



# An exploration of tourist motivation in rural settings: The case of Troodos, Cyprus

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## ABSTRACT

Following the decline of traditional agrarian industries, tourism has become one of the most popular rural development strategies adopted by destinations. Rural tourism has been regarded for years as a means of economic and social development in rural areas; particularly, in destinations where tourism has been concentrated in coastal areas, rural tourism development has been considered as a means of diversification of the tourism product. The popularity of tourism as a means of development in rural areas is reflected in academic research; nevertheless, vagueness still exists over what constitutes rural tourism. Whilst several studies have been undertaken investigating the reasons for rural tourism development, little is known about what attracts visitors to rural areas. The aim of this research paper is to enhance understanding of rural tourism by examining rural tourists' motivations. Qualitative research, in the form of unstructured interviews, was performed with both the supply-side and the demand-side sectors of the Cyprus tourism industry to identify the factors that motivate people to visit rural areas. Research findings reveal that different types of rural tourists exist as respondents expressed different levels of interaction with the rural environment and varying interest in rural activities. Also, it was found that people travel to rural areas for various reasons, whereby often the main motivation is not related to the rural setting. Hence, the findings verify the complexity of defining rural tourism and create implications for tourism planners and managers regarding the interaction of destination-specific and personal-specific attributes in attracting tourists to rural settings.

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## 1. Introduction

Rural tourism is experiencing a strong expansion in most Western countries due to the benefits it offers to the host community, the land and the tourist (San Martin & Herrero, 2012). Indeed, several authors have acknowledged the contribution of rural tourism to cultural preservation, economic development and sustainability (Blezentis, Krisciukaitiene, Balezentis, & Garland, 2012; Chen, 2011; Liu, Feng, & Yang, 2011; Sharpley & Vass, 2006). Tourism activity in rural areas is often labelled alternative tourism, agro-tourism, farm tourism and even eco-tourism (Roberts & Hall, 2001). The European Community defines rural tourism, rather simplistically, as tourism taking place in rural areas; nevertheless, an increasing number of academic articles on rural tourism highlight the difficulty of defining the concept (Oppermann, 1996; Sharpley, 1996; Su, 2011). Hall (2008) stated that there is no universally accepted technical term for what constitutes rural and urban tourism. Indeed, the concept of rural tourism tends to differ between countries as different parameters are used to define the term. According to Hoggart (1990), by conceptualising rural tourism as the opposite of urban tourism, little value is offered. Keane, Briassoulis, and van der Straaten (1992) stated that confusion might arise when conceptualising rural tourism as tourism

activity taking place in the rural setting. This is because of the multi-faceted nature of rural tourism (Lane, 1994). Rural tourism encompasses a variety of activities ranging from nature-based to adventure-oriented activities. Similarly, rural tourism activities may be offered in settings that are not predominantly rural or might be offered on a large-scale. The increasing need to define rural tourism is evident. Understanding of what constitutes rural tourism can be enhanced from the exploration of tourists' motivations. According to Beeton (1999:28) "a motivating factor for tourists to visit rural areas is to experience what is still thought of as the rural idyll". Similarly, Hernantes, Munoz, and Santos (2007) stated that the main motivation for individuals to travel to rural areas is the contact with a rural way of life and nature. Given the wide range of tourism activities and tourism forms that exist in rural settings, it is possible that by studying tourist motivation in relation to rural tourism, existing knowledge on this under-researched and misunderstood tourism sector can be enriched. Page and Getz (1997:17) argued that "identifying and segmenting the rural tourism market is probably the least researched and understood process in the rural tourism system". It is therefore this research paper's aim to fill in this gap in the literature. Huang (2010) argued that more research directed towards the measurement of conceptual issues is needed. Investigating the reasons for travel will contribute to the understanding of tourism as a social phenomenon (Cohen, 1974) and offer practical managerial insights (Wight, 1996; Young, 1999). Therefore, the identification and investigation of the motivations of rural tourists will provide a significant framework for conceptualising the term and will increase understanding of rural tourists'

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profile. In turn, this will deepen the understanding for rural tourism demand and ultimately provide important implications for tourism researchers and tourism planners and managers alike.

The following sections discuss the concept of rural tourism as defined and understood in the existing literature, highlight the importance of motivations in understanding the reasons tourists travel and present the findings on this research's attempt to conceptualise rural tourism by exploring the motivations of rural tourists.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Rural tourism definition

