



**Examining the role of attractions in
influencing destination attractiveness**

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Steven Richards: Examining the role of attractions in influencing destination attractiveness

Abstract

This thesis examines the role of attractions in shaping destination attractiveness. Tourism has long been viewed as a driver of economic growth and jobs creation, and destinations compete to attract tourists for the positive benefits they bring. Understanding what attracts tourists is central to the success of this, encapsulated in the concept of destination attractiveness. In essence, destination attractiveness is about how visitors, potential or actual, evaluate a destination in terms of meeting their needs. It focusses on the appeal of the different resources at the destination, providing insight on what destination elements are important to visitors. It would appear self-evident that attractions, by their very nature, attract tourists, and previous research does highlight the importance of attractions. However, there is a need for a better understanding of the role they play in influencing destination attractiveness.

This research adopted a qualitative approach to provide a deeper insight into the influence of attractions on destination attractiveness. Narrative based interviews were conducted with seventeen participants who recounted their holiday experiences, and subsequent thematic analysis identified a number of relevant themes. Prior to the trip, findings show that the importance of attractions varied when choosing the destination, from providing the initial inspiration for the trip, adding to the general appeal of the place, influencing the final choice when selecting between destinations, to being overlooked at the time of booking. The role of attractions prior to the trip was also evident when participants researched and planned what to do when there. Finally, whilst at the destination, the role of attractions again varied, providing a sense of change, the chance for discovery, and the opportunity to pursue desires.

This research builds on existing knowledge, and presents a conceptual framework to illustrate the nuanced role of attractions prior to the visit and at the destination itself. Further, it proposes a novel approach to categorising attractions, based upon the concept of curiosity, and expands upon existing approaches to conceptualising attractions as an 'assortment'. Implications for destination managers and future research are provided, supporting the need for further in-depth research into the tourist perspective on what makes a destination attractive.

Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	3
Table of Contents	4
List of Tables	7
List of Figures	7
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	8
<i>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</i>	9
Rationale and background	9
Rationale	12
Research aim	13
Contribution to new knowledge	14
The structure of the thesis	14
<i>CHAPTER 2: ATTRACTIONS AND DESTINATIONS</i>	15
Introduction	15
Exploring the concept of visitor attractions	15
Destination concept	24
Summary	36
<i>CHAPTER 3: DESTINATION ATTRACTIVENESS</i>	37
Introduction	37
Exploring the concept of destination attractiveness	37
Destination attractiveness research	42
Summary	62
<i>CHAPTER 4: UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF VISITORS</i>	64
Introduction	64
Main motivational theories in tourism	65
Curiosity and motivation	73

Summary	84
CHAPTER 5: ATTRACTIONS AND DESTINATION CHOICE	85
Introduction	85
Influence of attractions as destination attributes	85
Role of attractions during decision process	88
Summary	95
CHAPTER 6: METHODOLOGY	98
Introduction	98
Research philosophy	98
Adopting a narrative approach	103
Sampling and participant profile	105
Designing and conducting the interviews	111
Data analysis	118
Ethical considerations of the research	121
Ensuring trustworthiness	123
Limitations of the research	128
Summary	129
CHAPTER 7: CHOOSING THE DESTINATION	130
Introduction	130
Attractions providing inspiration	131
The appeal of place	139
Swaying the balance	145
Attractions overlooked at time of booking	149
Summary	153
CHAPTER 8: PREPARING FOR THE TRIP	155
Introduction	155

Discovering more about the destination_____	155
Planning what to do _____	172
Summary_____	183
CHAPTER 9: ROLE OF ATTRACTIONS AT THE DESTINATION - PART I _____	185
Introduction _____	185
Spending time in the nest _____	186
Attractions providing a diversion _____	188
Attractions encouraging discovery _____	198
Fulfilling a desire _____	204
Summary_____	207
CHAPTER 10: ROLE OF ATTRACTIONS AT THE DESTINATION - PART II _____	209
Introduction _____	209
Attraction as objects of desire_____	209
Attractions encouraging discovery _____	225
Attractions providing a diversion _____	238
Summary_____	242
CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION _____	243
Overview of themes_____	244
Toward an understanding of the influence of attractions on destination attractiveness _____	252
Contribution to knowledge _____	258
Implications for practice _____	260
Recommendations for further research _____	261
Bibliography_____	262
Appendix A: Interview guide _____	317

List of Tables

Table 2.1	Definitions of attractions	p.17
Table 2.2	Approaches to classifying attractions	p.23
Table 5.1	Factors influencing destination choice	p.87
Table 6.1	Overview of participants	p.111

List of Figures

Figure 2.1	Tourist attraction system	p.21
Figure 3.1	Expectancy-value model of behaviour	p.41
Figure 3.2	Development of preferences in destination attractiveness	p.41
Figure 3.3	The hierarchy of determinants of seniors-friendly tourism attractiveness	p.49
Figure 4.1	The escaping and seeking dimensions of leisure motivation	p.70
Figure 4.2	The core structure of the Career Travel Approach	p.72
Figure 4.3	Role of individual attractions in drawing tourists to a destination	p.73
Figure 4.4	Crompton's (2024) six tourist's motive constructs	p.84
Figure 11.1	A conceptual framework illustrating the influence of attractions on destination attractiveness	p.254

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Rationale and background

Tourism has long been viewed as a driver of economic growth and jobs creation (Assaker et al. 2014; Telfer and Sharpley 2015; Brida et al. 2016; UNWTO 2017; Gonzalez-Rodriguez 2023), and more recently has been included as a specific target in the UN Sustainable Development Goal 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth (UNWTO 2017). The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) estimate that spend by international visitors contributed directly to 3% of world GDP in 2023 (UNWTO 2024). Further, taking into account domestic tourism and the secondary impacts of tourism, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) claim that the sector accounts for approximately 1 in 11 jobs globally (WTTC 2023).

It is estimated that international visitors spent 1.6 trillion US dollars in 2024 (UNWTO 2025). However, as more destinations are opening up and investing in tourism (UNWTO 2017), competition for this spend has increased (Assaker et al. 2014; Reisinger et al. 2019). This has led to a focus on how destinations can compete to attract tourists (Abreu-Novais et al. 2015; Shariffuddin et al. 2023). Put simply, “a destination is competitive if it can attract and satisfy potential tourists” (Enright and Newton 2004, p.778). For a destination to be competitive, they must do this better than other destinations; “destinations must ensure that their overall attractiveness and the integrity of the experiences they deliver to visitors must equal or surpass that of many alternative destinations open to potential visitors” (Crouch and Ritchie 1999, p.139). Ritchie and Crouch (2003, p.2) provide a broad definition of destination competitiveness which encompasses several composite elements:

“Its ability to increase tourism expenditure, to increasingly attract visitors while providing them with satisfying, memorable experiences, and to do so in a profitable way, while enhancing the wellbeing of destination residents and preserving the natural capital of the destination for future generations”.

As Dwyer and Kim (2004) highlight, destination competitiveness is a relative concept, as comparisons are made between destinations, and it is also multi-dimensional, with a range of factors considered when making this comparison. Several frameworks and models have been developed to capture these different factors (Xia et al. 2024). The most commonly applied models within the literature

were developed by Ritchie and Crouch (2003) and Dwyer and Kim (2004) (Abreu-Novais et al. 2015; Shariffuddin et al. 2023; Xia et al. 2024). Ritchie and Crouch's (2003) conceptual model of destination competitiveness identifies 36 attributes categorised into five groups, Dwyer and Kim (2003) developed an integrated model which identified 83 competitiveness attributes in four main groups. These attributes include attractions, which have long been considered as one of the key elements of a destination. Burkart and Medlik (1981, p.44) stated that "how important any geographical unit is as a tourist destination, or how important it is potentially, is determined by three prime factors: attractions, accessibility, and amenities". Cooper et al. (1993, p.77) stressed that "the destination represents the *raison d'être* for tourism: it is the reason for traveling, and the attractions at the destination generate the visit". The importance of attractions to destinations is now generally accepted (Abreu-Novais et al. 2015), and rather than identifying additional attributes, there are calls for further research into the relative importance of particular attributes (Dwyer et al. 2014; Abreu-Novais et al. 2015).

This thesis attempts to address this, by focusing on the importance of visitor attractions. As McKercher (2017) suggested, the question of whether attractions attract tourists appears axiomatic, however there is a lack of existing research to address this simple question. Indeed, McKercher argued that the role of attractions "is far more nuanced and complex" than this simple question suggests (2017, p.120), and in-depth research may offer insights into the role they play.

In order to explore the role of attractions, this study is framed in the concept of destination attractiveness. Ariya et al. (2017, p.1) argue that "destination attractiveness is the driving force of tourism and without which tourism would be almost non-existent". Mayo and Jarvis (1981, p. 203) proposed that "the overall attractiveness to the traveller of a destination area has a great deal to do with the specific benefits that are desired by travellers and the capability of the destination to deliver them". In essence, it is about how visitors, potential or actual, evaluate a destination in terms of meeting their needs (Formica and Uysal 2006; Cheng et al. 2013; Dimitrov et al. 2017). This study focusses on how attractions influence destination attractiveness by contributing to meeting these needs.

Destination attractiveness is central to the concept of destination competitiveness, as destinations need to attract and satisfy tourists (Ritchie and Crouch 2003; Vengesai 2003; Mikulic et al. 2016; Cracolici and Nijkamp 2009; Kresic and

Prebezac 2011; Medina-Munoz et al. 2013; Bianchi 2018). It is a less complex concept, limited to what the destination offers (Cracolici and Nijkamp 2009; Kresic and Prebezac 2011; Medina-Munoz et al. 2013), and focusses on the “pulling effect” destination attributes have on visitors (Vengesai 2003, p.638). This allows for a greater focus on destination resources, to highlight “the important role that tourism attractions have in the process of achieving destination competitiveness” (Kresic and Prebezac 2011, p.502). This helps destinations understand which attractions are important to visitors, allowing them to manage these effectively (Mikulic et al. 2016). Adopting this approach also reflects the shift from a productivist approach to a marketing approach amongst destination managers (Kresic and Prebezac 2011): it is no longer sufficient to merely offer a tourist product, they “must now make the tourist central to their decision-making” (Barros et al. 2011, p.145).

