

**MEMORABLE TOURISM EXPERIENCES: STRATEGIES
FOR THE SUCCESSFUL MARKETING OF DESTINATIONS**

By

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ABSTRACT

Memorable tourism experiences are becoming the dominant focus of tourism marketers due to increasing academic commendation about the proposition that MTEs could lead to deliver new and repeat business for tourism operators worldwide. The two main aims of this study were to explore what tourists are more likely to remember from their leisure travels, and also what impact memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) are likely to have on the decisions tourists make for their travel in future. Existing knowledge about MTEs is under-developed, fragmented and inconclusive, and there are methodological limitations to existing studies: there is a need for a more accurate, comprehensive and reliable investigation of this important experiential phenomenon.

The study employed in this research is a mixed methods research methodology, which enabled an examination of MTEs in a comprehensive and reliable way from the perspective of leisure travellers. Two qualitative methods, “netnography” (travel blog narratives) and ‘in-depth interviews’ were used to explore the meaning of MTEs. These exploratory findings were then tested with a quantitative survey of 700 respondents to confirm their reliability and validity. The survey was carried out at major tourist areas in Sydney, Australia during the summer of 2012. Purification and validation of the MTEs scale was carried out using ‘expert reviews’, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The hypothetical relationships between MTEs and other dependent variables were tested through a path analysis using the SEM approach.

Three important goals were achieved from the research. Ten experiential dimensions emerged from the qualitative data as the integral components of MTEs: (i) authentic local experiences (ii) novel experiences (iii) self-beneficial experiences (iv) momentous travel experiences (v) serendipitous and surprising experiences (vi) social interactions with people (vii) local hospitality (viii) impressive local guides and tour operator services (ix) fulfilment of personal travel interests and (x) affective emotions. These ten dimensions were then measured using a survey instrument with 34-items. The results revealed that the ten dimensions related to MTEs do not have a significant positive impact on repeat visitations but do have a strong impact on word-of-mouth (WOM) recommendations. The implication being that if tourism operators focus their marketing activities on enhancing the probability that leisure travellers will have a memorable tourism experience, then their efforts will produce more positive word of mouth recommendations for their products and increased business will inevitably result.

However, hoping that repeat visitation will result from the efforts of tourism operators is not as reliable due to the fact that leisure travellers predominately display variety-seeking behaviour that precludes many from visiting the same destination multiple times.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AM	Autobiographical Memory
ASV	Average Shared Square Variance
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CMIN/DF	Chi-square/ <i>df</i> ratio
CR	Composite Reliability
DMOs	Destination Marketing Organizations
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
ECVI	Expected Cross-Validation Index
IFI	Incremental Fit Index
KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
MANOVA	Multivariate Analysis of Variance
ML	Maximum Likelihood
MSV	Maximum Shared Squared Variance
MTEs	Memorable Tourism Experiences
NZ	New Zealand
RMSEA	Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
TLI	Tucker-Lewis Index
VFR	Visiting Friends and Relatives
WOM	Word-of-Mouth
WTO	World Tourism Organization