
Original Article

Determining the timeshare owner-heritage/cultural tourist connection

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ABSTRACT This study's purpose is to look at the timeshare owner who has similar characteristics to the heritage/cultural tourist to see if there is a connection. Visitors that own a timeshare in Orlando were asked questions related to their interest in heritage/cultural tourism. Even though Orlando is typically seen as a destination where the primary attraction is theme parks, there is a desire to experience the cultural attractions of the area. There are significant relationships between the level of interest in cultural attractions and the distance the timeshare owner is willing to travel while in the area. There are also some significant relationships between the age of the owner and their interest in cultural attractions.

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INTRODUCTION

The number of timeshare units sold has climbed in recent years as more companies enter the segment and more vacationers consider timeshare as a viable option in their vacation plans. (State of the Timeshare Industry, 2008). There has been limited research on understanding the timeshare consumer in this growing segment. Research has focused on owner satisfaction (Kaufman *et al*, 2006), gender preference and consumption

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patterns (building on with this consumer research focus, Kaufman and Upchurch, 2006 and 2007). Most research has determined the demographics of the timeshare owner and repeatedly has found that the timeshare owner is more likely to have a higher income, stay longer in a community while on vacation, are older and spend more money in the community where they are on vacation (State of the Timeshare Industry, 2008). This has made the timeshare consumer a much sought after vacation segment as a result.

The similarity in the growth of the timeshare industry paralleled the growth of the heritage/cultural tourism industry. The interesting connection is the fact that the heritage/cultural tourist also is more likely to have a higher income, stay longer in a community while on vacation, are older and spend more money in the community where they are on vacation (Silberberg, 1995). This reasoning has led communities to try to determine how to attract the heritage/cultural tourist. Communities and city planners must acquire information about these consumers and determine their specific needs relative to the tourist experience. In agreement with this line of thought several studies have shown that heritage/cultural tourists are a viable growth segment that may be marketed to once these tourist preferences are understood (Taylor *et al.*, 1993; Hollinshead, 1996; Chandler and Costello, 2002). Therefore, the basis of this research is going to take the similarities that are present between the timeshare owner and the heritage tourist to see if there is any connection with the timeshare owner's interest in heritage/cultural attractions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The growing acceptance of timeshare has been based on the inclusion of the timeshare segment among the major hotel brands. Currently, Starwood, Wyndham, Hyatt, Hilton, Marriott and Disney all have timeshare properties. Sales have increased from approximately US\$9 billion in 2004 such that by 2007 sales were 10.6 billion. Reflected in these numbers is an increase in timeshare owners and weeks/intervals owned. In 2007, 6.5 million weeks/intervals were owned by 4.7 million owners. These numbers reflect the trend that on average a timeshare consumer owns more than one week/interval (Understanding Vacation Ownership, 2008).

The timeshare owner is a sought after traveler and companies realize the importance of capturing a market that stay longer at a destination than the average traveler and make more money. Recent studies show that the median income of timeshare owners is \$72 900 where as the median income for US households is \$50 200 (Understanding Vacation Ownership, 2008). About half (49.9 per cent) of timeshare owners have a college degree or higher and 89.8 per cent own their own home (Vacation Timeshare Owner Report, 2008).

Most timeshare buyers in the United States indicated they are married/domestic partner (78.1 per cent) and 21.9 per cent were listed as single. Almost, one in four owners has children living in their home (23.6 per cent). These numbers show that the owners are less likely to be traveling with children. The average age of owners is 52.6 and almost



half (49.7 per cent) of owners are 55 or older (Vacation Timeshare Owners Report, 2008).

The constancy of timeshare use is an important element in producing a stable tourism economy for the United States. Ninety-two per cent of the timeshare owners report using their unit themselves or allowing others to use their timeshare unit. High timeshare occupancy results in a strong year-round utilization of the product resulting in less seasonality which in turn strengthens the job market and the success of the local businesses in the United States (ARDA International Foundation, 2008).