Destination attractiveness has been investigated in a number of studies since the 1980s, and these have considered a range of resources that may appeal to visitors (see Hu and Ritchie 1993; Formica and Uysal 2006; Kim and Purdue 2011; Reitsamer et al. 2016). This has led to a long list of resources which are considered important to destination attractiveness, and there is commonality with the core resources proposed by Ritchie and Crouch, primarily natural resources, cultural and heritage resources, entertainment and recreational activities (Gearing et al. 1974; Haahti 1986; Lee et al. 2009; Kim and Purdue 2011; Vigolo 2015; Ariya et al. 2017; Dey et al. 2020; Alahakoon et al. 2021; Islam and Chaudhary 2021; Pompurova et al. 2024). However, this approach of using an inventory of attributes to determine what factors influence destination attractiveness does raise an issue regarding what an attraction is. Most studies follow early definitions, where attractions include all attributes that draw visitors to the destination (Lew 1987). There has been much debate within visitor attraction research regarding what should be included, with later definitions limiting attractions to those which are designated and managed as such (Middleton 1996). Whilst several studies have grouped attractions together and identified them as being important (Salazar et al. 2001; Vengesai 2009; Kresic and Prebezac 2011), these have followed the inventory approach and differ in what attractions they have included, providing only general insights for destination managers. For instance, Kresic and Prebezac (2011) found that natural beauty and preserved nature were the main pull factors to Croatia. Yet, as Ritchie and Crouch (2003) contend, destination managers have little or no control over this.

To address this, this study adopts a narrower definition of attractions evident within visitor attraction research, where they need to be recognised as a visitor attraction and managed as such (Pearce 1991; Middleton 1996; Hu and Wall 2005). As a qualitative approach is adopted, this recognition is based upon the perceptions of the participants, acknowledging the role tourists play in creating the importance of attractions (MacCannell 1976; Edelheim 2015). Attractions are viewed from the subjective perspective of the visitor, rather than defined through externally established, objective classifications.

Rationale

The above discussion highlights where this research fits and the research gaps it aims to fill. Whilst there has been a growing interest in destination attractiveness within the literature (Lee and King 2019), differences in its conceptualization and measurement have led to a wide range of resources being investigated, including both cognitive and affective attributes (Chen and Hsu 2000; Kim and Purdue 2011; Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin 2017; Lee and King 2019). Although some authors recognise the existence of 'universal' or 'basic' attributes in attracting tourists (Hu and Ritchie 1993; Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin 2017), the inclusion of a range of attributes has led to a 'fragmentation' of views regarding what are the most important (Pompurova et al. 2024). As Kresic and Prebezac (2011, p.56) conclude, "there is evidently a need for a better understanding of the role that attractiveness factors play". Regarding the role of attractions, whilst research exists on the importance of attractions (Salazar et al. 2001; Vengesai 2009; Kresic and Prebezac 2011), Vengesai et al. (2009) consider this as a starting point for further research, and Assaker et al. (2014; 37) suggest that this area "provides an opportunity for future research". More specifically, McKercher and Koh (2017) and McKercher and Tolkach (2020) note that there has been limited research into the influence of attractions on destination choice, and whilst their recent studies add some insight into whether attractions attract, further research is required (McKercher and Tolkach 2020).

Most studies in the field have applied a quantitative approach, which is useful for identifying the range and importance of different attributes, but limits the depth of understanding provided. As Packer et al. (2018, p.211) stress, "understanding visitor experiences is an important focus for visitor research in attractions", and adopting a qualitative approach lends itself to this focus. There have been few

qualitative studies to date (Moularde and Weaver 2016; Jorgensen 2020; Alahakoon et al. 2021), and this study aims to add to this limited body of research, adopting a narrative approach to generate rich data from the visitors themselves (Smith and Weed 2007).

This research will be of benefit to destination managers, providing deeper insights into the role attractions play, informing destination management plans, and what messages to communicate to different visitor groups. The attractions sector has also gained more attention recently from intermediaries, with the CEO of TripAdvisor identifying it as a considerable business opportunity, estimated to be worth around USD 2 billion (Skift 2018). Understanding what visitors look for, how they book and consume attractions at the destination will provide further insight into this developing market.

On a personal level, having worked in travel agencies for a number of years, I have always been interested in what attracts people to different places. This interest was also piqued when working as a tourism consultant, where a common dilemma destination managers faced was what should a destination develop to attract tourists. I have continued this interest in academia, delivering destination management and visitor attraction management modules at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Research aim

The aim of this research is:

To examine the role of attractions in influencing destination attractiveness

To meet this aim, several objectives has been set, providing steps to guide the research:

1. To critically appraise the concepts of destinations and visitor attractions
2. To critically evaluate the concept of destination attractiveness and destination attributes which influence destinations attractiveness
3. To explore how attractions contribute to destination attractiveness prior to visiting and whilst at the destination
4. To develop a conceptual framework to highlight the role of attractions in influencing destination attractiveness

As a qualitative approach is followed, the main aim, or central research question, is framed as a general topic so as not to limit the scope of inquiry (Cresswell 2007). It is used here to inform the research design, but it is expected to evolve and be refined as the research progresses (Braun and Clarke 2013). The objectives have also been deliberately formulated in a broad manner to allow for this flexibility (Jones et al. 2013).

Contribution to new knowledge

This study will add to existing knowledge, by exploring the concept of destination attractiveness from the visitor's perspective. By focusing on the role of visitor attractions, it will contribute to theory by developing a conceptual framework which highlights the role of attractions in influencing destination attractiveness. This will not only be useful for academics, but also for practitioners. By understanding what role attractions play, destination managers can consider the type and mix of attractions to offer to different markets. For destination marketers, it will also help inform product development strategies, as well as provide insight when identifying and communicating with target markets.

The structure of the thesis

This thesis begins with a review of the literature, firstly setting the context of attractions and destinations (Chapter 2), before exploring the concept of destination attractiveness and existing studies in this area (Chapter 3). This leads to a focus on the benefits sought at the destination (Chapter 4), before focusing on the role of attractions in destination choice (Chapter 5). These chapters provide the conceptual underpinning for the primary research. Chapter 6 explains and justifies the research approach adopted in this study, and the findings are presented in the following chapters. These are separated firstly into the pre-visit stage, highlighting the role of attractions when choosing the destination (Chapter 7), and then later when participants prepare for the trip (Chapter 8). The analysis then moves to the visit stage, and findings are presented firstly for trips where attractions were of less importance at the time of booking (Chapter 9), followed by trips where attractions had a greater influence on destination choice (Chapter 10). Trips were separated this way to shed light on the varying role attractions have at the destination. Finally, conclusions are drawn and a conceptual framework developed in the final chapter, to tie the research together (Chapter 11).

CHAPTER 2: ATTRACTIONS AND DESTINATIONS

Introduction

This chapter firstly introduces the concept of attractions, the main focus of this thesis. Different approaches to defining and categorising attractions are reviewed, highlighting the difficulty in delineating what can be considered to be a visitor attraction. The concept of tourist destinations is then explored, with the main approaches discussed, emphasising the role of attractions within these approaches.

Exploring the concept of visitor attractions

Defining visitor attractions

Many researchers have highlighted the difficulties in agreeing a common definition of visitor attractions, due to the diverse nature of the sector (Gunn 1988; Pearce 1991; Swarbrooke 2002; Beckendorf 2004; Leask 2010; Weidenfeld et al. 2010; Weidenfeld et al. 2016). A list of common definitions is shown in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Definitions of attractions

Author	Definition of attractions
MacCannell (1976, p.41)	"I have defined a tourist attraction as an empirical relationship between a tourist, a sight, and a marker (a piece of information about a sight)"
Lew (1987, p.554)	"tourist attractions consist of all those elements of a 'non-home' place that draw discretionary travellers away from their homes"
Gunn (1988, p.15)	"All the places that provide both the pulling power to travel away from home and the satisfaction achieved therefrom"
Leiper (1990, p.371)	"A tourist attraction is a system comprising three elements: a tourist or human element, a nucleus or central element, and a marker or informative element. A tourist attraction comes into existence when the three elements are connected"
Pearce (1991, p.46)	"a named site with a specific human or natural feature which is the focus of visitor and management attention"
Innskeep (1991, p.38)	"Anything that serves to attract visitors"
Middleton (1996, p.261)	"A designated permanent resource which is controlled and managed for the enjoyment, amusement, entertainment, and education of the visiting public"
Prentice (1993, p.39)	"A site, theme, or area which attracts visitors"
Swarbrooke (2002, p.4)	"Attractions tend to be single units, individual sites or clearly defined small-scale geographical areas that are accessible and motivate large numbers of people to travel some distance from their home, usually in their leisure time, to visit them for a short, limited period"
Hu and Wall (2005, p.619)	"A tourist attraction is a permanent resource, either natural or human-made, which is developed and managed for the primary purpose of attracting visitors"
VisitEngland (2016, p.4)	"...An attraction where it is feasible to charge admission for the sole purpose of sightseeing. The attraction must be a permanently established excursion destination, a primary purpose of which is to allow access for entertainment, interest, or education and can include places of worship (but excludes small parish churches); rather than being primarily a retail outlet or a venue for sporting, theatrical, or film performances. It must be open to the public, without prior booking, for published periods each year, and should be capable of attracting day visitors or tourists as well as local residents. In addition, the attraction must be a single business, under a single management, so that it is capable of answering the economic questions on revenue, employment etc."
Leask (2018, p.301)	"Natural, cultural or built assets that have been created or converted into a permanent visitor experience, where visitor interpretation and engagement with the asset is a core purpose of the development and management of the site".

(Source: Various authors)

The main issue in defining visitor attractions is what types of resources should be included (Lew 1987; Leask 2010; Edelheim 2015; Navarro-Ruiz and McKercher, 2020). Early researchers provided broad definitions which highlighted the draw, or appeal, of sites and resources at the destination. Lew (1987, p.554) stated that "tourist attractions consist of all those elements of a 'non-home' place that draw discretionary travellers away from their homes". These elements can include a

wide scope of sites and resources which could be considered as attractions, including landscapes, activities and experiences. Gunn (1988, p.15) agreed, defining attractions as “all the places that provide both the pulling power to travel away from home and the satisfaction achieved therefrom”. More simply, Innskeep (1991, p.38) defined attractions as “anything that serves to attract visitors”, whilst for Prentice (1993, p.38) an attraction could be “a site, theme, or area which attracts visitors”.

