U.S. Ecotourists' Travel Experience and Satisfaction Reported on the World Wide Web
A Case of Costa Rica Ecolodges

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PURPOSE

Construct the ecotourists' travel experience represented by staying at ecolodges and identify the factors contributing to satisfaction/dissatisfaction with stay in ecotourism destinations

STUDY BACKGROUND
Ecotourism & Ecotourists

- "A sustainable, non-invasive form of nature-based tourism that focuses primarily on learning about nature first-hand, and which is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented… typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation of such areas (*Fennell, 2007, p. 24*)"
  - Growth in demand 10%-34% per year *(Mastny, 2001)*
  - Ecotourism and nature tourism are growing three times faster than the tourism industry as a whole *(UNWTO press release, 2004)*

- Travelers who are attracted to destinations where the forms of sustainable tourism are promoted to enhance conservation of environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of local residents in 2002 *(Kerstetter et al., 2004)*

STUDY BACKGROUND
Ecotourism Research

- Consumer trends and market segmentation *(Laarman & Durst, 1987; Lindberg, 1991; Acott et al., 1998; McKercher, 2001; McKercher, 2002; Wood, 2002; Wight & Weaver, 2001; Dolnicar, Crouch, & Long, 2008)*

- Motivation *(Eagles,1992; Crossley & Lee, 1994; Wight, 1996; Wight, 2001; Ayala, 1996; Holden & Sparrowhawk, 2002; Kerstetter et al., 2004)*

- Ecotourism experience *(UNWTO, 2005; Chan & Baum, 2007; Chan & Baum, 2007b)*

STUDY BACKGROUND
Ecolodge

- "A nature-dependent tourist lodge that meets the philosophy and principles of ecotourism *(Russell, Bottrill, & Meredith, 1995, p. 147)*"

- Ecotourists staying in ecolodges
  - Access to nature reserves and nearby nature-based attractions
  - Local flora and fauna, wildlife viewing, birdwatching, participation in nature-based activities

Source: theidesignbox.com

STUDY BACKGROUND
Satisfaction Theory

- Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory of Job Satisfaction *(Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959)*
  - Tourism and recreation researchers adapted Herzberg's theory to identify satisfiers and dissatisfiers *(Balmer & Baum, 1993; Crompton, 2003; Chan & Baum, 2007)*

- Cadotte and Turgeon (1988) suggested a typology of factors contributing to customer satisfaction
  - Criticals, satisfiers, dissatisfiers, neutrals

User-generated Content (UGC) & Tourism

- ## User-generated content (UGC)
  - "Any type of message, communication, or media that is created by individuals and freely accessible for informational or entertainment purposes. Its subject matter may be newly formed by the creator or may be a rendition of, or influenced by, an existing subject (i.e., imagery, narrative, personality, or brand) *(Havens, 2007, p.2)*"

- ## Online travel reviews
  - Believed more trustful in planning the trips – 25%, higher than glossy travel brochures - 13% (travel programmes) or 11% for magazines and newspaper supplement *(newmediatrendwatch.com)*
  - E.g., Tripadvisor.com, Yahootravel.com, Igougo.com

http://www.

STUDY BACKGROUND
UGC Research

- Managerial value *(Papathanassis & Knolle, 2010)*

- Credible and readily available *(Dellarocas, 2003; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008)*

- Electronic word-of-mouth *(Chatterjee, 2001; Zhang et al., 2010)*

- Impact on decision-making *(Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008; Ye, Law, & Gu, 2009; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Yoo, Lee, Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2009)*

http://www.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: What are the components that constitute the ecotourists' travel experience represented by stay at ecolodges, reported by ecotourists themselves?

RQ2: What are the factors that increase satisfaction or generate dissatisfaction among ecotourists staying at ecolodges in ecotourism destinations?

METHODOLOGY
Selection of Ecolodges

Figure 1. Costa Rican Ecolodge Sample Distribution

METHODOLOGY
Selection of UGC Reviews

- TripAdvisor® website

- 373 online reviews posted by travelers from United States and written in English
  - 300 Positive Reviews ("I would recommend this hotel to a friend or relative – Yes")
  - 73 Negative Reviews "I would recommend this hotel to a friend or relative – No")

METHODOLOGY
Content Analysis

- 26 attributes and 7 categories

- Reliability check
  - Average PA on Positive Reviews - 87.08%
  - Average PA on Negative Reviews – 86.26%
  - Reliable (70+%) (Frey et al., 2000; Shoemaker, 2003)
  - Code on the problematic attributes (i.e., PA < 70%) was adjusted

- Reviews were assigned a favorability score (Krippenforff, 2004)

Nonparametric Test I

- Independent-samples Kruskal-Wallis test
  - Find the relationship between attitudes towards individual attributes and the overall satisfaction with the stay at ecolodge
  - Test the distribution of an ordinal variable between two or more groups
    - The dependent variable - the overall satisfaction rating score
    - The independent variable - the attitude towards attributes (i.e., "favorable/positive comment", "unfavorable/negative comment", "not mentioned")
  - Non-parametric version of ANOVA

