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# Cultural tourism and the vacation ownership industry

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## Abstract

Both cultural and heritage tourism and the timeshare industry have seen dramatic growth during the last decade. The purpose of this research project is to determine whether there is a link between cultural and heritage tourism and the timeshare industry. Vacation club owners who belong to an internationally recognised branded vacation club were surveyed to determine their interest in Orlando's cultural and heritage attractions. The results indicated a significant relationship with the Orlando vacation owner and their interest in Orlando's cultural and heritage tourism industry. The results of this survey will help developers better understand their owners. It will also provide developers with information that will help diversify the planned activities that they may offer the vacation club owners. The community's tourism marketers will be aided in support for this growing area of tourism in Orlando.

## Keywords:

cultural tourism market, timeshare, vacation ownership

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## INTRODUCTION

Visiting cultural and heritage<sup>1</sup> attractions while travelling in the United States continues to be among the top activities to pursue while on vacation. In 2004, according to the Travel Industry of America,



17 per cent of the person-trips taken that year included visits involving heritage and cultural attractions. The timeshare industry<sup>2</sup> continues to be the fastest growing segment of the hospitality industry. In 2004, \$7.87bn in sales were recorded collectively by timeshare companies in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

Florida houses 22.7 per cent of the timeshares in the United States and a large portion of those are located in Orlando.<sup>4</sup> While Orlando is better known for its theme parks, it does house many heritage and cultural attractions of which most visitors are unaware. This research project asks respondents who own a timeshare at a branded timeshare resort in Orlando about their interest in heritage and cultural attractions. This research will also determine whether the Orlando heritage and cultural attractions were effectively marketed and easy accessible, and whether the timeshare owners would be interested in visiting the attractions.

On the surface, the connection between a cultural tourist and a timeshare owner may not be evident. Research conducted independently on these two groups, however, indicates that both cultural and heritage tourists<sup>5</sup> and timeshare owners<sup>4</sup> have a higher income, spend more money in the communities that they visit, stay longer in the communities that they visit and have a higher education level.

## VACATION OWNERSHIP LITERATURE

The empirical research to date has looked for the reasons behind purchasing vacation ownership units in the United States. These motivations include the flexibility of product usage in terms of location choice, unit size and time of year. This concept of flexibility is reported by 86 per cent of vacation ownership purchasers as being a dominant force that drives their satisfaction with their timeshare purchase.<sup>6</sup> Other factors that were critical to owner satisfaction included: (a) the guarantee of quality accommodations (84 per cent in agreement), (b) exchange opportunity with other resorts through exchange company (80 per cent of the respondents), (c) credibility of the vacation ownership company (77 per cent) and (d) 72 per cent of the respondents noted that available resort unit amenities enhanced their product satisfaction.<sup>5</sup>

Current timeshare research has looked to determine underlying differences present between timeshare owners. With this growth, there has been limited research to understand and better define the potential timeshare consumer. There have been steps to better understand the timeshare consumer. Kaufman *et al.*<sup>7</sup> found a significant relationship between timeshare owner satisfaction and their knowledge of various timeshare product components. Kaufman and Upchurch<sup>8</sup> have begun to segment the timeshare market based on age and found that there were also relationships present based on the age of a timeshare owner and their current as well as future consumption patterns. Finally, Kaufman and Upchurch<sup>9</sup> looked at the differences based on gender and found significant gender-based differences in areas of satisfaction, and planned usage.



## **CULTURAL AND HERITAGE TOURISM LITERATURE**

Cultural and heritage tourism, a worldwide phenomenon, is currently in the growth mode in the United States. A need to recapture the past is important to travellers who now expect a greater depth of experience than they did in the past. An ordinary vacation is no longer acceptable; today's traveller is sophisticated and expects more when vacationing than a mundane and homogenous experience. In general, travellers have a greater wealth of knowledge because of higher education levels and varied past vacation experiences. Therefore, developers must plan to meet these needs by offering greater opportunities for guidance and interpretation.<sup>10</sup> Balancing the growing numbers of tourists interested in historic sites and cultural attractions while providing a quality experience that does not lead to overdevelopment and degradation of the attractions and its environs have been a vital issue for practitioners and researchers.<sup>11</sup>

Many things have caused the increased interest in cultural/heritage tourism. Some of the more evident reasons include: the ageing baby boomers, the use of the internet and other information technology, the increase in weekend travel and an increasing interest in vacation packages. The Travel Industry of America recently released figures that show 30 million US travellers have stayed longer at a destination because of cultural/heritage tourism in 2000.<sup>12</sup>

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The Travel Industry of America released figures that show 30 million US travellers have stayed longer at a destination because of cultural/heritage tourism in 2000.<sup>12</sup> Many things have caused the increased interest in heritage/cultural tourism. Some of the more evident reasons include: the ageing baby boomers, the use of the internet and other technology, which provides additional information for traveller's access, the rise in weekend travel and an increasing interest in vacation packages.

