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The Travel Motivations of Canadian Ecotourists

PAUL F. J. EAGLES

This article reports on the grouped findings of three studies that have taken an in-depth look at the travel motives of Canadian ecotourists. The results from these studies are compared to the general Canadian traveler population. These studies indicate that the ecotourists are much more likely to have social motives that put stress on physical activity, meeting people with similar interests and seeing the maximum possible in the time available, than is the general Canadian traveler. The ecotourist is also much more likely to be interested in the destinations that contain wilderness, lakes and streams, rural areas, parks, mountains and oceanside, than is the general traveler.

The term "ecotourism" describes a specific travel market. It has been characterized as being composed of those who select a certain travel experience and destination, that of nature-oriented experiences in pristine natural environments.

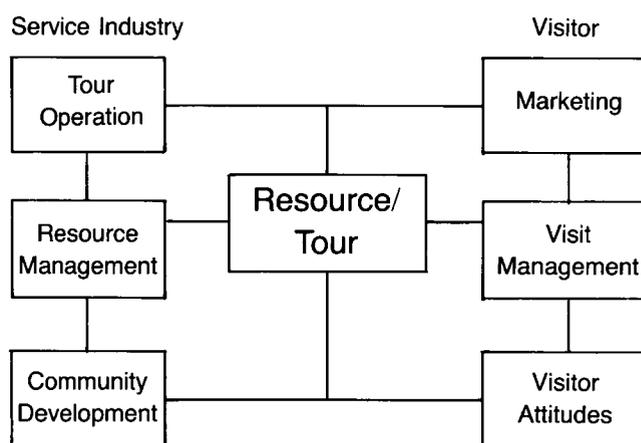
Ecotourism is centered around leisure travel to observe and experience nature (Laarman and Durst 1987; Valentine 1990). It is a rapidly growing activity, often with travel from first-world country citizens visiting natural sites in the poorer countries in the tropics. Kenya, Ecuador, and Costa Rica are three countries with well developed and growing ecotourist industries (Wilson 1987; Whelan 1988). This form of tourism holds considerable promise for the combination of nature conservation and economic development (Boo 1990), a factor that is important everywhere, but vitally important in poorer locales.

Investigations of tourism phenomenon are best done within a conceptual framework for tourism analysis (Culpan 1987). The ecotourism travel analysis framework proposed by Fennell and Eagles (1990) consists of three interrelated components: the service industry, the visitor, and the natural resource tour (Figure 1).

The tour experience within a natural environment is the central component of the framework. The traveler undertakes a travel experience that is directly related to an environmental feature. Therefore, nature and the trip are the key, cardinal components of the resource tour component of the model.

One side of the framework involves the service industry that provides for the tourism experience. A vital factor of the tour operation is the infrastructure necessary for the trip, including the transportation, accommodation, food provision, and information services for the tourist (Ingram and Durst 1989). One of the key factors of community development is the level of service delivery that the community provides (Elkan 1975). Resource management involves the protection of the wilderness through the provision of environmentally moderate tourism use policies based on an understanding of the dynamics of the ecosystem. Environmental planning for tourist development is necessary to limit

FIGURE 1
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR
ECOTOURISM ANALYSIS



the negative impacts that may result from infrastructure development and from visitor use (Inskeep 1987; Tilt 1987).

The other side of the framework involves understanding the visitor involvement in the travel experience. Marketing is a critical factor (Culpan 1987). The visitor has to find the location of and how to travel to a place (Durst and Ingram 1988). The visitor has a certain level of commitment to the visit experience (Tobias and Mendelsohn 1991), and marketing can play an important role in molding both the attitude and the commitment to a destination.

The visitor attitudes are a critical component of the ecotourism conceptual framework. What does the visitor want to experience? What social context is appropriate? What level of experience is desirable? The fulfillment of each of these factors determines the level of satisfaction that the ecotourist will attain. The visitor and the experience must be managed. Visit management is the central factor that helps match the desires of the ecotourist with the reality of the situation that occurs in nature.