These definitions focus on the appeal, or the draw of resources which attract visitors to the destination. As Gunn (1988, p.53) highlighted, all tourism supply can draw visitors, yet “while the total supply side of tourism exercises a pull on markets, the attractions of a destination are particularly influential in drawing visitors”. The difficulty here is how to differentiate between resources which appeal and those that are ‘particularly influential’. Edelheim (2015) raises the question as to whether researchers are talking about tourist attractions or tourist attractors, which are any resources which appeal to potential visitors, and could potentially encompass all objects and humans. This is reflected in the model of Tourism Destination Competitiveness and Sustainability developed by Ritchie and Crouch (2003). They categorised resources into five groups: qualifying and amplifying determinants; destination policy, planning and development; destination management; core resources and attractors; and supporting factors and resources. It is the core resources and attractors which provide “the primary elements of destination appeal” (Ritchie and Crouch 2003, p.68). These encompass a broad range of destination resources, grouped into seven factors: physiography and climate; culture and history; mix of activities; special events; entertainment; superstructure; and market ties. This reflects the broad range of resources which can add to destination appeal, and it is how the visitor perceives these resources which determines the appeal of the destination (Ritchie et al. 2001).

Rather than focusing purely on appeal, other definitions have attempted to narrow the scope of what is considered as a visitor attraction. Pearce (1991, p.46) developed an operational definition of attractions as “a named site with a specific human or natural feature which is the focus of visitor and management attention”. Here, the important aspect is that the site or resource must be recognized as an attraction and managed as such. Middleton (1996, p.261) adopted a similar approach, defining an attraction as “a designated permanent resource which is controlled and managed for the enjoyment, amusement, entertainment, and

education of the visiting public". This definition raises two further issues: permanency and purpose. For Middleton, temporary attractions such as events and festivals are excluded, and this has been followed by VisitEngland (2016), however other researchers do include events (Lew 1987; Swarbrooke 2002; Mason 2023). Leask (2022) argues that events should be excluded as they rarely involve interpretation at the site, considered a key element of the visitor attraction experience. Middleton's definition brings to the forefront the purpose of attractions, with the main aim being to provide enjoyment, amusement, entertainment and education. This is more specific than the general term of 'pull' or 'draw' used by earlier researchers, however issues still arise with this definition as it may be hard to identify the main purpose. As Leask (2016) notes, the primary purpose of attractions has become blurred as operators in other sectors have diversified to attract different markets, for instance garden centres and sports arenas. Their main purpose may be retail or to host sporting events, yet they may also have visitor centres. Examples can also include religious sites and dark tourism sites (Leask (2016).

A further issue in defining visitor attractions is whether they are considered to be visitor attractions or tourist attractions. Leask (2010) and Swarbooke (2002) both highlight the fact that attractions attract local visitors, hence the term 'visitor attractions' is more accurate. However, Edelheim (2015) chooses to use 'tourist attractions', as the term tourist is more globally recognized than visitor, most notably in America. Further, he argues that even though locals visit attractions, they can be considered as tourists when visiting attractions, as they are outside their usual environment and their usual way of seeing the world, and they experience these sites "through the eyes of tourists" (p.8). Whilst this argument has merit, this thesis draws on the term 'visitor attractions', as it explicitly encompasses day visitors, which can be an important segment to a destination.

As this discussion highlights, the debate regarding what should be defined as an attraction continues. Leask (2010, p.163) suggests that whilst agreeing a definition remains a challenge, researchers have at least moved to the "consolidation stage" in the "definitional debate", although as Navarro-Ruiz and McKercher (2020, p.498) recognise, "no consensus has yet been reached by academics". Given the focus on destination attractiveness in this thesis, the broad approach of defining visitor attractions based upon their appeal is acknowledged, where they play a role as 'attractors'. However, the thematic analysis will be guided by participants'

recognition of specific sites and phenomena as attractions, acknowledging the subjective perspective of the visitor.

Attraction systems

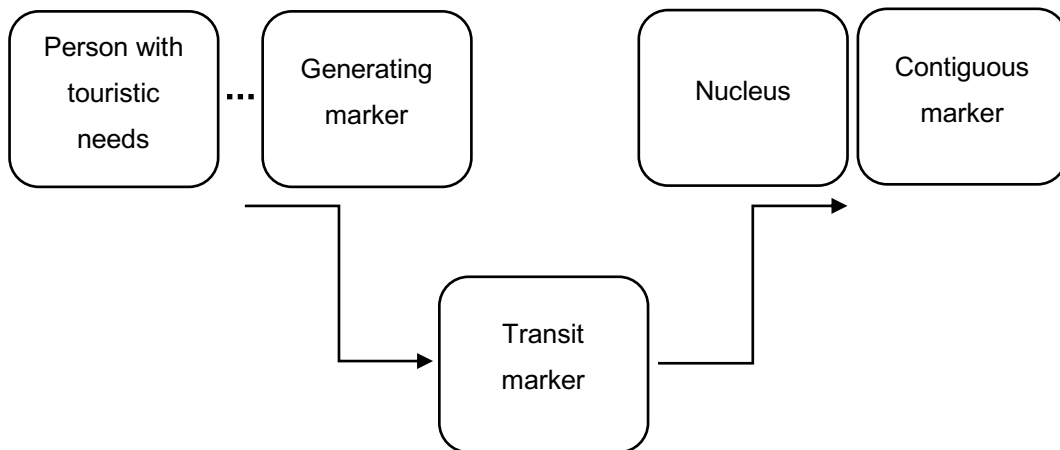
Whilst the above debate focusses primarily on resources at the destination, some researchers have extended this to consider the role of visitors more explicitly. Tourism attraction systems focus on the relationship between the attraction site and the visitor. MacCannell (1976) stressed the importance of the tourist in this relationship, using art as an allegory. Whilst artists produce art, it is society that generates the importance of this art; and it is the tourist that creates the importance of attractions. MacCannell (1976) considered that the site and the visitor were linked by information, defining a tourist attraction “as an empirical relationship between a tourist, a sight, and a marker” (p.41). The sight and visitor are connected by a piece of information, and it is this information that marks that sight as significant, and then the attraction becomes important to the tourist. MacCannell (1976) notes that often the sights look no different from other objects, and if they were not marked, it would be impossible for a visitor to distinguish between them.

Leiper (1990) developed a tourist attraction system based upon the work of MacCannell. He critiqued previous approaches to defining tourist attractions where the term ‘attraction’ is taken literally, with terms such as ‘pull’ factor and ‘magnetism’ suggesting attractions emanate some attracting force. For instance, Gunn (1988, p.37) states that “by definition an attraction is magnetic”, whilst for Burkart and Medlik (1981, p.44), attractions “exert gravitational influence upon non-residents”. For Leiper, the three components in MacCannell’s definition of tourist attractions form a system: “a tourist attraction is a system comprising three elements: a tourist, a sight, and a marker” (1990, p.370). However, MacCannell’s definition focussed on sightseeing attractions, not all attractions. Leiper extended this, building on the work of Gunn (1988) who considered that an attraction may be any object, rather than just a sight. Gunn (1988) talked about the ‘nucleus’ of an attraction which was the central component of the attraction, and this could be any attribute, including a person, an object, or an event. Using this terminology, Leiper (1990, p.371) broadened his definition to:

“a system comprising three elements: a tourist or human element, a nucleus or central element, and a marker or informative element. A tourist attraction comes into existence when the three elements are connected”.

The tourism attraction system stresses the importance of all three components: the attraction itself, the visitor, and the information which connects these two. Attractions not only need to exist, but they also need to be known about. The tourist attraction system is shown below in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 Tourist attraction system



(Source: adapted from Leiper 1990)

Leiper focused on tourists motivated for leisure purposes. These tourists search for leisure experiences, and they will search for attraction nuclei which meet their needs. The attraction nuclei “might be any feature or characteristic of a place that a traveller contemplates visiting or actually visits” (Leiper 1990, p.372). Again, this is a broad definition, and as needs are varied, there will be a wide range of nuclei. As Leiper highlights, “behaviourally, there are many types of tourists, and individual tourists might relate to virtually any feature or characteristic of places as nuclei” (382). The third part of the system is markers, which are “items of information, about any phenomenon that is a potential nuclear element in a tourist attraction” (1990, p.377). These can be generating markers, which is information received prior to the trip; a transit marker, where information is received enroute; and contiguous markers which is information received at the attraction location. Markers are the “catalytic element” (378) which link the visitor with the attraction. In this system, there are no pull factors, rather visitors react on the information they receive, and are pushed toward the attraction by their own motivation.

Classification of attractions

Given the debate regarding what to include as an attraction, it is useful to consider how attractions are classified to clarify this further. Lew (1987) was amongst the first to develop a framework to understand the approaches taken to researching tourist attractions. Lew reviewed not only previous research into tourist attractions, but also studies into destination attractiveness. From this, he classified approaches into three perspectives, which can be used to develop typologies of attractions:

1. Ideographic (inventory)
2. Organisation
3. Tourist cognition of attractions

The ideographic approach is where typologies, or classifications, are developed which “describe the concrete uniqueness of a site, rather than an abstract universal characteristic” (Lew 1987, p.555). Here, attractions are listed and inventories developed (Smith 1987). Leiper (1990) argues that ‘ideographic’ may not be the best term, as the title suggests ‘ideogram’ which means symbolism without a name, whereas lists of names are included in this perspective. Instead, this approach could be labelled a ‘formal perspective’ (Leiper 1990), or the ‘inventory’ approach (Smith 1987). This approach is common within destination attractiveness research (see Ferrario 1979; Gearing et al. 1974), with the most basic classification placing attractions on a continuum between nature based and human-orientated attractions (Lew 1987). Examples of this approach are shown in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 Approaches to classifying attractions