Light and Prentice<sup>13</sup> found that there is no uniform demand for one type of heritage tourism experience that makes it difficult to determine what the public wants. It appears that the heritage and cultural tourist has different motivations for travel than a traditional traveller.<sup>14</sup> A person who is more historically preservationist minded may be seeking an entirely different experience at a heritage and cultural site than one who is not. Visitors can no longer be treated as one collective mass, and sites must differentiate themselves in order to market effectively. It has been suggested that visitor experience should be placed at the centre of any heritage and cultural management process. Traditional management focusing on the heritage resource is thought to be inadequate because it does not take into account the human element or the significance of visitors in heritage management.<sup>15</sup> Managers at heritage sites have begun to explore ways to increase attendance and control operating expenses by



evaluating operating policies and practices. The issues emphasised include a heightened focus on customer service.<sup>5</sup> By studying what the more historic preservationist-minded tourist wants at heritage sites, planners will be better able to comprehend what these individuals expect from their visit. By determining preferences, planners will be poised to capture the 'heritage and cultural tourist market'.

The growth in the heritage and cultural tourism area is producing a diverse audience seeking a variety of services and benefits from the heritage and cultural site experience; at the same time, individuals place authenticity as a key factor in selecting a cultural or historic location. Realising that the public is demanding an authentic heritage or cultural experience, practitioners must accommodate these wishes or they will be replaced by other practitioners who are planning, marketing and developing heritage sites with the awareness of the 'pulse of America' in mind.<sup>16</sup>

## **METHODOLOGY**

The sample consists of 200 owners of an internationally branded vacation ownership company that owns at the Orlando property. These owners were randomly selected for the pilot study out of a total of 2,200 members. The owners were sent an invitation via e-mail to complete an online survey. Of the 200 e-mail invitations sent out, 165 were successfully delivered. Of the 165 e-mails that were successfully delivered, 27 responded resulting in a response rate of 16.4 per cent. Although this is a low percentage rate, it is typical for online surveys. The survey (Appendix A) included questions to determine their level of interest in pursuing cultural activities while on vacation in Orlando, FL.

## **RESULTS**

The results indicate that there is a significant interest in pursuing cultural tourism opportunities in Orlando by owners of a nationally branded vacation ownership company. The makeup of the sample was as follows: 63 per cent were 40–59 years old; 56 per cent were male; 66 per cent's household income was over \$70,000; 75 per cent college graduate, masters, doctorate, post-doctorate and 78 per cent stay seven or more nights on vacation. This confirms that respondents had representative characteristics of both the timeshare and cultural heritage tourism populations. This previous research indicated that both cultural and heritage tourists<sup>5</sup> and timeshare owners<sup>4</sup> have a higher income, spend more money in the communities that they visit, stay longer in the communities that they visit and have a higher education level.

Table 1 indicates four questions that vacation owners agreed with in relation to their interest in cultural tourism in Orlando, FL. As noted, the highest level of agreement was evident in the desire to visit a local festival while on vacation in Orlando as long as it was convenient and accessible.

The respondents were asked if they knew that Orlando had well-planned cultural attractions, would they extend their vacation to Orlando?

**Table 1:** Interest level in Orlando, Florida's cultural opportunities

Question	Mean	Standard deviation
I am likely to include a visit to an art museum during a vacation to Orlando if it was convenient and easily accessible.	2.89	1.36
I am likely to include a visit to a concert at a performing art centre during a vacation to Orlando if it was convenient and easily accessible.	3.58	1.20
I am likely to include a visit to a local festival during a vacation to Orlando if it was convenient and easily accessible.	4.04	0.897
I am likely to include a visit to shops that showcase the work of local artists during a vacation to Orlando if the shop was convenient and easily accessible.	3.44	1.12

5 — Strongly Agree; 1 — Strongly Disagree

**Table 2:** Likelihood of extension of stay in Orlando, Florida and interest in Orlando's cultural activities

Question	Significance level
I am likely to include a visit to a concert at a performing art centre during a vacation to Orlando if it was convenient and easily accessible.	0.001
I am likely to include a visit to a local festival during a vacation to Orlando if it was convenient and easily accessible.	0.000
I am likely to include a visit to shops that showcase the work of local artists during a vacation to Orlando if the shop was convenient and easily accessible.	0.003
I am likely to include a visit to antique shops during a vacation to Orlando if the shops were convenient and easily accessible.	0.000

**Table 3:** Likelihood of increased visitation to Orlando, Florida and interest in Orlando's cultural activities

Question	Significance level
I am likely to include a visit to an art museum during a vacation to Orlando if it was convenient and easily accessible.	0.002
I am likely to include a visit to a concert at a performing art centre during a vacation to Orlando if it was convenient and easily accessible.	0.025
I am likely to include a visit to a local festival during a vacation to Orlando if it was convenient and easily accessible.	0.000
I am likely to include a visit to shops that showcase the work of local artists during a vacation to Orlando if the shop was convenient and easily accessible.	0.003
I am likely to include a visit to antique shops during a vacation to Orlando if the shops were convenient and easily accessible.	0.001

The mean response to this question was 2.81 (5 — Strongly Agree; 1 — Strongly Disagree). This question was then correlated utilising Pearson's correlation with specific questions about cultural tourism opportunities in Orlando. These results are found in Table 2. The questions showed significant correlation with the likelihood that the vacation owner would extend their stay in Orlando if there were well-planned cultural attractions and their interest was in concerts, festivals, local artists and antique shops while visiting Orlando.