Heritage tourism, a worldwide phenomenon, is currently in the growth mode in the United States. A need to recapture the past is important to travelers who now expect a greater depth of experience than they did in the past. Heritage and cultural tourism have seen a dramatic increase in popularity in recent years. Eight per cent of domestic travelers visited a historic site or museum when they traveled during 2004 (Travel Industry of America, 2004).

An ordinary vacation is no longer acceptable; today's traveler is sophisticated and expects more when vacationing than a mundane and shoddy experience. In general, travelers have a greater wealth of knowledge because of higher education levels and varied experiences. Therefore, developers must plan to meet these needs by offering greater opportunities for guidance and interpretation (Gunn, 1997). Balancing the growing numbers of tourists interested in historic sites and providing a quality experience that does not lead to over development and degradation of a historic site and its environs have been a vital issue for practitioners and researchers (Weaver and Kaufman, 2000).

Many things have caused the increased interest in heritage/cultural tourism. Some of the more evident reasons include: the aging baby boomers, the use of the internet and other technology, the rise in weekend travel, and an increasing interest in vacation packages. The Travel Industry of America released figures that show 30 million US travelers have stayed longer at a destination because of heritage/cultural tourism in 2000 (Medina, 2001).

METHODOLOGY

Vacation owners at a branded Orlando vacation ownership resort were sent an invitation via e-mail to participate in a research study analyzing their travel preference and likely activities while staying at their timeshare in Orlando. Two thousand nine hundred and sixty-five owners were sent the e-mail invitation to participate in the research study by logging on to a website with the survey. Of the 2965 e-mails that were sent out, 2402 were successfully delivered without bouncing back. This resulted in an 81.01 per cent delivery rate. Of the 2402 that were successfully delivered, 268 were actually opened resulting in an 11.16 per cent open rate. Two hundred and twenty-nine of the 268 that were opened were completed by the vacation owners resulting in an 85.4 per cent response rate concerning the e-mails that were opened.

The data were entered into SPSS and the means, standard deviations and percentages were configured to find the make-up of the data. Pearson's correlation was performed to find any relationships in the data as well.



Table 1: Demographic make-up of sample

	<i>Percentage</i>
Male	50
Female	50
30–39 years	4
40–49 years	11
50–59 years	44
60–69 years	34
70 years and over	8
Post-doctorate	2
Doctorate	7
Masters	22
College graduate	37
Some college	19
High school graduate	12
Less than high school	0.4
Single	3
Married	88
Living with a significant other	3
Divorced	4
Widowed	2
Residency: Florida	15
Residency: Eastern United States	58
Residency: Western United States	8
Residency: Outside the United States	19

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the purpose of the research study the research questions are as follows:

1. What are the demographics of the timeshare owners at a branded resort in Orlando?
2. What is the level of interest in heritage/cultural tourism attractions in Orlando by timeshare owners?
3. Are Orlando timeshare owners willing to travel while visiting Orlando to participate in Central Florida’s heritage/cultural attractions?
4. Is there a relationship with the heritage/cultural tourism interest level of Orlando timeshare owners and their age?

RESULTS

The vacation owners were split evenly in regards to gender (see Table 1). The older population (86 per cent 50 and over) is representative of the current median age of the vacation owner. Sixty-eight per cent of the sample having a college degree or greater also accurately represents the current education level of the vacation owner as indicated in other literature. Most of the sample is married which is seen in the general population of vacation owners. The largest part of the sample lives in the eastern part of the United States (58 per cent) and 19 per cent of the sample lives outside of the United States.