This article deals with the visitor attitudes component of the ecotourism conceptual framework. These are critical precursors to the entire ecotourism experience. Until recent-

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ly, the motivations of ecotourists have been measured through the general observation of the behaviors of some travelers, as opposed to systematic study. Boo (1990) confirms, "Few statistics exist on the numbers and profiles of people who travel to protected areas." Boo (1990) hesitantly proposes, "It is possible that nature tourists are less demanding in terms of lodging than other types of tourists and thus do not need accommodations, food, or nightlife that meet luxurious standards. The nature traveler seems more willing to accept and appreciate local conditions, customs, and foods." Are these observations accurate?

Two travel motivation categories are discussed in this study. The features that are desirable are important to the tourist choice of destination. These are referred to in this study as "attraction motivations." The other category is the set of opinions about personal goals and about interactions with others. These are referred to as "social motivations." The purpose of this article is to develop a fuller understanding of the attraction and social motivations of Canadian ecotourists. To assist, these are compared to the general Canadian traveler.

METHODS

The Canadian Tourism Attitude and Motivation Study (CTAMS) was administered by Statistics Canada in 1983 through the Labour Force Survey. A total of 11,500 Canadians completed surveys concerning, among other things, their attitudes and motivations towards travel. The survey had an 80% participation rate (Burak Jacobson Inc. 1985). Respondents were asked to indicate the importance of several social motives and attraction motives to the choice of the destination for their last trip. Each motive was ranked into one of four choices — very important, somewhat important, not very important and not at all important. A total of 26 social motivations and 29 attraction motivations were presented to each respondent; the results were tabulated and published in 1985 (Burak Jacobson Inc.). Subsequently the data were deposited in the Leisure Studies Data Bank at the University of Waterloo and made available for secondary research.

Fennell (1990) undertook a survey of Canadian ecotourists that had traveled to Costa Rica sometime in the 1985 to 1989 period. His survey used the same social and attraction motive choices as in the CTAMS survey; however, he made two changes. First, he added motive questions. Each question was chosen to assist with the development of a more precise definition of ecotourist motivations. Second, he asked the respondent to refer to a specific trip when answering the questions, the one to Costa Rica, not the respondent's last trip, as done for CTAMS. Fennell had 77 usable questionnaires for a 78.6% return rate.

Kretchman and Eagles (1990a) undertook a survey of ecotourists who had participated in the Federation of Ontario Naturalists' Trip Program. For example, in 1989 this program offered 135 trips to the members of this provincial, environmental organization. The trips tend to be short, usually from one to three days in length, and travel to destinations in Ontario. The survey design followed that of Fennell. A group of respondents was randomly chosen from all of those who had taken at least one of these trips at some time in the 1984 to 1988 period. This survey had 182 usable questionnaires for a 50% return rate. A comparison of travel motives portion of this data with CTAMS can be found in Kretchman and Eagles (1990b).

Williacy and Eagles (1990) undertook a survey of ecotourists who had participated in the Canadian Nature Tours Program. This program offers trips to members of both the Canadian Nature Federation and the Federation of Ontario Naturalists. The trips are usually two weeks long and travel to various destinations outside the country. Participants were randomly chosen from the participant list of the 1985 to 1989 period. The survey design followed that of Fennell. This survey had 193 usable responses for a return rate of 51%.

The data from the three Canadian ecotourist studies were combined to form the data base for the group referred to as Canadian ecotourists. The ecotourist data were compared using the SPSSX analysis program (Norusis 1990) to one half of the CTAMS population. Because the CTAMS population was large and unwieldy, it was reduced in size, randomly, to facilitate computer analysis.

Each of the four choices of motivation attractiveness was assigned a number: very important, 4; somewhat important, 3; not very important, 2; and not at all important, 1. The totals for each question were tabulated and averaged. Therefore, if all respondents stated that a particular travel motivation was very important to them in the choice of their trip, that motivation would get a mean of four. Conversely, a mean of one would occur if all respondents stated that a motivation was not at all important. The data presented in the article gives the means for each motivation. The comparisons between populations are done using the means.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the 15 motivations given the highest ranking by the average Canadian traveler according to the Canadian Travel Attitude and Motivation Study.

