodology**

This study will apply a concurrent mixed method design where quantitative and qualitative approaches will be used as the primary and secondary methods. Of the 69 registered tour operators in Australia (Council of Australian Tour Operators, 2013), 67 of these offered a total of 179 older adults' educational travel tours during 2013 and 2014 (Leads Corp, 2013). From the total pool of tour operators, the researcher will randomly select the first tour operator from the list. Subsequently, every third perspective tour operator will then be chosen and later contacted to determine their willingness to support the study. Through cooperation and agreement with tour operators, approximately 900 Australians 50 years old or older who participate in educational tour packages will be randomly sampled to complete pre- and post-travel surveys (RO1, RO3, RO4). The survey participants who indicate a willingness to be contacted for a semi-structured interview will be followed up with after they return from their trip. A list of the older travelers who volunteer will be generated and be used to schedule and conduct the interviews (RO2). Qualitative data will be collected simultaneously with the quantitative data as the participants will engage in various educational tourism programs at different times. Semi-structured interviews will be used as the complementary research tool to provide a more elaborate description of participants' most memorable educational travel experiences. A mixed method design was chosen in order to enhance the understanding of older travelers' educational tourism experiences, as well as to determine the meanings of these experiences in older adults' daily lives.

The survey questionnaire will be adapted and modified from previous studies. Learning and leisure motivation scales (Ahn & Janke, 2011; Pelletier, Vallerand, Green-Demers, Blais, & Brière, 1996; Vallerand et al., 1992) will be used to determine what motivates older adults to choose educational travel. Preferred tour attributes will be adopted to assess the importance of tour attributes when selecting the educational programs (Szucs, 2001). The memorable experience instrument will be adapted from studies by Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick (2012), Roberson (2003), and Ahn and Janke (2011). Emotional expressions or feelings during the trip

will be adopted from the 'Modified Differential Emotions Scale' (Cohn, Fredrickson, Brown, Mikels, & Conway, 2009; Nawijn, Mitas, Lin, & Kerstetter, 2013). Overall satisfaction will be measured as a single-item (Correia et al., 2013) based on the overall educational tourism experience. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) will be used to measure older adults' life satisfaction before and after travel. To minimize any potential common method variance (CMV), the survey design and administration will be adhered to Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) guidelines. In summary, this study will apply a simultaneous dominant-less dominant design (QUAN+qual) (Creswell, 2014) and be conducted in four stages: (1) A pilot study of the research questionnaire ; (2) A main study where the revised 'pre and post-travel' questionnaire survey will be administered (3) Semi-structured interviews and (4) Quantitative and qualitative results to draw conclusions.

The preliminary data analysis will examine normality of the data (by calculating skewness and kurtosis) and the presence of multivariate outliers (by calculating Mahalanobis scores) that may mitigate the results (Hair, Black, & Anderson, 2010). Descriptive, inferential statistics and partial-least-squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) techniques will then be used to analyze the survey data. A descriptive analysis will present a profile of respondents. PLS-SEM will be applied to examine measurement and the structural model, and to investigate the mediating effects of factors involved in post-travel phase on life satisfaction. Lastly, qualitative data will be analyzed using a thematic analytical technique (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **Expected outcomes**

This study explores the interrelationship between different psychological and travel attributes of educational travel experiences including the affective (hedonic) and cognitive (eudaimonic) components of subjective well-being. It is expected that findings from this study will help to fill the gaps identified in the literature and enhance the body of knowledge in psychology, ageing and tourism studies such as self-determined motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985), goal (Sirgy, 2010), selection, optimisation and compensation (Baltes & Baltes, 1990), bottom-up spillover (Neal, Sirgy & Uysal 2007) and well-being (Seligman, 2011) theories.

McCabe and Johnson (2013, p. 61) suggested, "comparative studies could illuminate the lacunae of knowledge on tourism's contribution to subjective well-being across a wide range of contexts further to understand how different types of tourism contribute to different aspects of well-being". It is anticipated this study will have practical implications for the two main stakeholders in older adult educational tourism: tour operators and older adults themselves. The results of this study may assist tour operators in making better informed business decisions, understanding their clientele, designing better packages and developing new promotional strategies (Pitman et al., 2010; Ritchie et al., 2003). Findings from this study may also serve as a means of encouragement for older adults to pursue educational tourism as a means of aging successfully.

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