Approach	Classifications	Sources
<i>Inventory</i>	Nature Nature-human interface Human	Lew 1987
	Cultural or heritage Nature Recreation White-knuckle	Walsh-Heron and Stevens 1990
	Natural Man-made not for tourists Man-made for tourists Special events	Swarbrooke 2002
	Natural Built	Leask 2008
	Theme parks/amusement parks Museums and Galleries Natural Animal Visitor Centres Religious Heritage	Leask 2010
	Natural features Managed environmental features Purpose-built attractions Other buildings not constructed for leisure purposes Special events	Robinson et al. 2020
<i>Organisational</i>	Isolated / clustered	Lew 1987
	Permanent / temporary	Wall 1997; Swarbrooke 2002
	Paid entry / free entry	Lew 1987; Swarbrooke 2002; Yale 2004; Leask 2008
	Point, line, area	Wall 1997
	Ownership	Pearce 1991; Wall 1997 Swarbrooke 2002; Leask 2008
	Indoor / outdoor	Wall, 1997; Swarbrooke 2002; Yale 2004
	Market catchment area	Lew 1987; Pearce 1991; Swarbrooke 2002; Leask 2008
	Site/event	Lew 1987
	Number of visitors	Pearce 1991; Swarbrooke 2002
	Location	Lew 1987; Gunn 1994; Swarbrooke 2002
	Scale	Lew 1987; Swarbrooke 2002
	Target markets	Swarbrooke 2002
	Touring / destination	Lew 1987; Gunn 1988
	Single visit / multiple visit	Lew 1987
<i>Cognitive</i>	By activity	Lew 1987
	Attraction characters	Lew 1987
	By tourist experience/experience attributes	Lew 1987; Leiper 1990
	Primary / secondary / tertiary	Leiper 1990
	Benefits sought	Swarbrooke 2002
	Discovery (D) attractions / Escape (E) attractions	Botti et al. 2008; Peypoch and Solonandrasana 2007

One issue Lew (1987) highlighted with this approach is where to include infrastructure and service facilities. He argued that as they have some value as attractions, adding to the overall appeal of the destination, they should be included in the human-oriented category. This highlights the earlier issue regarding what to include, and this extends to classifications, as there is no recognised and agreed classification of types (Edelheim 2015). Further, the inventory approach does not easily lend itself to the measurement of quality and visitor preference for different attractions (Lew 1987). This can be addressed by considering other aspects captured in organisational (such as ownership) or cognitive (such as benefits sought) approaches.

The organisational approach focuses on spatial layout, capacity, and permanency of attractions. Examples include categorizing attractions by scale in terms of area covered, ranging from site to continents. Attractions can also be classified into 'touring' and 'destination' attractions; as small or large capacity in terms of visitor numbers; as temporary or permanent; or seasonal and non- seasonal (see Table 2.2). As noted by Leiper (1990), this approach focuses primarily on geographic organisation rather than managerial, however as can be seen from Table 2.2, several aspects of attraction management can be grouped under this approach, including ownership and price charged. The benefit of this approach is that it allows managers to measure and compare performance with direct competitors (Leask 2008). It can also provide some further insight into their role in destination attractiveness, as these aspects may influence the appeal of the destination. To illustrate, Gunn (1988) classified attractions into touring and longer stay attractions, with the rationale being that when visitors stay in a destination for longer, there is an opportunity to offer more things for them to do. The organisational approach also offers insight into the demand side, in terms of the number of visitors and types of market attracted. However, this classification also raises the issue of what to include, indeed Gunn (1988) included support services such as camping and homes of friends/relatives as attractions in this classification.

The cognitive perspective focuses on the perspective of visitors and the benefits sought (Edelheim 2015). Lew (1987) categorised these on a continuum from 'safe' to 'risky' based mainly on their authenticity and how constructed. Attributes considered here include inexpensive vs expensive; familiar vs exotic; modern vs traditional. Leiper (1990) criticised this framework due to the references to 'the' tourist, which leads to a stereotyping of general behaviour, and it is important to

remember that there are different types of tourist and tourist behaviour, which will lead to different cognitive perspectives. To address this, researchers need to understand the needs of different tourists. Leiper (1990) does provide a useful classification of attractions, which takes into account the needs of visitors when selecting a destination. Leiper developed a hierarchy of attractions, based upon their importance during the process:

- Primary attractions: defined as an attribute of a destination “which is influential in a traveller’s decision about where to go” (Leiper 1990, p.374)
- Secondary attractions: defined as an attribute which is known about before visiting, “but not significant in decisions about the itinerary” (Leiper 1990, p.374)
- Tertiary attractions: defined as an attribute that is not known about but discovered when at the destination.

These approaches to classifying attractions are useful when considering the role of attractions in influencing destination attractiveness. The inventory approach identifies what resources a destination offers, and the organisational approach provides some insight into the importance of the location of attractions, and the markets they appeal to. The cognitive approach goes further, highlighting the benefits sought and experiences offered. Lew (1987) suggests that these approaches can be combined, but warns against this, as visitors may seek different experiences at the same attraction. Indeed, “in theory, cognitive categories can be attached to any type of ideographic category” (Lew 1987; 561). Given the qualitative approach adopted in this study, the focus is on the cognitive perspective of visitors.

Destination concept

Just as defining attractions has been debated in the academic literature, there is also no widely accepted definition of what a tourism destination is (Saraniemi and Kylanden 2011; Pearce 2014), and concepts and definitions are vague (Murphy et al. 2000). The concept has been used differently by researchers: “as a narrative, as an attraction, as a geographical unit, as an empirical relationship, as a marketing object, as a place where tourism happens...and so on” (Framke 2002, p.93). This diversity of approaches “has produced more confusion than it has helped to produce clarity or helpful practical solutions” (Reinhold et al. 2023, p.586). It is important to understand how destinations are conceptualized as it will influence

the research problem addressed and the methodology adopted. In particular, research is required to examine “the ways in which and extent to which the performance of destinations can be explained by particular concepts or elements” (Pearce 2014, p.150), and this is especially important given the focus on the influence of attractions on destination attractiveness. This section reviews the main approaches taken to conceptualizing tourism destinations, to highlight the potential role visitor attractions may have in adding to the attractiveness of destinations.

There have been several reviews and analytical papers into the concept of the tourist destination, which have identified the main approaches to conceptualizing destinations (Framke 2002; Saraniemi and Kyland 2011; Pearce 2014; Jovicic 2016). The main approaches are:

- Classic/traditional approach
- Systems approach
- Clusters approach
- Marketing approach
- Social cultural approach

Classic/traditional approach to tourism destinations

The classic/traditional approach focusses on the geographical characteristics of destinations (Jovicic 2016). Here, destinations are seen to contain elements which attracted tourists, such as attractions, amenities etc. The following examples illustrate this focus:

“The geographical unit visited by a tourist may be a self-contained centre, a village or a town or a city, a district or a region, an island, a country or continent. This geographical unit may be described as the tourist destination. ...How important any geographical unit is as a tourist destination, or how important it is potentially, is determined by three prime factors: attractions, accessibility, and amenities which may be termed the tourist qualities of a destination” (Burkart and Medlik 1981, p.44).

“All destinations share certain characteristics; their success in attracting tourists will depend upon the quality of three essential benefits that they offer the tourist: attractions; amenities (or facilities); and accessibility” (Holloway 1998, p.7)

“The destination represents the raison d’etre for tourism: it is the reason for travelling, and the attractions at the destination generate the visit (Cooper et al. 1993, p.77)

“The focus of facilities and services designed to meet the needs of the tourist” (Cooper et al. 1993, p.77)

Saraniemi and Kylanden (2011, p.134) call this the “elements model”, and it is the most common way to conceptualise destinations. As Framke (2002) concludes, this approach considers three central elements to destinations: attractions, facilities, and services which includes transport (Jovicic 2016). Cooper et al. (1993) also include ancillary services provided by Destination Management Organisations, identifying the four A’s of destinations, namely attractions, access, amenities, and ancillary (support) services. Without these elements, Jovicic (2016) contends that a place cannot be considered a destination.

This approach highlights the importance of attractions as a key element, creating the reason to visit. It defines a destination in terms of opportunities available to visitors at the destination (Saraniemi and Kylanden 2011) and supports the ‘inventory approach’ to identifying attractions discussed previously. However, this focus on what a destination contains does lead to some criticisms. Saraniemi and Kylanden (2011) argue that the approach is static and does not take account of changes in resources at the destination and shifting boundaries. Framke (2002) and Jovicic (2016) stress that some definitions do not even delineate the destination boundaries, and destinations can be defined at multiple scales, which means defining destination boundaries can become problematic (Jovicic 2016). This is recognised by the UNWTO, who recently updated their definition of a tourism destination, changing the phrase “it has physical and administrative boundaries defining its management, images and perceptions defining its market competitiveness” (UNWTO 2007, p.1), to “a physical space with or without administrative and/or analytical boundaries in which a visitor can spend an overnight” and these “can network to form larger destinations” (UNWTO 2019, p.14)

All agree that the approach does not take into account the influence of changing demand on the destination. Framke (2002) notes that little research exists into how individual products which form part of a range of complementary products are related, and more research should be conducted in this area. Another issue is the ambiguity over the use of the term attractions. Framke (2002) highlights that some researchers consider the destination as a whole as an attraction, rather than an element of the destination.

Systems approach to tourism destinations

Whilst Framke (2002) considers systems as part of the classic approach, Pearce (2014) and Jovicic (2016) both treat it separately. The system approach is similar to the classic approach in the sense that it breaks the whole into its constituent elements, but it then considers the key elements and how they are connected (Pearce 2014). This provides a more comprehensive and complex understanding of tourist destinations (Jovicic 2016).

Pearce (2014) classifies tourism destination systems into supply-demand systems and spatial systems. Supply-demand systems focus on the linkages between suppliers of the tourism product and the visitors, whereas spatial systems focus on the relationships between places (Pearce 2014). Gunn and Var (2002) suggest that even though they use different terms, the relationship is much the same, with generating regions replacing demand, and destinations replacing supply. An example of a supply-demand system is Gunn and Var's (2002) tourism system. As Gunn and Var (2002) stress, tourism is not just made up of individual components such as attractions, but "rather a system of major components linked together in an intimate and interdependent relationship" (p.35). Leiper (1979) developed the most widely known spatial system (Pearce 2014), with a tourist generating region and a tourist destination region. The generating region is where the source markets reside and the focus of marketing. Tourist destination regions are "locations which attract tourists to stay temporarily, and in particular those features which inherently contribute to that attraction" (Leiper 1979, p.397).