The respondents were asked if they knew that Orlando had well-planned cultural attractions if they would visit Orlando more often,



the mean response to this question was 2.66 (5 — Strongly Agree; 1 — Strongly Disagree). This question was then correlated utilising Pearson's correlation with specific questions about cultural tourism opportunities in Orlando. These results are found in Table 3. The questions showed significant correlation with the likelihood that the vacation owner would be more likely to visit Orlando more often if there were well-planned cultural attractions and their interest was in art museums, concerts, festivals, local artists and antique shops while visiting Orlando.

## DISCUSSION

The results clearly show that there is a commonality of interest by vacation owners in cultural and heritage experiences. This is a pilot study, however, and a continuation of this research to a larger audience needs to be performed before any generalisation can be made. If future research supports these findings, there will be great progress in understanding both the vacation owner and the cultural and heritage tourist. Perhaps the desire to own one's vacation and be given the ability to return to the same destination year after year could lend support to the idea that drives the cultural and heritage tourist. The timeshare owners want to experience a community's culture and heritage and feel that they have had an authentic experience while on vacation.<sup>17</sup>

The results will be used to: (1) provide support for improved marketing of Orlando's cultural and heritage attractions to timeshare owners, (2) look at a possible link between these two growing areas of hospitality and tourism and (3) better understand the vacation owner.

## References and Notes

1. Cultural and heritage attractions refer to the attractions where tourists experience a community's culture and heritage. Cultural and heritage tourists seek the sites that focus on the community's culture and heritage.
2. Timeshare and vacation ownership both refer to the ownership of what is the equivalent of at least a week at a timeshare resort.
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## APPENDIX A

### QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer questions 1–14 by selecting one response that most closely represents your level of agreement from the following scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree, 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree. For questions 15–24 please select an answer from the given options.

- (1) I am more likely to visit art museums
- (2) I am more likely to visit history museums
- (3) I am more likely to visit historic sites
- (4) I am likely to include a visit to an art museum during a vacation to Orlando if it was convenient and easily accessible
- (5) I am likely to include a visit to a concert at a performing art centre during a vacation to Orlando if it was convenient and easily accessible
- (6) I am likely to include a visit to a local festival during a vacation to Orlando if it was convenient and easily accessible
- (7) I am likely to include a visit to shops that showcase the work of local artists during a vacation to Orlando if the shop was convenient and easily accessible
- (8) I am likely to include a visit to antique shops during a vacation to Orlando if the shop was convenient and easily accessible
- (9) If I knew that Orlando had wellplanned cultural attractions I would extend my vacation to Orlando
- (10) If I knew that Orlando had well-planned cultural attractions I would be more likely to visit Orlando more often
- (11) I would participate in Orlando's Cultural attractions if transportation was provided
- (12) I prefer to stay at my Orlando Hilton Grand Vacation Property
- (13) I prefer to stay at another Hilton Grand Vacation Property other than the Orlando locations
- (14) I prefer to stay at an RCI (Resorts Condominiums International) property
- (15) On vacation in Orlando, how far would you be willing to travel to participate in cultural attractions that interest you?

(A) Not interested; (B) ½ hour; (C) 1 h; (D) 1½ hour; (E) 2 hour



- (16) How much would you be willing to spend per adult ticket for admission to an art museum?
- (A) Less than \$5.00; (B) \$5.00–\$9.99; (C) 10.00–\$14.99; (D) \$15.00–\$19.99; (E) \$20.00 or greater
- (17) How long do your average vacations generally last?
- (A) 1–2 nights; (B) 3–4 nights; (C) 5–6 nights; (D) 7–8 nights; (E) More than 8 nights
- (18) How much do you generally spend per person (per person or per day?) on your average vacation (including food, transportation, entertainment and souvenirs EXCLUDING LODGING)?
- (A) Less than \$99.99; (B) \$100.00–\$249.99; (C) \$250.00–\$499.99; (D) \$500.00–\$999.99; (E) More than \$1000.00
- (19) How many vacations do you take per year on average?
- (A) 0–1; (B) 2–3; (C) 4–5; (D) 6–7; (E) 8 or more
- (20) How old are you?
- Under 20, 20–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–69, 70 and over
- (21) Are you male or female?
- (22) What is your household income?
- Up to \$24,999, \$25,000–\$39,999, \$40,000–\$54,999, \$55,000–\$69,999, \$70,000–\$84,999, over \$85,000
- (23) What is the highest education level that you have attained?
- Less than high school, high school graduate, some college, college graduate, masters, doctorate, post-doctorate
- (24) Are you?
- Single, Living with a significant other, Married, Divorced, Widowed