The vacation owners were asked with whom they traveled when they stayed at their timeshare in Orlando. They were given the opportunity to



Table 2: Travel companions

Spouse	86%
Grandchildren	29%
Significant other	4%
Extended family (brother, sister, and so on)	33%
Children	59%
Friends	30%
Other	4%

Table 3: Heritage/cultural tourism interest level of Orlando timeshare owners

	Mean	Standard deviation
I would include a visit to an art museum during a vacation to Orlando if it was convenient and easily accessible.	3.09	1.15
I would attend a concert at a performing art center while on vacation in Orlando.	3.45	1.04
I would visit a local festival if it was convenient and easily accessible while on vacation in Orlando.	3.96	0.829
I would include a visit to shops that showcase the work of local artists while on vacation in Orlando.	3.49	0.990
I would include a visit to 'child-friendly' museums while on vacation in Orlando.	3.03	1.15
I would go antique shopping while on vacation in Orlando.	2.59	1.16
I would participate in food and wine events while on vacation in Orlando.	3.63	1.05
If Orlando had convenient cultural attractions, I would extend my vacation to Orlando.	3.00	1.00
I would participate in Orlando's cultural attractions if transportation was provided.	3.05	1.02

5=Strongly agree; 1=Strongly disagree.

check everyone that applied considering they probably would have used their timeshare in Orlando more than once and the type of companion that a person travels with could influence their travel preferences or likely activities. Most of the sample chose their spouse (see Table 2). Almost a third selected their grandchildren and 59 per cent selected their children. Extended family (33 per cent) and friends (30 per cent) were selected by about a third of the sample. This reinforces the idea that the vacation owner is more likely to travel with his/her extended family and friends when they stay at a timeshare. This produces a larger amount of money being spent at the destination and in the local economy on each trip.

The vacation owners were asked questions relating to their interest in cultural attractions while vacationing in Orlando (see Table 3). All but one of the questions had a mean of three or higher signifying there is an interest among the sample of experiencing cultural attractions while on vacation in Orlando. The only question that scored below three involved antique shopping in Orlando. The top two questions in terms of agreement involved visiting a local festival and attending a food and



Table 4: Willingness to travel to participate in Central Florida’s heritage/cultural attractions

<i>Distance</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Not interested	24.8
30 min	42.9
1 hour	20.8
1 ½ hours	7.1
2 hours	4.4

wine event. The question that concerned the level of interest in cultural attractions in Orlando as it relates to the owner extending their stay was given a neutral response. This could be that they had already stayed in Orlando for an extended period of time as has been shown in previous research about timeshare owners in the United States. The convenience question of participating in cultural events if transportation was provided was scored as a 3.05 signifying that the Orlando owner already has access to transportation and this may not be as important to the owner.

The sample was asked about their willingness to travel to participate in Central Florida’s cultural attractions (see Table 4). About a third of the sample was willing to drive an hour or more to go to a cultural attraction and 42.9 per cent were willing to drive a half an hour. This finding broadens the area that planners can work with when developing activities for their owners or mapping potential cultural attractions that may interest the timeshare owners.

In order to see if there were any significant relationships between an owner’s response to the length they are willing to travel to participate in cultural attractions and their interest in participating in cultural attractions while visiting Orlando Pearson’s correlation was run (see Table 5). Every item showed 0.000 significance indicating a strong relationship present. This shows that there is a segment of owners that are extremely interested in Orlando’s cultural attractions and those within driving distance. Further research should be performed to narrow the scope of the owners that are interested in order to market and plan more effectively.

The median age of a timeshare owner in the United States is 52. This higher age range made for a rationale of running Pearson’s correlation and determining if there was a relationship with the timeshare owner’s age and their interest in participating in Orlando’s cultural attractions (see Table 6). There were three significant relationships present. As age increased so did their interest in visiting an art museum during a vacation to Orlando if it was convenient and easily accessible. Showing there is more of an interest in art museums among the older timeshare owners. The second significant relationship was visiting ‘child-friendly’ museums while on vacation in Orlando. As age increases so was their interest in child-friendly attractions. This shows that timeshare owners are traveling with their children or grandchildren while visiting their timeshare in Orlando. Finally, as age increases so did their agreement with If Orlando had convenient cultural attractions, I would extend my vacation to Orlando. This makes sense because as one ages typically their vacations are more