More recently, the systems approach has been extended to consider destinations as complex adaptive systems (Pearce 2014; Jovicic 2016). Baggio (2008) stressed that a destination can be conceptualised as a system which responds to both external and internal changes, however, these relationships may be non-linear. This means that "simple cause and effect relationships among the elements rarely exist and instead a very little stimulus may cause unpredictably large effects or no effect at all" (p.4). The understanding here is that the elements are connected but in a diverse non-linear relationship, which makes the analysis of destinations particularly hard. The complex systems approach stresses the need for destinations to adapt and evolve in response to changes in the system, and the need to try to influence rather than control the direction of development. Jovicic (2016) further highlights the concept of smart tourism destinations which can be

considered as the latest phase in the systems approach. Here, the destination is seen as a knowledge-based destination, where information technologies are used to exchange information and knowledge regarding tourism activities, to improve both the experiences of visitors and the quality of life of residents (Sorokina et al. 2022).

Within the systems approach, the potential role of attractions in destination attractiveness is expanded. The focus extends beyond the destination resources to also consider demand, as this approach stresses the need to match destination supply with demand (Gunn and Var 2002). This would support a 'cognitive perspective' to categorising attractions, with a focus on understanding the needs of visitors. Attractions will have an important role in destination attractiveness if they are perceived as providing benefits sought by potential visitors. However, rather than a focus on individual elements, the systems approach also adopts a more holistic view, stressing the need for producers to supply an integrated set of goods and services (Pearce 2014). As Modica (2016, p.35) notes, "a destination is a unique and original entity in comparison to its individual attributes, and has a value that exceeds the potential of the distinct elements of which it is composed". This value is captured in the image and perceptions potential visitors have of the destination (Pearce 2014), and elements such as attractions help in "defining the destination profile" (Modica 2016, p.35). This suggests that attractions not only have a role in meeting a potential visitor's needs, but also may contribute to the overall image of the destination.

This focus on the destination as a whole does not necessarily undermine the role of attractions as key elements of the destination, reflected in the classic approach. To illustrate, McKercher (1999) likens tourism destinations to an ecological community, and makes the allegory that:

"just as the overall survival of an ecological community is dependent on the survival of keystone species, so too is the overall survival of a tourism community dependent on its keystone species, in this case the primary attractions that motivate visitation and the transport links that facilitate access" (1999, p.427)

Whilst a destination is more than just its constituent elements, McKercher (1999) highlights that not all elements are equal, reflecting a hierarchy where the power to attract is not equally distributed (Reinhold et al. 2023).

Destinations as clusters

The clusters approach treats tourism destinations as ‘territorial agglomerations’ (Prats et al. 2008), where organisations gain benefits (termed agglomeration benefits) from locating in close proximity to each other (Glaeser et al. 1992; Henderson 1994; Yang 2012; Frenken et al. 2007; McCann and Folta 2009). Porter, in his seminal work (1998), popularised the use of clusters. He argued that “location remains fundamental to competition” (p.78), and his idea of clusters was a new way of considering location. The approach has been widely applied within tourism destination research (Jackson and Murphy 2002; Michael 2003; Hawkins 2004; Novelli et al. 2006; Majewska 2015; Aarstad et al. 2016; Bo et al. 2016; Lee et al. 2021; Jang and Kim 2022; Shin et al. 2023).

Clusters are defined as “geographic concentrations of interconnected companies and institutions in a particular field” (Porter 1998, p.78), the boundaries of which “are defined by the linkages and complementarities across industries and institutions that are most important to competition” (p.79). Michael (2003) identified three types of clustering within tourism:

- Horizontal clustering: refers to the co-location of firms which produce similar products
- Vertical clustering: refers to the co-location of firms at different stages in the supply chain which will lead to reduced costs
- Diagonal clustering: refers to the concentration of complementary firms offering different products and services (Michael 2003).

A key benefit of horizontal clusters is access to greater demand (McCann and Folta 2009). Marshall (1920) originally proposed that similar firms locating together will benefit from increased demand for their products and services. Here, “demand-related externalities exist when growth in the number of providers causes large numbers of customers to be attracted to the agglomeration” (McCann and Folta 2009, p.368). The reason for this is the ability to search and compare between different providers at the same location (Fischer and Harrington 1996; McCann and Folta 2009). This does suggest, however, that consumers conduct limited pre-purchase research before visiting the location. Some argue that the internet allows consumers to learn from the experience of others, which “makes all attributes searchable” (Huang et al. 2009, p.55). This suggests that increased information availability will reduce these localisation benefits, although this does not take into

account the experiential component of search, as consumers may enjoy looking for information at the destination (McCann and Folta 2009).

Diagonal clustering is evident within tourism destinations (Hjalager 2002; Jackson and Murphy 2002), which “are not a single product but composite products consisting of a bundle of different components” (Morgan and Pritchard 2001, p. 277). This was also recognized by Porter himself: “in a typical tourism cluster, for example, the quality of a visitor’s experience depends not only on the appeal of the primary attraction but also on the quality and efficiency of complementary businesses such as hotels, restaurants, shopping outlets, and transport facilities (1998, p.81). Rather than reducing search costs alone, diagonal clustering has the benefit of ensuring the destination is able to meet the diverse range of needs tourists may have (Lue et al. 1996; Yang 2012).

There have been several studies which consider benefits resulting from clusters of tourist attractions (Lue et al. 1996; Salazar et al. 2001; Hunt and Crompton 2008; Weidenfeld et al. 2010; 2011; 2014; Bo et al. 2016; Zhou et al. 2016; Tchetchik et al. 2024). Most studies in the sector have applied the concept of cumulative attraction. This was developed by Nelson (1958) in his study of retail locations. Cumulative attraction occurs where “a given number of stores dealing in the same merchandise will do more business if they are located adjacent to or in proximity to each other than if they are widely scattered” (Nelson 1950, p.58). This theory has parallels with cluster benefits discussed above, where increased demand results from the benefit of reduced search costs, allowing visitors to compare products offered by different providers. Hunt and Crompton (2008) identified two types of cumulative attraction:

- Similar cumulative attraction: similar attractions attract visitors as they offer alternatives, allowing visitors to select attractions based upon specific features (such as rides, cost etc)
- Complementary cumulative attraction: attractions are different types but are seen as complementary by visitors and these attractions share customers.

Similar cumulative attractions mirror the benefits of horizontal clusters, whilst complementary cumulative attractions could be considered a form of diagonal clusters, although these attractions could be in the same sector and be a form of horizontal clustering. Weidenfeld et al. (2010) argued that these terms were problematic, as they were not clearly defined. To aid clarification, Weidenfeld et al.

(2010) categorised attractions into 'similar' and 'dissimilar' attractions, based upon product classifications provided by Swarbrooke (2002). Their study found that cumulative attraction was higher between dissimilar attractions, suggesting that complementary attractions add to the cumulative attraction of a destination, but called for research to explore the relationships further. However, as Michael (2003) concluded, difficulties lie in identifying these linkages, as "ultimately it is the consumer who determines what goes with what" (Michael 2003, p.144).

The marketing approach to tourism destinations

In the marketing approach, the destination is considered as a product (Pearce 2014). This approach is similar to the classic approach, as it considers what the destination offers as a product, and also the systems approach, as it also links the destination to the visitor in terms of matching the product to benefits sought. It also builds on clusters in the sense that the colocation of organisations make up the tourism product. The main differentiation of this approach is that the explicit focus is on the visitor, where tourism destinations need to cater to their needs. Here, destinations can be defined as "agglomerations of facilities and services designed to meet the needs of tourists" (Saranemi and Kyland 2011, p.135).

Smith (1994) was the first to develop a conceptualization of the generic tourism product. He noted that earlier researchers had conceptualized tourism products as bundles which create the tourist experience, labelled the 'components' model, reflecting the classic approach discussed earlier. Smith argued that this approach did not adequately describe the structure and production of the tourism product, and extended this to develop a model with five distinct elements:

1. The physical plant: this is the core of the tourism product, a tangible element such as a site, natural resource, or facility e.g. beach, museum
2. Service: these are the services that need to be performed to meet the needs of visitors e.g. admissions
3. Hospitality: this is the way the service is delivered, and can be labelled as 'enhanced service'
4. Freedom of choice: this relates to the choice available to consumers. The visitor must be able to make a free choice for the experience to be satisfactory, thus a range of options needs to be provided
5. Involvement: tourists are involved, to some degree, in the delivery of the service.

This model includes the tourist as part of the product, in terms of freedom of choice and involvement (levels 4 and 5). Free choice is considered important as it provides a sense of control, but also allows for freedom and “the potential for happy surprises and spontaneity” (p. 590). Involvement for tourism products relates to a sense of engagement, where the visitor can focus on the activity. For leisure travellers, this means feeling safe and secure enough to be able to play or relax. To be involved, visitors need to have “access to activities and programs that capture the imagination, interest and enthusiasm of the potential participant” (p.590). Smith’s model shows how ‘inputs’ from a destination can produce experiential ‘outputs’ for tourists (Murphy et al. 2000).

Whilst Smith (1994) considered a generic tourism product, Murphy et al. (2000) studied the tourism destination product. Whilst they broadly agreed with Smith’s (1994) conceptualisation, they noted that it was not just the elements themselves, or the physical plant, that was important, but also the environment in which they were set. They labelled this the destination ‘macro-environment’. Thus, the destination product not only consists of the physical plants, but also the destination environment in which they were set. These contributed to the ‘atmosphere’ of the destination, which is tied to the destination image (Murphy et al. 2000).

Other researchers have adopted this approach to destinations, although later models still consider the physical element as the core product. Benur and Bramwell (2015) focused on the ‘primary tourism products’ which attract visitors to destinations and considered the benefits of both product concentration and diversification, comparable to the discussion on complementary attractions earlier. Product diversity allows destinations to offer varied experiences and activities, which may broaden the range of experiences offered to existing visitors or potentially attract new markets. Alternatively, concentration allows the destination to establish a clear image and reputation which may appeal to a particular market segment. Andergassen et al. (2013) developed an economic model of tourism destinations which focused on two specific aspects: coordination between firms and the degree of sophistication of the product. Of interest here is the issue of sophistication, which relates to the supply of a variety of different goods and services. They found that offering more variety did add to the appeal of the destination, however this also led to a perceived reduction in quality, resulting from congestion and crowding. This model suggests that more is not always better, as there may be negative impacts resulting from capacity issues.

