

Conceptualising family adventure tourist motivations, experiences and benefits

GILL POMFRET * [g.c.pomfret@shu.ac.uk]

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Objectives |

1. To provide insights into family adventure tourists relative to their motivations, collective experiences while on adventure holidays, and the benefits that they gain from these experiences.
2. To synthesise and reflect on previous research pertaining to family tourists, family recreationists, adventure tourists and recreational adventurers, and the application of this knowledge to family adventure tourists.
3. To develop a theoretically grounded perspective of family adventure tourists in the form of a conceptual framework which demonstrates extant understanding of this market and proposes suggestions for further research.

Methodology | The work reviews existing research pertinent to family adventure tourists, and develops a conceptual framework to highlight current understanding of these tourists. It explores three key themes related to the aforementioned objectives. Firstly, it considers the motivations of family adventure tourists. Secondly, it explores the experiences of adventure tourism for families, and thirdly, it examines the benefits of adventure tourism participation. In the final section, a conceptual framework of family adventure tourists illustrates the emergent themes from the literature and identifies future research directions.

Main Results and Contributions | The primary contribution of this paper is to develop insights into the motivations which encourage family adventure holiday participation, the experiences encountered by family adventure tourists, and the benefits they gain as families from their experiences. A conceptualisation of family adventure tourism is absent from extant adventure tourism literature yet family participation rates in outdoor adventure activities and holidays are rising (Adventure Travel Trade Association [ATTA], 2016; Outdoor Foundation, 2016), justifying the need to understand this market.

* **PhD in Tourism** from Sheffield Hallam University (UK), **PGDIP in Tourism** from Manchester Metropolitan University (UK) and **BSc (Hons) in Psychology** from Plymouth University (UK). **Senior Lecturer** in Tourism at Sheffield Hallam University (UK).

Adventure tour operators offer holidays to families which comprise a plethora of adventure activities primarily situated at the shallow-end of the Adventure Commodification Continuum (Varley, 2006, p. 188) where “the activities are rendered more predictable, and the vagaries of nature are managed-out wherever possible in order to create safe, reliable commodities with only a veneer of risk”. There is no known definition of family adventure tourists yet a plethora of adventure tourist definitions and categorisations exist (ATTA, 2016; Patterson, 2006; Pomfret & Bramwell, 2014; Sung, 2004) which segment these tourists according to travel behaviour, hard and soft adventure, physical activity, interaction with nature, traveller features, age, gender and cultural learning. Yet, perspectives about adventure tourism vary and family groups are little mentioned in these classifications, making it problematic to propose a definition of this type of adventure tourist.

The first theme of the paper considers tourism, recreational and adventure activity motivation literature to gain insights into the particular motives of family adventure tourists. Motivational differences exist between family groups and non-family groups of tourists because of the collective nature of family holidays (Lee, Graefe & Burns, 2008). Yet, prior work has predominantly explored parents’ holiday motives, and limited attention has focused on uncovering children’s holiday motivations (Gram, 2005). Conjectures about the applicability of this prior research for family adventure tourists are drawn. The second theme of the paper explores the experiences which families are likely to encounter during adventure holiday participation. An appreciation of recreational adventurers’ experiences during activity participation exists (e.g. Csikzentmihalyi, 1992; Willig, 2008) while the experiences of adventure tourists are less well understood (Fletcher, 2010; Kane & Tucker, 2004). Accordingly, it is useful to review these bodies of literature concurrently with non-adventure family holiday experiences to develop a fuller understanding of family adventure holiday experiences. Additionally, the theoretical constructs of flow (Csikzentmihalyi, 1979) and reversal theory (Apter, 1982) are introduced as they have previously been used to explain adventurers’ experiences although their suitability for interpreting family adventure tourism experiences are unknown. The third theme of the paper presents the likely benefits which families gain from participating in adventure holidays together. These benefits develop both during the holiday experience and post-holiday and hence they differ from, but may be influenced by, the motives which encourage families to participate in adventure holidays in the first place. Discussion focuses on extant literature about the generic benefits of family holidays and family outdoor recreation experiences. It also considers the theoretical constructs of collective efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and the core and balance model of family leisure functioning (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001) as these theories are pertinent to the benefits associated with family adventure holidays. Finally, the conceptual framework draws together the reviewed themes, highlights how these relate to family adventure tourists, and suggests areas of further research.

Limitations | The key findings within this paper are based on previous secondary research related to family adventure tourists and the design of a conceptual framework. Accordingly, the paper has limited applicability because it primarily focuses on conceptual development. Empirical research which investigates family adventure tourists is required to more deeply understand this market.

Conclusions | This work has reviewed different bodies of literature relative to family adventure tourist motivations, experiences and benefits, and developed a conceptual framework, with the intention of progressing conceptual understanding of these tourists. It is concluded that these tourists are motivated

not only by generic family holiday motivations but also by mutually shared adventure motives. Their collective participation in challenging, exciting, adrenalin-inducing activities and intense sensory experiences form the core of family adventure holiday experiences, ultimately resulting in collective contentment. As these holidays are predominantly shared experiences, it is important that the concepts of collective flow and collective efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Csikzentmihalyi, 1979) are explored further for these tourists. There may be a higher propensity for cohesive families who show strong collective efficacy during adventure tourism participation to experience collective flow rather than individual flow. It is proposed that reversal theory (Apter, 1982) is used to consider the absence or presence of different motivational states during activity participation. Additionally, further research should focus on the core and balance model of family functioning (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001), particularly relative to 'out of the ordinary' (p. 284) balance activities such as camping, hiking and skiing (Melton, Ellis & Zabriskie, 2016).

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