TABLE 1
MOTIVATIONS OF CANADIAN TOURISTS

Motivation	Mean	Rank
Being together as a family	2.76	1
Feel at home away from home	2.64	2
Visit friends and relatives	2.62	3
Warm climate	2.53	4
Have fun and be entertained	2.53	4
See maximum in the time available	2.48	6
Lakes and streams	2.44	7
Meet people with similar interests	2.42	8
Go to places where one feels safe	2.41	9
Predictable weather	2.39	10
Oceanside	2.37	11
Change from a busy job	2.36	13
Free to act the way I feel	2.34	13
National and provincial parks	2.33	14
Beaches for swimming or tanning	2.30	15

Table 1 provides an informative picture of the motivations most central to the travel decisions made by the average Canadian traveler. The importance of family and friends is strongly revealed. These people like to travel with family members and like to visit places where family and friends live. Familiarity and safety are also high on the list. The most important environmental feature is warm climate, a reasonable desire for a northern people who endure cold winter each year. The presence of lakes and streams, oceanside, and

beaches are all in the top 15. (One assumes that the traveler is referring to these places in their unfrozen state.) The desire for consistent warm weather is possibly the explanation behind the high ranking given predictable weather. Some release from normal life conditions is suggested in the desire to get a change from a busy job and to feel free to act out feelings. National and provincial parks are well known to Canadians and are highly valued as travel destinations as shown by their ranking in the top 15.

These data show Canadian travelers concentrate on traveling with family and friends to warm climates with predictable weather. They want to be safe and in familiar surroundings. They like to see lakes, streams, and beaches. They want to have fun and visit parks.

Table 2 contains a listing of the top ranked 15 motives for the population of ecotourists studied.

TABLE 2
MOTIVATIONS OF CANADIAN ECOTOURISTS

Motivation	Mean	Rank
Tropical forests ^a	3.95	1
Wilderness and undisturbed nature	3.94	2
Learn about nature ^a	3.87	3
Birds ^a	3.69	4
Lakes and streams	3.68	5
Tree and wildflowers ^a	3.66	6
Photography of landscape/wildlife ^a	3.58	7
Mammals ^a	3.52	8
National and provincial parks	3.41	9
Be physically active	3.39	10
Meet people with similar interest	3.33	11
Mountains	3.32	12
Oceanside	3.32	12
See maximum in time available	3.24	14
Rural areas	3.18	15

^a Asked of the ecotourist populations only. These were not included as choices in the general Canadian travel study.

Table 2 shows the ecotourists are interested in a broad range of natural environment features. Tropical forests, birds, lakes and streams, trees and wildflowers, mammals, mountains, and oceanside are all ranked in the top 15 motivations. Ecotourists appear to prefer to experience these features within a context of wilderness or undisturbed nature, usually in the form of national or provincial parks. They express a desire to learn about these features, hopefully with the opportunity to reinforce this learning with photographs that can be taken home. They want to do the maximum in the time available, suggesting a strong desire for travel and learning efficiency.

A considerable amount of attention has been devoted to the study of travelers identified as bird watchers (Butler and Fenton 1988; Hvenegaard 1989). However, this study shows that the ecotourists ranked trees, wildflowers, and mammals almost as highly as birds as important motives for travel. Reptiles and amphibians were also ranked high with a mean of 3.09, but insects and fish were ranked very close to the overall motivation mean of 2.56.

Tables 1 and 2 identify those motivations that are the most highly ranked by each of the two populations under study. How do the motivation rankings compare between the two populations?

The means of the motivations of the general population and the ecotourists are compared by the use of t-test. Table 3 lists those 10 motivations that are more important to the general population at the .05 level of significance. The second column gives the mean of the general population. The third column gives the t statistic. In this column a positive number means that this motivation is significantly more important to the general population, or expressed another way, significantly less important to the ecotourists. The fourth column gives a rank order of the motivations for the table.