Rather than the physical element being the core product, Saraniemi and Kylanen (2011) suggested a customer-oriented approach, which extends the traditional marketing approach to the services marketing approach. This approach considers the service offer, and places the consumer benefit at the core (Palmer 2014). It focuses on the value visitors are expecting to gain. As noted by Oh et al. (2007):

“in essence, what tourists primarily seek and consume at destinations is engaging experiences accompanied by the goods and/or service components of the destinations. Hence, entire tourist destinations are beginning to be positioned as ‘experiences’” (p.119).

Mehmetoglu and Normann (2013) adopted this approach in their conceptualization of the destination product. The core product was defined as “the essential service or benefit designed to satisfy the identified personal needs and motives of target customer segments” (185), such as novelty, relaxation, excitement and status.

The customer-oriented approach has been extended in recent years with the development of the service-dominant (S-D) logic (Vargo and Lusch 2006). One of the key aspects of this logic is the role of resources. Natural resources are simply ‘stuff’ on which an operation or act is performed to produce an effect: “essentially, resources are not; they become” (Vargo and Lusch 2006, p.2). These resources are labelled ‘operand’ resources, whilst resources used to produce an effect are labelled ‘operant’ resources, and these are considered to be primary resources as they produce the effect. In general terms, operand resources are tangible, whilst operant are intangible (Li and Petrick 2008).

The main differences here are that the value to the consumer exists in use, and consumers themselves possess operant resources as they use their knowledge and skills to cocreate value. Thus, value is the usefulness perceived by the consumer. Organisations can only offer a value proposition, which the consumer then determines once they co-create and consume it (Vargo and Lusch 2006). Li and Petrick (2008, p.240) argued that this approach was useful to understand the tourist experience, as organisations are “not providing final products, but offering solutions (value propositions) to satisfy customer needs and wants through their knowledge and skills”. Lusch et al. (2007) identified a range of factors which influence the extent to which customers participate in the co-creation of a service offering. These include expertise, where a customer is more likely to participate in co-creation if they have the required skills, and the emotional and economic

benefits it delivers. Shaw et al. (2011) linked S-D logic to the experience economy, where the value is in the consumption experience. The experience economy highlighted the importance of creating memorable experiences, associated with design, participation and the connection with the experience event (Pine and Gilmore 2019). Whilst Pine and Gilmore (1999) outlined five main principles in designing customer experiences, S-D logic stresses the importance of involving visitors in this process to ensure it meets their individual needs. Destinations can be viewed as 'experience environments' (Blazquez-Resino et al. 2015), or 'experiencescapes' (Mossberg 2007) where visitors can integrate resources to create value.

Socio-cultural approach to destinations

Within the social cultural approach, rather than destinations being considered as a mix of physical elements stressed in previous approaches, destinations are understood as socially constructed spaces (Pritchard and Morgan 2001; Saraniemi 2004). They are produced by the social practices and interactions of people within the space (Framke 2002; Pearce 2011; McKercher et al. 2006). This approach can be traced back to Tuan (1975), who argued that people learn about the world by experiencing it, and it is these experiences which create a place. A space may contain different physical elements, but individuals only assign meaning to it through their experiences, creating a place: "place is a center of meaning constructed by experience" (Tuan 1975, p.152). As Reinhold et al. (2023, p.586) state:

Visitors shape their own experiences as they take decisions and actions, draw on selected places or more generally 'resources' offered by the environment and thereby build their own stories and create memories. In this process, travellers create tourist destinations.

These experiences are based upon social practices and interactions between different actors, including local communities, tourism businesses, governing bodies and most importantly tourists (Beritelli 2011; Schonherr 2023). As meanings attached are subjective, different people will give different meanings to a place, resulting in destinations having multiple identities (Framke 2002; Pearce 2011; Saraniemi and Kylanden 2011). Further, any changes in these social practices will influence the character of the destination, highlighting the dynamic nature of tourist destinations (Saraniemi 2004; Saraniemi and Kylanden 2011).

Within this approach, tourists are treated as consumers, or 'experience seekers' (Framke 2002; Shaw and Williamson 2004; Saraniemi and Kylanen 2011). Destinations become sites of consumption (Framke 2002; Shaw and Williams 2004; Saraniemi and Kylanen 2011), and attractions are the 'cathedrals of consumption' within destinations (Shaw and Williams 2004).

An important consideration within this approach is the connection between consumption and production in the tourism destination. The social practices of tourists help create the place, as "every activity happens at a place, and such activities form the place" (Framke 2002, p.99). As tourists interact with the destination, they influence the destination itself, thus tourism is not only place-shaped, but also place shaping (Shaw and Williams 2004). As such, tourists are not seen as passive consumers, but rather as having an active role in both the production and consumption of experiences (Shaw and Williams 2004). Edensor (2001) suggests that destinations can be considered as providing meaningful contexts, or 'stages', where tourists perform. As Saraniemi and Kylanen (2011, p.138) note, "places therefore receive their meaning only through concrete production and consumption processes that connect people to the world by contextualizing their experiences". The role of tourists in the production and consumption of experiences highlights the role of tourists as co-producers, or cocreators (Framke 2002; Saraniemi and Kylanen 2011). This mirrors the marketing approach discussed earlier, indeed Saraniemi and Kylanen (2011) propose a cultural marketing approach combining both cultural geography and marketing, which stresses the co-creation of experiences.

The social construction approach highlights that it is not the destination elements themselves that are important, rather the meaning tourists attach to them. Experiences are important in forming these meanings, and these meanings lead to the construction of the destination identity for the tourist. Framke (2002) traces the social construction approach to the work of MacCannell (1976), previously discussed. As MacCannell (2014, p.286) later stressed, "my models locate the source of attraction in the socially constructed relationship between a tourist, the sight, and its marker(s), not in the sight/site itself".

Summary

This chapter has discussed the concept of attractions, and the different ways these can be categorised. One issue is what to include as an attraction, as what appeals to a visitor could encompass a wide number of resources at the destination. As McKercher and Koh (2017) state, it is difficult to analyse the influence of attractions given the broad definitions employed. For this reason, rather than attractions per se, some scholars talk of 'tourist attractors' (Edelheim 2015), or destination attractors' (Ritchie and Crouch 2003). This broader appeal will be considered, however the thematic analysis will be guided by participants' recognition of specific sites and phenomena as attractions.

The potential role of attractions in destination attractiveness has been emphasised within different ways to conceptualize destinations. Within the traditional approach, attractions are seen as a key element appealing to tourists; indeed, without attractions, the destination would not exist. The systems approach highlights the importance of attractions in meeting the needs of the visitor, as well as how these may contribute to the image and perceptions held by potential visitors. The clusters approach identifies the importance of attractions as part of the 'bundle' offered to tourists, adding to the cumulative attraction of the destination. In particular, attractions may have a role in offering complementary products and services which may add to the overall destination appeal. The marketing approach stresses the destination as an environment for tourists to create experiences, and attractions may be important resources to create value for visitors. Finally, the socio-cultural approach stresses the meanings visitors attach to the destination through the experiences they have, and attractions may play a role in providing the setting for these experiences.

CHAPTER 3: DESTINATION ATTRACTIVENESS

Introduction

This chapter examines the concept of destination attractiveness, before reviewing previous studies in this area. Destination attractiveness is firstly defined, then its basis in the attitude construct is explored, underlining its influence on intentions and behaviour. Previous studies are then examined, to illustrate the different approaches applied and how these have evolved. The review focusses on the main findings, to show the common destination resources found to influence destination attractiveness in a range of contexts.

Exploring the concept of destination attractiveness

Defining destination attractiveness

Mayo and Jarvis (1981) were the first to define destination attractiveness, as part of their study into the tourist's decision-making process. They proposed that "the overall attractiveness to the traveller of a destination area has a great deal to do with the specific benefits that are desired by travellers and the capability of the destination to deliver them" (Mayo and Jarvis 1981, p.203). The capability of a destination to deliver these desired benefits is based upon the potential visitor's perceptions of the resources available at the destination. Mayo and Jarvis (1981) viewed destination attractiveness from a marketing perspective, where tourism destinations are considered as a multi-dimensional product. This reflects the rational model of choice behaviour, where consumers are deemed to evaluate options against relevant attribute dimensions (Ajzen 2008). As Hu and Ritchie (1993, p.2) propose, "a tourism destination is a package of tourism facilities and services, which, like any other consumer product or service, is composed of a number of multidimensional attributes that together determine its attractiveness to a particular individual in a given choice situation". It is these attributes that provide the tourist with a range of benefits (Alahakoon et al. 2021). Formica and Uysal (2006) contend that destination attractiveness also reflects a tourist systems approach, which also links supply with demand. Similarly to Mayo and Jarvis (1981), they argue that "the overall tourism attractiveness of a destination depends on the relationship between the availability of existing attractions and the perceived importance of such attractions" (Formica and Uysal 2006, p.418). The importance of linking supply and demand is evident in other definitions applied in the literature. Vengesai (2003, p.638) states that "the attractiveness of a destination reflects the

feelings and opinions of its visitors about the destination's perceived ability to satisfy their needs". For Alahakoon et al. (2021, p.847), "destination attractiveness refers to an individual's perceptions and feelings about a destination's ability to satisfy their travel needs". Indeed, as Kresic and Prebezac (2011, p.498) state, destination attractiveness is "a mental construct that exists only in the minds of the potential visitors", which is "formed on the basis of the physical attractions available in the destination".

This raises an issue when researching destination attractiveness, as by its very nature, destination attractiveness is subjective, and potentially "every destination may be characterized as attractive if it is perceived as attractive by former, current, or potential visitors" (Pompurova et al. 2024, p.2008). Further, it is also context-dependent, and may vary depending upon the type of trip planned (or taken) (Hu and Ritchie 1993; Lee et al. 2010; Kim and Purdue 2011; Suttikun et al. 2015; Lee and Chen 2017; Alahakoon et al. 2021; Pike et al. 2021; Lam and Ryan 2024). Hu and Ritchie (1993, p.25) extended Mayo and Jarvis's (1981) original definition to reflect this: "the feeling, beliefs, and opinions that an individual has about a destination's perceived ability to provide satisfaction in relation to his or her special vacation needs".

