



MEASURING FAMILY REUNION TRAVEL MOTIVATIONS

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Abstract: The study developed a Family Reunion Travel Motivation Scale (FRTMS) measuring family reunion travelers' motivations. Through a rigorous scale development process, the final model of the scale exhibits excellent levels of psychometric properties. Details of each step are described in this paper. The 15-items scale contains four dimensions labeled as: (a) family history and togetherness, (b) immediate family cohesion, (c) family communication, and (d) family adaptability. Furthermore, canonical correlation analysis was conducted to empirically test the associations between travel motivation and family leisure activity choice. The finding suggested that family reunion tourists' selection of activities correlated with their travel motivations. Both practical and theoretical implications were discussed. **Keywords:** family reunion travel, travel motivation, family leisure, family functioning, scale development. Published by Elsevier Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

There is increasing emphasis on the basic values of family togetherness in contemporary society. Celebrating family togetherness and enjoying family friendly activities have been regarded as an important usage of time. Coupled with this trend is the emergence of a larger percentage of multigenerational households. Studies have shown that multigenerational households tend to have higher levels of emotional closeness and social bonding (Dellmann-Jenkins, Hollis, & Gordon, 2005; Generations United, 2009). Not only does the intergenerational connection provide positive learning for children, but elders also learn to understand the lifestyles of the young (Harrel-Smith, 2006). Family travel patterns have reflected these social changes; diverse family members are increasingly traveling together (Gardyn, 2001; Nayyar, 2001). For instance, grandparents vacationing with their grandchildren account for 7% of U.S. adult leisure tourists (U.S. Travel Association, 2009). Senior travelers as a market segment have received ample research attention. Topics range

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from motivations and behavioral patterns to factors affecting seniors' decision-making (Boksberger & Laesser, 2009; Hsu, Cai, & Wong, 2007; Huang & Tsai, 2003; Jang & Wu, 2006).

Along with the emerging trends in family travel, many statistical facts and figures have attested to increasing interest in family reunion travel market. According to the U.S. (2009), for example, one third of U.S. adults have traveled to attend a family reunion in the past three years. This translates into nearly 72 million U.S. adults. Consequently, many Convention and Visitor Bureaus are launching family reunion specific websites, not just a mention within their website. Practitioners in the hospitality industry view family reunion travel as an emerging vehicle for economic gains. Expressions, such as “New egg for hospitality to crack,” and “Conventions which no city is trying not to attract,” are how hospitality experts currently describe family reunions in the media. While the benefits of intergenerational travel has, to some extent, already been investigated by researchers (Kang, Hsu, & Wolfe, 2003; Levere, 1997), the need for further research in family reunion travel is apparent given its more nuanced and complex decision-making process involving multiple family units and multiple generations of travelers.

Family reunion refers to gatherings of multiple family units composed of at least three generations on a recurring basis, not for special events such as weddings or funerals (Farber, 1974; Yun & Lehto, 2009). The main goal of such an event is getting together with extended family. Family reunions may involve travel for the participants geographically dispersed. Family reunions appear to have been embraced as an effective means of creating an “altogether atmosphere” among extended family members and fostering the feeling of being close to each other both emotionally and physically (Yun & Lehto, 2009). Researchers have started paying attention to this emerging segment by focusing on reasons of holding family reunions.

However, the few initial explorations have largely relied on qualitative approaches such as informal interviews or personal observations. While qualitative approaches lend much needed holistic insights into family reunion travel, much remains to be empirically tested using quantitative methods to be balanced in tourism research (Walle, 1997). Hence, this study sought to explore the unique characteristics and patterns of the family reunion travel market, especially focusing on travel motivations. Given the lack of quantifiable measures for such motivations, this research primarily attempted to develop measurement items for a family reunion motivation measurement scale (FRTMS). A secondary goal was to assess whether and how family reunion travel motivations may be correlated to reunion travelers' leisure activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rituals and Family Reunion

Family reunion travel fulfills both family togetherness and travel needs. To better understand family reunion travel, it is necessary to

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