Table 3 shows that the general population has a number of travel motivations that are ranked more highly than by the ecotourists. The importance of traveling to visit friends and relatives is paramount. Such popular social activities as shopping, nightlife, theme parks, and resorts are ranked more highly.

TABLE 3
THE MOTIVATIONS SIGNIFICANTLY MORE IMPORTANT TO CANADIAN TRAVELERS

Motivation	Mean	T Value	Rank
Visit friends and relatives	1.88	9.09	1
Shopping	1.59	7.46	2
Nightlife and entertainment	1.42	7.17	3
Amusement and theme parks	1.41	6.76	4
Resort areas	1.66	5.10	5
Being together as a family	2.37	4.72	6
Do nothing	1.52	4.10	7
Big cities	1.51	3.47	8
Feel at home away from home	2.39	3.23	9
Other indoor activities	1.83	2.84	10

Table 3 shows all of the motivations that are ranked significantly higher by the Canadian travelers, whether or not they were ranked high in absolute terms. For example, resort areas are given a low absolute rating at 1.66, but even this low number was significantly higher for the general travelers. The Canadian traveler's motivation score mean was 2.09. Being together as a family and feeling at home away from home are the only two in the top 50% of traveler motivations in this list. This shows that even though the other activities, such as big cities and resort areas, are ranked significantly higher by the Canadian traveler, they are still in the bottom half of these travelers' concerns.

Table 4 presents those motivations that were significantly more important to the ecotourists. The second column contains the population mean for the ecotourists. The third column gives the t statistic. A negative number means that this motivation was significantly more important for the ecotourist population, or put another way, significantly less important for the general population. The fourth column gives a rank order of the population based upon the t statistic value. This table only contains those motivations that were asked of both populations.

Table 4 contains a lengthy list of motivations that are ranked more highly by the ecotourists. Those that are ranked over 2.56, the group mean, have a rating in the top 50% of ecotourist motivations and are discussed here.

The environmental features that are much more highly ranked by the ecotourist are wilderness, lakes and streams, mountains, national and provincial parks, rural areas, and oceanside. In addition, cultural features, such as historic places, local crafts and historic sites are also given more

TABLE 4
THE MOTIVATIONS THAT ARE SIGNIFICANTLY
MORE IMPORTANT TO THE ECOTOURISTS

Motivation	Mean	T Value	Rank
Wilderness and undisturbed nature	3.94	-23.40	1
Lakes and streams	3.68	-16.46	2
Be physically active	3.39	-16.07	3
Mountains	3.32	-14.56	4
National or provincial parks	3.41	-14.33	5
Experience new lifestyles	2.89	-13.22	6
Rural areas	3.18	-12.59	7
Oceanside	3.32	-12.34	8
Meet people with similar interest	3.33	-12.17	9
Simpler lifestyle	2.79	-12.01	10
Visit historical places	2.79	-11.85	11
Outdoor recreation	3.12	-11.00	12
Be daring and adventurous	2.51	-10.61	13
Cultural activities	2.71	-10.44	14
See maximum in time available	3.24	-9.95	15
Rediscover self	2.47	-7.95	16
Change from a busy job	3.06	-8.81	17
Local crafts	2.66	-8.53	18
Historic sites and parks	2.79	-8.25	19
Reduced fares	2.47	-7.95	20
Thrills and excitement	2.55	-7.01	21
Museums, art galleries	2.42	-6.59	22
Budget accommodation	2.62	-5.68	23
Escape from demands of life	2.52	-5.32	24
Participate in sports	1.91	-5.30	25
Try new foods	2.18	-5.27	26
Have fun, be entertained	2.92	-5.09	27
Smaller towns, villages	2.56	-4.53	28
Local festivals and events	2.28	-4.23	29
Go places friends have not been	1.84	-3.83	30
Inexpensive meals	2.63	-3.77	31
Talk about trip after return	2.30	-3.57	32
Live theaters and musicals	1.85	-2.20	33

emphasis. The social motives more highly ranked are: being physically active, experiencing a new and a simpler lifestyle, meeting people of similar interests, having a change from a busy job, seeing cultural activities and buying local crafts, and having fun. Interestingly, even with their high incomes ecotourists are on the look for budget accommodations and inexpensive meals (Fennell 1990; Kretchman and Eagles 1990; Williacy and Eagles 1990).