Whilst there is general consensus in defining destination attractiveness, there does appear to be a difference when it comes to how the benefits are treated. Mayo and Jarvis (1981, p.203) talk of "the specific benefits that are desired by travellers", reflecting its role in destination choice. Hu and Ritchie (1993, p.25) acknowledged this focus on decision making, but rather than benefits desired, they focussed on "a destination's perceived ability to provide satisfaction in relation to his or her special vacation needs". This focus on satisfaction has seen an extension to the concept of destination attractiveness, to not only encompass destination choice, but also as an evaluation based upon perceptions and experiences at the destination itself. For instance, Edward and George (2008, p.16) defined destination attractiveness as "the degree to which destinations meet the touristic expectations of its visitors". Similarly, Cracolici and Nijkamp (2009, p.337) mention "the extent to which the availability, quality and management of local tourist services satisfies the needs of the customer". More specifically, Das et al. (2007, p.105) considered "satisfaction on touristic attributes as another determinant for the attractiveness of the destination". Put simply, "destination attractiveness could be defined as the destination's ability to attract and satisfy potential tourists"

(Medina-Munoz and Medina-Munoz 2014, p.521). Thus, destination attractiveness no longer only pertains purely to destination choice, but also the experiences at the destination. This has led to new areas of research, reviewed below. As Wu et al. (2015, p.203) observe, “current research on destination attractiveness attempts to better understand tourists’ decision-making processes as well as the specific benefits derived by tourists as a result of tourism experiences”.

Destination attractiveness as an attitude

Mayo and Jarvis (1981) posited that destination attractiveness relates specifically to attitudes and their influence on travel behaviour, where attitudes can be thought of as “predispositions to act” (p.178). Attitude refers to the tendency to view an object, such as a tourist destination, with a degree of favour or disfavour (Ajzen 2008; Eirich and Corbett 2009; Lee 2009; Solomon et al. 2019; Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin 2017). At its core is an evaluative reaction, which can be positive or negative (Ajzen 2008), based upon a rational evaluation of the key attributes of the object (Cohen et al. 2014), as well as an individual’s affective responses to the object (Eirich and Corbett 2009).

Mayo and Jarvis (1981) highlighted that attitudes have three components:

1. Knowledge component (beliefs and opinions): refers to what an individual knows about an object
2. Feeling: refers to an emotional judgement made about an object
3. Behavioural: tendency to respond favourably or negatively to an object

This is known as the ABC model of attitudes (Solomon et al. 2019) and acknowledges the importance of what tourists know (cognition), how they feel (affect), and their intentions to act or visit (behaviour) (Lee 2009; Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin 2017). The knowledge component has received most attention within tourism research (Um and Crompton 1990; Lee 2009; Cohen et al. 2014; Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin 2017). Here, attitudes toward an object are based upon an individual’s belief about an object, “*where a belief is defined as the subjective probability that the object has a certain attribute*” (Ajzen 2008, p.531). Meinung (1995) notes that this approach is based upon the expectancy-value model of behaviour, shown below in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 Expectancy-value model of behaviour

$$A(j) = \sum_{i=1}^n E(i)B(ij)$$

$A(j)$ = attitude (or attractiveness) of an object j

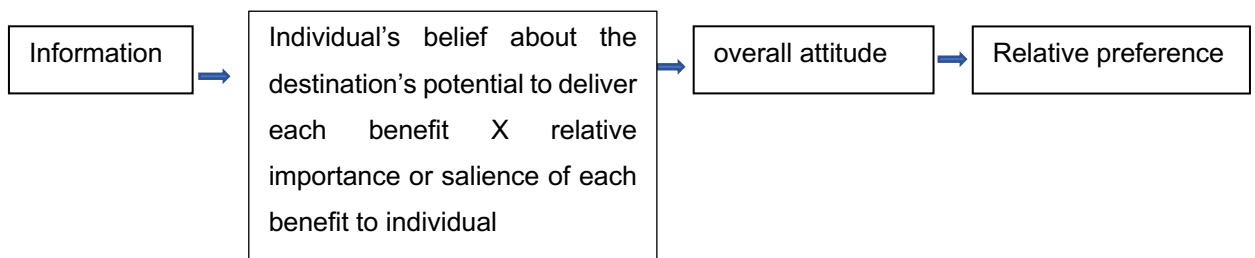
$E(i)$ = evaluation of the desirability of a quality i

$B(ij)$ = belief whether an object j has the quality i

(Source: Meinung 1995)

As Ajzen (2008, p.531) states, “the evaluation of each attribute contributes to the attitude in direct proportion to the person’s subjective probability that the product possesses the attribute in question”. The consumer then forms feelings toward the object once these beliefs have been evaluated (Solomon et al. 2019). This approach underpins the work of Mayo and Jarvis (1981), who stated that individuals develop preferences following an evaluation of the destination attributes, based upon information they receive, as shown in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2 Development of preferences in destination attractiveness



(Source: Mayo and Jarvis 1981)

Mayo and Jarvis (1981, p.191) argue that an “attitude toward an object is really composed of a number of attitudes toward each of the specific attributes of that object”. These attitudes toward specific attributes will vary in intensity, or salience, depending on their wants, goals and context (Alahakoon et al. 2021). It is the visitor’s perception of salient (important) benefits that leads to the development of travel preferences, and these preferences lead to intentions which influence destination choice. Lee and Chen (2017, p.464) argued that “some attributes are a stronger driving force than others”, and several authors contend that these can be considered the ‘pull factors’ which draw visitors to the destination (Pompurova

et al. 2024; Lee et al. 2009; 2010; Vengesai et al. 2009; Lee and Huang 2014; Medina-Munoz and Medina-Munoz 2014; Lee and Chen 2017; Wu et al. 2022; Lam and Ryan 2024). Studies have set out to identify these attributes, as reviewed below.

This approach reflects the basic utilitarian function of attitudes, where individuals aim to maximise the benefits and minimise the costs associated with an object (Katz 1960). Destinations are evaluated in terms of the perceived benefits offered, and “the closer these objects are to actual need satisfaction and the more they are clearly perceived as relevant to need satisfaction, the greater are the probabilities of positive attitude formation” (Katz 1960, p.171). However, Katz (1960) also stresses that attitudes can perform other functions. They may perform a value-expressive function, where attitudes are formed based upon what the destination says about them as an individual, rather than the perceived objective benefits. Further, some purchases occur with low involvement, where decisions are based upon limited information (Solomon et al. 2019). Attitudes are then formed from experiencing the product, and their behaviour and their emotional responses play a more important role in forming attitudes (Eirich and Corbett 2009; Solomon et al. 2019). Ajzen (2008) also stresses that attitudes are not assumed to be based on rationality. Rather, they are based upon subjectively held beliefs about an object. Whilst individuals may express the same attitude toward an object which can be captured using attitudinal scaling in surveys, this approach will not reveal their beliefs which these are based upon. To counter this, Eirich and Corbett (2009) suggest the use of qualitative approaches to explore the factors underpinning attitudes in more depth.

Mayo and Jarvis (1981) also stressed that it was arguable to what degree attitudes influence behaviour, as behaviour can be inconsistent, for instance undertaken out of curiosity or on impulse. A common model used to explain the relationship between attitudes and behaviour is the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 2008; Eirich and Corbett 2009; Cohen et al. 2014; Solomon et al. 2019). Ajzen (2008) stresses that intentions mediate between attitudes and behaviour, forming a belief-attitude-intention hierarchy. The Theory of Planned Behaviour suggests that intention to act will depend not only on attitudes, but also subjective norms (normative beliefs, motivation to comply) and perceived behavioural control (beliefs about capability and control) (Ajzen 2008). The influence of attitudes on behaviour will also depend upon their stability; whether they are shared with social groups

(social anchoring); and how they relate to an individual's personal values – referred to as the centrality of the attitude (Mayo and Jarvis 1981). Cohen et al. (2014) question the stability of attitudes, as they may change as the situation changes.

Destination attractiveness research

Several authors have identified two main approaches to destination attractiveness research (Formica and Uysal 2006; Kim and Perdue 2011; Reitsamer et al. 2017):

1. A supply side approach which considers the physical attributes of a destination
2. A demand side approach which considers perceptions of a destination.

Whilst this is useful to aid understanding of this research area and its development, in reality many studies overlap these perspectives and combine both supply and demand aspects. This overlap highlights the dual nature of destination attractiveness. Destination attractiveness is not only concerned with what exists at a destination (supply side perspective), but also whether these resources are attractive to potential visitors (demand side perspective). The discussion below builds on this categorisation, noting how early research in regional analysis focussed primarily on supply, and later studies focused more on the demand side. Demand side studies have been further categorised based upon the main approach taken when evaluating destination resources, namely expert or visitor judgements.

Regional analysis

Early research in destination attractiveness was developed in the field of regional analysis. Smith (1987) was one of the first researchers who focused on destination attractiveness when he undertook a regional analysis of tourism resources in Ontario, Canada. Tourism resources were categorised into three main types: accommodation, recreation facilities, and attractions. Reflecting the range of resources within the region, data was collected on the following types of recreational facilities and attractions: marinas; industrial tours; horse riding establishments; designated historic sites; provincial parks; ski hills; and major events. Different areas were then grouped, based upon the types of resources they offered. To provide an indication of the attractiveness of these different resources, these were then correlated against tourism spend within these areas. Results indicated that areas offering self-catering and boating facilities received higher

tourist spend. Smith did note that the study was mainly limited to a supply side analysis, and measuring demand, or potential demand, “would provide a desirable complement to this study” (p.271). Backman et al. (1991) applied Smith’s (1987) approach in South Carolina, adapting the range of resources analysed to reflect the tourism product in the region. Analysing tourism spend in different types of destinations highlighted a number of important resources: ‘tourism supporting resources’; ‘accommodation/resorts’; ‘camping’; ‘outdoor activity’; ‘outdoor recreation’; and ‘historic/environment’. Whilst acknowledging that a limitation of this approach was that it did not actually research demand, Backman et al. (1991) suggested that the regional analysis approach did contribute to destination attractiveness research as it “facilitated the identification of dimensions which gave each region its uniqueness” (p.326).

