



TOURIST ROLES, PERCEIVED RISK AND INTERNATIONAL TOURISM

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Abstract: International tourists can be classified according to the degree of novelty and familiarity sought. This study investigated the hypothesis that tourists seeking familiarity would perceive higher levels of risk associated with international tourism than those seeking novelty. A random sample of US-born young adults was surveyed. Seven risk factors were identified: health, political instability, terrorism, strange food, cultural barriers, a nation's political and religious dogma, and crime. Three-way ANOVAs revealed that women perceived a greater degree of risk regarding health and food. More experienced tourists downplayed the threat of terrorism. However, tourist role was the most significant variable, with familiarity seekers being the most risk adverse. **Keywords:** tourist role, perceived risk, novelty and familiarity, international tourism. © 2003 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Résumé: Rôles des touristes, risques perçus et tourisme international. On peut classifier les touristes internationaux en fonction du degré de nouveauté et de familiarité qu'ils recherchent. La présente étude a exploré l'hypothèse que les touristes qui recherchent un environnement familier percevaient des risques plus élevés associés au tourisme international que les touristes qui recherchent la nouveauté. On a sondé un échantillon pris au hasard et composé de 290 jeunes adultes nés aux USA. Sept facteurs de risque ont été identifiés: santé, instabilité politique, terrorisme, nourriture inhabituelle, obstacles culturels, dogmes politiques et religieux du pays et crime. Un logiciel ANOVA à trois facteurs a révélé que les femmes perçoivent un plus haut degré de risque pour la santé et la nourriture. Les touristes plus expérimentés minimisaient la menace du terrorisme. Pourtant, le rôle du touriste était la variable la plus significative, et ceux qui cherchaient la familiarité étaient les plus opposés aux risques. **Mots-clés:** rôle du touriste, risque aperçu, nouveauté et familiarité, tourisme à l'étranger. © 2003 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Governments, travel agents, and the news media periodically issue warnings about the risks associated with international tourism. Tourists are urged to buy traveler's checks, guidebooks, and bottled water, and to obtain vaccinations as precautions against such risks. Indeed, surveys consistently note that safety and security are important concerns among individuals vacationing abroad (Poon and Adams 2000). Yet

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despite the pervasiveness of these beliefs and practices in everyday culture, there has been little academic research exploring the perceived risk associated with international tourism. The issue of perceived risk raises such important questions as how different types of tourists perceive international tourism in terms of risk and safety, and what factors influence this perception.

Previous investigations have identified four major risk factors: terrorism (Sönmez, Apostolopoulos and Tarlow 1999; Aziz 1995; Bar-On 1996; Leslie 1999; Richter and Waugh 1986; Enders, Sandler and Parise 1992; Sönmez and Graefe 1998a, 1998b; Sönmez 1998); war and political instability (Gartner and Shen 1992; Hollier 1991; Ioannides and Apostolopoulos 1999; Mansfeld 1996, 1999; Richter 1992, 1999; Sedghi, Nuttall and Theocharous 2000; Teye 1986; Wall 1996); health concerns (Carter 1998; Cossens and Gin 1994; Lawton and Page 1997); and crime (Brunt, Mawby and Hambly 2000; Dimanche and Leptic 1999; Ellis 1995; Garcia and Nicholls 1995; Hall, Selwood and McKeon 1995; Moore and Berno 1995; Pizam, Tarlow and Bloom 1997; Pizam 1999).

The relationship between tourism and terrorism gained international notoriety in 1972 during the Munich Olympic Games. The Palestinian attack on Israeli athletes left eleven people dead and introduced a global television audience of nearly 800 million viewers to terrorism (Sönmez and Graefe 1998a). Since then, international tourists have been acutely aware of this relationship. One of the most infamous acts of terrorism against tourists occurred in Egypt in 1997 when gunmen killed 71 tourists outside of Luxor. Indeed, tourists are often the specific targets of terrorist organizations. In Egypt, Aziz (1995) explained tourism has come to represent capitalism and conspicuous consumption and an attack on tourists signifies ideological opposition to these western values. In other areas of the world, where tourism is a state sponsored industry, an attack on tourists can symbolize an attack on the government (Richter and Waugh 1986; Sönmez 1998). Most recently, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in the United States resulted in 6.8% fewer international tourists visiting North America in the same year compared to the previous year (World Tourism Organization 2002).

Like terrorism, political instability and war can increase the perception of risk at a destination. As a result of the conflict in Tiananmen Square in China, approximately 11,500 tourists canceled visits to Beijing in 1989 (Gartner and Shen 1992). The Persian Gulf War in 1990 caused such a massive redirection of tourists away from the Middle East that hotels in Israel were used to house Russian immigrants instead of tourists (Hollier 1991). War and political instability can also affect neighboring countries not directly involved in any conflict. For example, the burgeoning tourism industry in Zambia was completely crippled after the US State Department issued a travel advisory for Zimbabwe, Zambia's neighbor (Teye 1986). This phenomenon has been identified as the generalization effect (Enders, Sandler and Parise 1992), whose reach may sometimes appear astounding. During the Persian Gulf War, for instance, destinations as far removed as Kenya and

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