- Mann-Whitney U test
  - Specify the difference of satisfaction distribution among groups
  - Test the distribution of an ordinal variable between two groups
    - The dependent variable – the overall satisfaction rating score
    - The grouping variable – "positive comment vs. not mentioned" & "negative comment vs. not mentioned"
  - The post hoc tests of Kruskal-Wallis test

METHODOLOGY
Nonparametric Test II

	Kruskal-Wallis Test	Mann-Whitney U Test	
		"Positive comment" vs. "Not mentioned"	"Negative comment" vs. "Not mentioned"
Neutrals	🚫		
Satisfiers	⭕	➕	
Dissatisfiers	⭕		➖
Criticals	⭕	➕	➖

RESULTS

- Positive Reviews

Table 4- 1. Attribute and category frequency in Positive Reviews

Category/Attribute	Frequency	Percentage*
Lodge settings	**486**	
Grounds/surroundings	165	55.0%
Lodge amenities	143	47.7%
Ambiance	109	36.3%
Ecofriendliness	31	10.3%
Noise	23	7.7%
Other guests	15	5.0%
Room	**404**	
Room/bathroom décor and layout	187	62.3%
Room amenities	170	56.7%
Room/bathroom facilities	27	9.0%
Insect problem	20	6.7%
Nature	**381**	
Nature-based activities	191	63.7%
Nature-based attractions	156	52.0%
Weather	34	11.3%
Service	**328**	
Customer service	209	69.7%
Tour/tour guide service	69	23.0%
Entertainment choice	20	6.7%
Restaurant service	15	5.0%
Management policies	8	2.7%
Reservation process	7	2.3%
Food	**234**	
Food quality	234	78.0%
Location	**136**	
Closeness to town	69	23.0%
Accessibility	42	14.0%
Closeness to attraction	25	8.3%
Value for money	**109**	
Food/drink price	49	16.3%
Room rates	45	15.0%
Other prices	15	5.0%

Note: *Percentage out of the number of Positive Reviews (N=300)

RESULTS

- Negative Reviews

Table 4- 1. Attribute and category frequency in Negative Reviews

Category/Attribute	Frequency	Percentage*
Lodge settings	**114**	
Lodge amenities	34	46.6%
Grounds/surroundings	32	43.8%
Ambiance	26	35.6%
Noise	15	20.5%
Ecofriendliness	5	6.8%
Other guests	2	2.7%
Room	**107**	
Room amenities	42	57.5%
Room/bathroom décor and layout	41	56.2%
Insect problem	13	17.8%
Room/bathroom facilities	11	15.1%
Service	**81**	
Customer service	44	14.7%
Reservation process	10	13.7%
Tour/tour guide service	9	12.3%
Entertainment choice	7	9.6%
Management policies	7	9.6%
Restaurant service	4	5.5%
Nature	**65**	
Nature-based attractions	29	39.7%
Nature-based activities	28	38.4%
Weather	8	11.0%
Food	**38**	
Food quality	38	52.1%
Value for money	**38**	
Room rates	18	24.7%
Food/drink price	17	23.3%
Other prices	3	4.1%
Location	**33**	
Closeness to town	16	21.9%
Accessibility	12	16.4%
Closeness to attraction	5	6.8%

Note: *Percentage out of the number of Positive Reviews (N=73)

RESULTS

- Attributes classification

Table 4- 1. Typology of Factors Contributing to Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction

Category	Attribute	Typology
Lodge settings	Ambiance	CRITICAL
Lodge settings	Ecofriendliness	CRITICAL
Room	Room/bathroom décor and layout	CRITICAL
Service	Customer service	CRITICAL
Service	Tour/tour guide service	CRITICAL
Food	Food quality	CRITICAL
Value for money	Room rates	CRITICAL
Lodge settings	Grounds/surroundings	DISSATISFIER
Lodge settings	Noise	DISSATISFIER
Lodge settings	Lodge amenities	DISSATISFIER
Room	Room/bathroom facilities	DISSATISFIER
Room	Room amenities	DISSATISFIER
Room	Insect problem	DISSATISFIER
Service	Reservation process	DISSATISFIER
Service	Management policies	DISSATISFIER
Nature	Nature-based attractions	DISSATISFIER
Lodge settings	Other guests	SATISFIER
Nature	Nature-based activities	SATISFIER
Location	Accessibility	Neutral
Location	Closeness to town	Neutral
Location	Closeness to attraction	Neutral
Service	Entertainment choice	Neutral
Service	Restaurant service	Neutral
Value for money	Food/drink price	Neutral
Value for money	Other prices	Neutral
Nature	Weather	Neutral

CONCLUSION

- Methodological and practical implications
  - UGC and ecotourism research
  - Satisfaction and ecotourism research
  - UGC and satisfaction research

- Supported by the empirical understanding of this research, management suggestions for ecotourism providers become more effective and convincing

LIMITATIONS
FURTHER RESEARCH

- 73 Negative Reviews might not be large enough to reach the saturation point of negative issues reported by dissatisfied ecotourists pertinent to their eco-experience

- Reviewer authenticity