According to [Sharpley \(1996:60\)](#) “the measurement of demand in rural tourism faces problems due to the lack of an internationally agreed definition and the variations of rural tourism activities and pursuits”. Indeed, with rural tourism being the most polymorphous special interest tourism product ([Sillignakis, 2007](#)), it is difficult to define the term. [Roberts and Hall \(2001\)](#) stated that there is no universal agreement on the critical threshold that distinguishes between urban and rural populations. Similarly, [Su \(2011\)](#) argued that rural tourism has many interpretations. The difficulty in defining rural tourism is the cause that the concept lacks a comprehensive body of knowledge and theoretical framework ([Opperman, 1996](#)). Nevertheless, efforts to define and conceptualise rural tourism have been made. [Gannon \(1994:5\)](#) defined rural tourism as “the range of activities and amenities provided by farmers and rural people to attract tourists to their areas in order to generate extra income for their businesses”. The [European Communities Commission \(1987:218\)](#) has defined rural tourism as “a vast concept covering other services besides accommodation such as events, festivities, outdoor recreation, production and sale of handicrafts and agricultural products”. The complex nature of tourism as well as that of rural areas creates much ambiguity as to what constitutes rural tourism. [Lane \(1994\)](#) highlighted the complexity of the activities and the different forms involved in rural tourism and suggested that demand for rural tourism will differ according to the rural area and the number of stakeholders involved. It is, therefore, appropriate to approach rural tourism definition through various angles: a) from a geographic/demographic aspect whereby rural tourism is defined as “a multi-faceted activity that takes place in an environment outside heavily urbanised areas. It is an industry sector characterised by small-scale tourism business, set in areas where land use is dominated by agricultural pursuits, forestry or natural areas” ([Dept of Tourism, 1994:3](#)); b) from a product aspect where rural tourism is defined as “a product which includes components as rural attractions, rural adventure tours, nature-based tours, ecotourism tours, country towns, rural resorts, country-style accommodation, farm holidays, together with festivals, events and agricultural education” ([Dept of Tourism, 1994:4](#)); and c) from a tourist experience aspect where the [Department of Tourism \(1994:3\)](#) defined rural tourism as “the offering of a different range of experiences to those offered in big cities...with emphasis placed on the tourist's experience of the products and activities of the area” ([Sallignakis, 2007](#)). Similarly, [Sharpley and Sharpley \(1997\)](#) suggested that rural tourism should be defined not only technically in relation to destinations, activities and other tangible characteristics but also conceptually as a state of mind, as the countryside is seen as an abstract concept that attracts people ([Halfacree, 1993](#)). These definitions coincide with [Lane's \(1994\)](#) suggestion that rural tourism should be seen in terms of population density, land use and the traditional social structure. Overall, it can be concluded that rural tourism is regarded by researchers as:

- Tourism taking place in rural areas
- Tourism involving small-scale development
- Tourism allowing the interaction with nature and traditional culture

- Tourism that is locally controlled and developed for the long-term benefit of the local community
- Tourism representing the rural environment, economy, history and location

([Lane, 1994](#))

Despite the identification of the above-mentioned rural tourism characteristics, some authors question the conceptualisation of rural tourism in terms of small-scale development and interaction with nature. In particular, [Murdoch \(1993\)](#) argued that not all tourism in rural areas is strictly rural. Similarly, not all rural tourism providers are operating on a small-scale structure whereas adventure seekers may interact with natural settings in rural areas but not necessarily be motivated by rural tourism. [Kastenholz \(2000\)](#) argued that not all rural tourists seek rurality to the same extent. It is thus imperative that a distinction is made between the various segments of rural tourists according to motivation in order to understand the demand for rural tourism. According to [Pearce \(1993\)](#), tourist motivations are part of tourist demand and hence an important aspect to study if greater understanding of what constitutes rural tourism and its demand is sought. [Sharpley and Sharpley \(1997\)](#) argued that the conceptualisation of rural tourism should be performed by either placing rural tourism within the context of special interest tourism and considered as a tourism sector or by viewing rural tourism as a developmental approach. The authors have agreed that the latter restricts the scope of rural tourism definition. With this statement in mind, this research has attempted to provide understanding on the concept of rural tourism as a tourism sector in relation to rural tourists' motivations. The following section provides an explanation of tourist motivations theory.

### 2.2. Tourist motivations

Tourist motivations have been the central stage of tourism research for several decades ([Huang, 2010](#)). Motivation theory goes back to consumer behaviour literature, which argues that motivations represent internal forces of individuals that lead to action ([Devesa, Laguna, & Palacios, 2009](#); [Schiffman & Kanuk, 1978](#)). With respect to travel, motivations are related to a set of needs that cause a person to participate in tourism activity ([Park & Yoon, 2009](#)). Hence, motivation plays a significant role in influencing travel decisions and tourist behaviour ([Gartner, 1993](#), [Moutinho, 1987](#)) as it explains why people travel, why they engage in the activities they do whilst on holiday and why they select a specific destination ([Heitmann, 2011](#)). One of the most important and widely referred to motivation theories is that of [Iso-Ahola \(1982\)](#), which suggests that tourist motivation has a psychological (escape) and a social component (seeking). Similarly, [Crompton \(1979\)](#) identified psychological motives (push) such as escape, relaxation, exploration etc. and cultural motives (pull) such as novelty and education. Specifically, pull factors were described by destination-specific attributes or outer motivations and push factors were described as inner motivations and factors that influence individuals, known as person-specific motivations ([Heitmann, 2011](#)), such as the need to escape his/her environment. Also, [Goeldner and Ritchie \(2003\)](#) classified motivation sets developed by previous studies ([Crompton, 1979](#); [Lundberg, 1971](#)) into four types: a) physical such as relaxation, b) cultural, c) interpersonal such as socialising and d) prestige such as self-esteem and self-actualisation. Similarly, [Pearce \(1993\)](#) has distinguished between extrinsic and intrinsic motivations whereas [Cha, McCleary, and Uysal \(1995\)](#) identified relaxation, knowledge, adventure, travel bragging, family and sports as motivational factors for travel. Among the most common motivational factors studied are family togetherness, self-development and relaxation ([Jang & Wu, 2006](#); [Pearce & Lee, 2005](#)).

Although several researchers have studied the concept of motivations within the tourism context ([Crompton, 1979](#); [Dann, 1981](#); [Fodness,](#)

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