Table 4 clearly shows that ecotourists have many strongly-held attraction and social motives. They are interested in nature, in its own right, and in personal development through physical activity and experiencing new, simpler lifestyles. They like to have fun. They like to meet others with similar interests, suggesting that having shared ecotourism experiences is an important attribute of the trip. They are looking for both financial and time efficiency in their travel.

Tables 3 and 4 do not contain any reference to several of the highly ranked ecotourist motivations, such as learning about nature and birds. These choices were not presented to the general Canadian population within the original CTAMS survey and therefore no comparison is possible.

DISCUSSION

The ecotourists have clear, distinct travel motivations, and both the attraction and social motives of Canadian eco-

tourists are substantially different from the average Canadian traveler.

The mean of all ecotourist motivation scores was higher than the general population, suggesting that ecotourist population holds its travel motivations more strongly. This may imply that the ecotourists are dedicated travelers with strongly held views on what is desirable in travel.

Ecotourists are most interested in the attraction motivations of wilderness, water, mountains, parks, and rural areas. This population is most interested in the social motivations of being physically active, new lifestyles, meeting people of similar interests, adventure, and seeing the maximum in the time available. In rank order, ecotourists are interested in the following living features: tropical forests, birds, trees and wildflowers, and mammals.

Ecotourists are least interested in the travel attractions and motivations of gambling, amusement parks, nightlife, big cities, watching sports, doing nothing, indoor sports, shopping, and resort areas.

A few cautionary comments are needed. All of the ecotourists studied undertook their travel within groups. Typically the trips were organized by an expert leader who knew the destination and its features. Our questionnaires did not survey people at the destinations and therefore did not pick up those who found their own way, without a leader. Therefore, this approach may not have found a complete sample of ecotourists, as the independent loner was missed.

There is a six-year gap between the CTAMS survey, conducted in 1983, and our studies conducted in 1989. However, the ecotourists were asked about trips that occurred at some time in the period from 1984 to 1989. Because of the increase in ecotourist travel in Canada over the last decade it is possible that if the CTAMS survey were repeated in 1989 the travel motivations might have changed.

This study confirms the statements made by Boo (1990) that ecotourists do not require luxurious accommodations, food or nightlife. They are willing to accept and appreciate local conditions, culture, and food.

Read (1980) predicted that special interest travel is going to be "the most important direction tourism will take over the next decade" — for any area of the world. This study has shown the motivations of one group of special interest tourists, Canadian ecotourists. How applicable are these findings to the ecotourism travelers generally?

It is the author's belief that the findings of this study are of general utility in the United States, as well as Canada. It is also probable that they are of some utility in describing the ecotourists from most western European countries. This statement is based on the author's discussions with people from a wide variety of countries at ecotourist destinations in central and south America. Krippendorf (1987) has stated that one-third of the population in West Germany "belongs to the category of highly environment-conscious people, and the share is growing rapidly." However, corroboratory studies need to be done for these populations.

Lars-Eric Lindblad (quoted in Read 1980) stated in reference to trips his company offered to China that "the people are going . . . out of intellectual curiosity." It appears that ecotourists are driven by a similar sense of inquisitiveness. Our work has shown that ecotourists are traveling to learn about nature within wilderness, to be with others they can learn from and with, and to be with people that share an appreciation of the richness of nature.