**Table 5:** Heritage/cultural tourism interest level and relationship with length

	<i>Pearson correlation</i>	<i>Significance</i>
I would include a visit to an art museum during a vacation to Orlando if it was convenient and easily accessible.	0.409	0.000
I would attend a concert at a performing art center while on vacation in Orlando.	0.272	0.000
I would visit a local festival if it was convenient and easily accessible while on vacation in Orlando.	0.243	0.000
I would include a visit to shops that showcase the work of local artists while on vacation in Orlando.	0.265	0.000
I would include a visit to 'child-friendly' museums while on vacation in Orlando.	0.238	0.000
I would go antique shopping while on vacation in Orlando.	0.129	0.053
I would participate in food and wine events while on vacation in Orlando.	0.285	0.000
If Orlando had convenient cultural attractions, I would extend my vacation to Orlando.	0.350	0.000
I would participate in Orlando's cultural attractions if transportation was provided.	0.286	0.000

Table 6: Heritage/cultural tourism interest level and relationship with age of owner

	<i>Pearson correlation</i>	<i>Significance</i>
I would include a visit to an art museum during a vacation to Orlando if it was convenient and easily accessible.	0.130	0.052
I would attend a concert at a performing art center while on vacation in Orlando.	0.092	0.172
I would visit a local festival if it was convenient and easily accessible while on vacation in Orlando.	0.087	0.195
I would include a visit to shops that showcase the work of local artists while on vacation in Orlando.	0.009	0.890
I would include a visit to 'child-friendly' museums while on vacation in Orlando.	0.137	0.041
I would go antique shopping while on vacation in Orlando.	-0.098	0.144
I would participate in food and wine events while on vacation in Orlando.	-0.014	0.834
If Orlando had convenient cultural attractions, I would extend my vacation to Orlando.	0.131	0.052
I would participate in Orlando's cultural attractions if transportation was provided.	0.035	0.600

flexible because of an increase in free time. These relationships show that the older timeshare owners should be focused on to find out specifically the types of cultural attractions that they are interested in and make certain that these attractions are incorporated in marketing literature for Orlando.



DISCUSSION

This study is an initial step in connecting the timeshare owner and the heritage/cultural tourist. The findings of this study support the beliefs that were intimated in previous research. The timeshare owner in this study is older, has a high education level and is more likely to be married. There is a higher than average interest in Orlando's heritage/cultural attractions and the sample indicates a willingness to travel to experience these attractions while visiting their timeshare in Orlando. There are some connections between age and the timeshare owners' interest level of Orlando heritage/cultural attractions. The connections may not be as evident because of the timeshare population is not diverse in the age brackets.

Timeshare managers and tourism officials in Orlando and other communities that house both timeshare and heritage/cultural attractions need to better market and coordinate between the two segments. There is a connection found that the timeshare owner is interested in these attractions and is willing to drive to experience heritage/cultural attractions while they are staying in their timeshare. This could be based on the length of time that they stay in the community and the desire to diversify their experiences and/or the fact that they may return to the same place every year and wish to broaden their experiences as their children grow older and/or no longer vacation with them. Because timeshare owners in this branded resort can exchange and go to other resorts as many timeshare resorts offer their owners, the managers of the timeshare resorts need to constantly stimulate the desire to return to their home resort. This study has given managers a market that they may not as yet have tapped. But by coordinating and marketing the area's heritage/cultural attractions timeshare resort managers could develop a reason for their owners to return and stay longer at their resort. Tourism officials need to focus their efforts on this growing timeshare market in order to make certain that the market is supporting the sustainability of tourism through supporting heritage/cultural attractions. The future of this research will be to sample other timeshare owners in other communities to build upon and support these findings.

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