APPENDIX 1

MOTIVATION SCORES FOR ECOTOURISTS AND GENERAL TRAVELERS

The following table contains a summary of the data for all attitudes for both groups. The first column is the motivation. The second column is the mean score for the general traveler. The third column is the t value based upon a pooled variance estimate. The fourth column contains the two-tailed probability. The fifth column contains the mean score for the ecotourists. On this table a t value greater than 2 or less than -2 shows a significant difference between the populations. Such a t value corresponds to a probability of .05 or less.

Motivation for Travel	Mean	T Value	Prob	Mean
Amusement or theme parks	1.88	6.76	.000	1.41
Be daring and adventurous	1.77	-10.61	.000	2.51
Be physically active	2.20	-16.07	.000	3.39
Use beaches for swim or tan	2.30	0.66	.507	2.25
Being together as family	2.76	4.72	.000	2.37
Big cities	1.74	3.47	.001	1.51
Birds				3.69
Budget accommodation	2.20	-5.68	.000	2.62
Camping				2.52
Change from busy job	2.36	-8.81	.000	3.06
Cultural activities	1.97	-10.44	.000	2.71
Do nothing	1.81	4.10	.000	1.52
Escape from demands	2.13	-5.32	.000	2.52
Experience new lifestyles	1.95	-13.22	.000	2.89
Feel at home away from home	2.64	3.23	.001	2.39
First class hotels	1.76	-0.10	.340	1.82
Fish				2.60
Free to act the way I feel	2.34	-1.02	.308	2.42
Gambling	1.20	-1.45	.148	1.28
Go places friends have not been	1.59	-3.83	.000	1.84
Have fun, be entertained	2.53	-5.09	.000	2.92
High quality restaurants	1.96	0.24	.809	1.94
Historic sites or parks	2.18	-8.25	.000	2.79
Indoor sports	1.71	1.92	.055	1.58
Inexpensive meals	2.28	-3.77	.000	2.63
Insects				2.76
Lakes and streams	2.44	-16.46	.000	3.68
Learn about nature				3.87
Learn new outdoor skill				3.08
Live theater and musicals	1.70	-2.20	.028	1.85
Local crafts	2.06	-8.53	.000	2.66
Local festivals and events	1.98	-4.23	.000	2.28
Mammals				3.52
Meet opposite sex				1.81
Meet people with similar interest	2.42	-12.17	.000	3.33
Mountains	2.21	-14.56	.000	3.32
Museums, art galleries	1.95	-6.59	.000	2.42
National or provincial parks	2.33	-14.33	.000	3.41
Nightlife and entertainment	1.92	7.17	.000	1.42
Oceanside	2.37	-12.34	.000	3.32
Other indoor activities	2.04	2.84	.004	1.83
Outdoor recreation	2.29	-11.00	.000	3.12
Participate in sports	1.55	-5.30	.000	1.91
Photography landscape/wildlife				3.58
Predictable weather	2.39	0.81	.420	2.33
Rediscover self	1.79	-9.56	.000	2.47
Relive good memories	2.12	1.39	.163	2.02
Reptiles and amphibians				3.09
Resort areas	2.03	5.10	.000	1.66
Rural areas	2.24	-12.59	.000	3.18
See max possible in time avail	2.48	-9.95	.000	3.24
Shopping	2.13	7.46	.000	1.59
Simpler lifestyle	1.92	-12.01	.000	2.79
Smaller towns and villages	2.24	-4.53	.000	2.56
Take advantage of reduced fare	1.88	-7.95	.000	2.47
Talk about trip after return	2.04	-3.57	.000	2.30
Thrills and excitement	2.04	-7.01	.000	2.55
To places where feel safe	2.41	-1.52	.129	2.52

Trees and wildflowers				3.66
Tropical forests				3.95
Try new foods	1.82	-5.27	.000	2.18
Visit friends and relatives	2.62	9.09	.000	1.88
Visit historical places	1.93	-11.85	.000	2.79
Visit places family from	1.94	1.06	.288	1.85
Warm climate	2.53	0.82	.410	2.47
Watch sports	1.56	0.69	.492	1.51
Wilderness-undisturbed nature	2.20	-23.40	.000	3.94
Average means	2.09			2.56

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