Spotts (1997) took a slightly different approach when researching the tourism resources within Michigan. Spotts (1997) stressed that it is a destination’s identity that makes it attractive, as “identity is what makes up an area” (p.3). This will include many elements, “however, from the perspective of the tourism marketer seeking to attract the tourist, the most basic elements of identity are arguably the tourism resources that lure people to the region” (p.4). For this reason, accommodation and other amenities were excluded from the analysis. Rather, tourism resources were defined as “anything that played a major role in attracting tourists to the study region, including natural resources, tourism events, outdoor recreation facilities, and tourist attractions” (p.5). Spotts (1997) identified a range of resources which explained differences in tourist spend within different areas, including ‘urban tourism resources’ (museums, nightclubs etc); ‘general wildland tourism resources’; and ‘general coastal tourism resources’. As well as acknowledging the supply side focus of the regional analysis approach as a limitation, Spotts (1997) also noted that the approach is lengthy, and prone to errors depending on what attributes are included. Further, the approach focuses on quantity and does not consider the quality of resources.

Expert evaluations

Gearing et al. (1974) were amongst the first to explicitly consider demand in order to establish an approach to measure what they labelled ‘touristic attractiveness’. Due to cost limitations, tourists were not asked, rather the opinions of experts were sought. They considered this ‘indirect’ approach suitable given the knowledge of

the experts selected, and also to address cost limitations. Their approach involved firstly establishing the criteria, or attributes, which contributed to destination attractiveness. Their study was conducted in Turkey, and criteria were established specifically for this country. A total of 17 attributes were identified, and these were categorised into five groups:

- A. Natural factors:
 - 1. Natural beauty
 - 2. Climate
- B. Social factors
 - 1. Artistic and architectural features
 - 2. Festivals
 - 3. Distinctive local features
 - 4. Fairs and exhibits
 - 5. Attitudes toward tourists
- C. Historical factors
 - 1. Ancient ruins
 - 2. Religious significance
 - 3. Historical prominence
- D. Recreational and shopping facilities
 - 1. Sports facilities
 - 2. Educational facilities
 - 3. Facilities conducive to health, rest and tranquillity
 - 4. night-time recreation
 - 5. Shopping facilities
- E. Infrastructure and food and shelter
 - 1. Infrastructure above 'minimal touristic quality'
 - 2. Food and lodging facilities above 'minimal touristic quality'

The relative importance of these attributes was determined, based upon the views of tourism experts in the country. Experts were asked to rank attributes within each group, and weightings were then assigned on a scale of 1-10, with 10 given to the attribute ranked most important. This measure was then applied to regions in Turkey to give an overall measure of attractiveness. Based upon this approach, the most important attributes were: 'natural beauty'; 'infrastructure above 'minimal touristic quality''; 'food and drink above 'minimal touristic quality''; 'climate'; and 'historical prominence'. Gearing et al. (1974) stressed that establishing attributes and weights must take into account the situation under study, as the importance of

different attributes will vary by destination and type of tourist. For this study, experts specifically considered the relative importance of these attributes for the independent tourist rather than the mass tourism market.

This approach was later adapted by Var et al. (1977) and applied in British Columbia. The list of attributes was revised to reflect local resources, with ancient ruins replaced by 'native historic settlements'. Again, natural beauty and climate were considered the most important attributes by experts. Ritchie and Zins (1978) developed Gearing et al.'s (1974) approach when they investigated the relative importance of culture as a determinant of destination attractiveness. They identified a range of general factors which determined a destination's attractiveness, namely:

- Natural beauty and climate
- Sport, recreational and education facilities
- Cultural and social characteristics
- Attitudes toward tourists
- Infrastructure of the region
- Price levels
- Shopping and commercial facilities

For cultural and social characteristics, three distinct forms of culture were defined: 'animated forms'; 'inanimate forms'; and 'daily life forms'. Tourism managers and suppliers were then surveyed to evaluate the relative importance of the different factors. To help respondents assess attractiveness, a context was provided from the viewpoint of "an average traveller possessing modest but adequate financial resources" (p.259). Natural beauty and climate were considered the most important general factor, followed by cultural and social characteristics. Within culture, traditions were considered most important for non-residents. Whilst experts were used to consider the views of tourists, the authors did recognise that it was essential that further research was undertaken with the eventual users: "it should be stressed that it is essential that the results from an analysis based on such a data collection approach be confirmed by the ultimate users of the facilities" (p.258).

Formica and Uysal (2006) concurred with this view when investigating the attractiveness of Virginia, USA, which was also restricted to expert views. Whilst

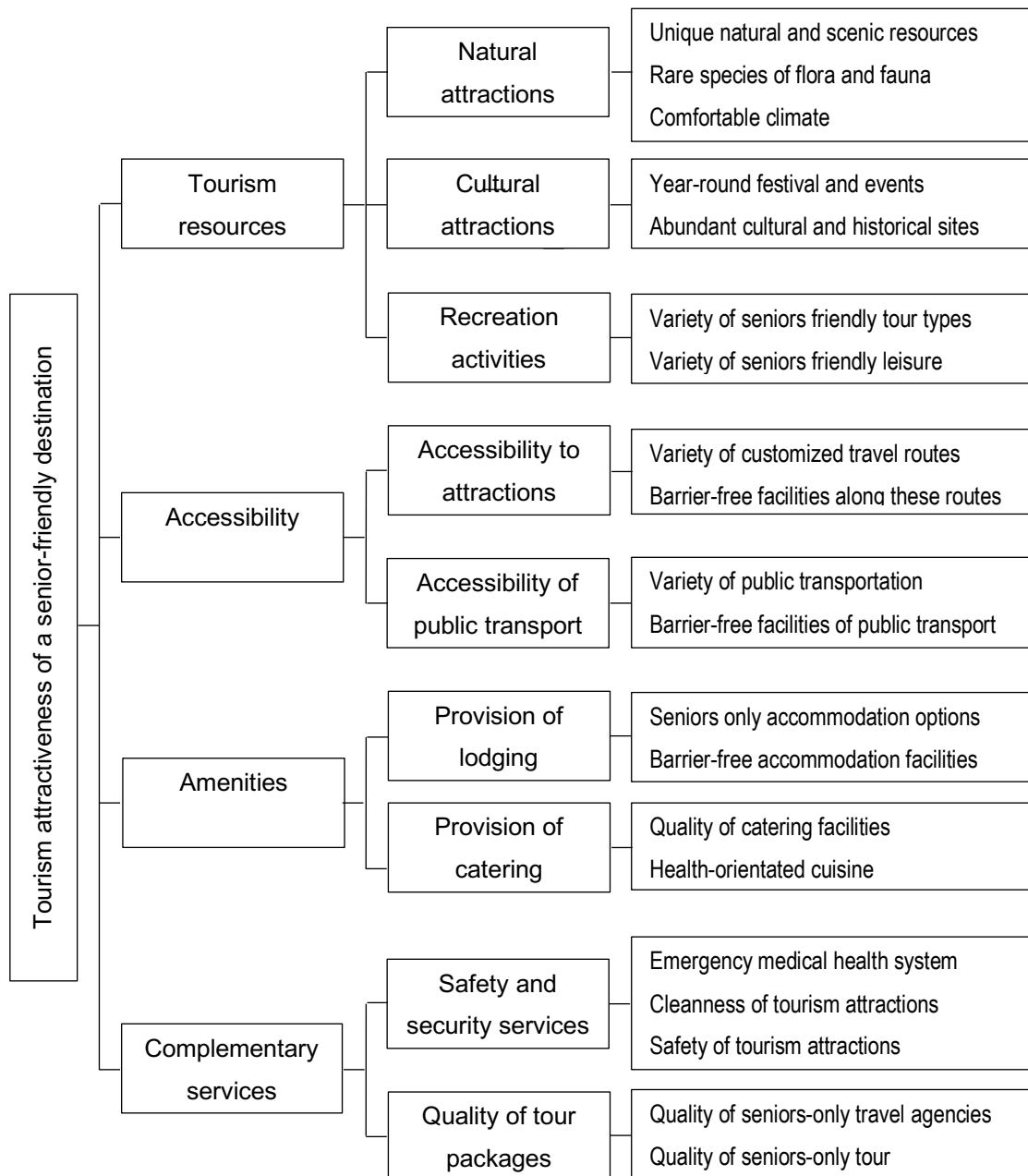
many later studies have taken this on board and researched visitors, a number of studies have continued to rely on expert judgements, mainly for time and cost reasons (Lee et al. 2010). Puska et al. (2020) recruited tourism experts to evaluate the attractiveness of rural destinations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Castro et al. (2015) gathered the views of park managers when assessing the determinants of tourism attractiveness of national parks in Brazil, whilst Wu et al. (2015) interviewed community members when investigating the attractiveness of salt tourism in Taiwan. Other studies have turned to intermediaries as experts, who act as 'gatekeepers' to demand (Faulkner et al. 1999). Faulkner et al. (1999) surveyed travel agents to evaluate the appeal of South Australia's main attractions, and wine tourism and Murray River were seen as offering the most appeal. Tomigova et al. (2016) surveyed Czech tour operators to assess the attractiveness of Portugal as a tourism destination, and results suggested that scenery, historical attractions, accessibility, climate and safety and security were the most highly rated attributes.

Several studies have extended the expert judgment approach, applying the analytic hierarchy process (AHP) developed by Saaty in the early 1970s (Saaty 1980). Deng et al. (2002) were the first to apply this approach, to evaluate the attractiveness of protected natural areas in Korea (Deng et al. 2002). This has been followed by several studies in Taiwan, focusing on hot springs (Lee and King 2010), forest recreation tourism (Lee et al. 2010), cycling tourism (Lee and Huang 2014), industrial tourism (Lee 2016), railway tourism (Lee and Chen 2017), and senior tourism (Lee and King 2016). AHP applies a systematic approach to complex problems (Deng et al. 2002), where the problem is broken down into its constituent parts (Lee et al. 2010). AHP treats decisions as a choice between a hierarchy of alternatives (Crouch and Ritchie 2005), and researchers develop this hierarchy to include relevant attributes. These are grouped into dimensions, and there may be further sub-categories depending on the number and type of attributes included. As an illustration, Deng et al. (2002) identified five major dimensions which contributed to the attractiveness of national parks:

1. Tourism resources (cultural and natural)
2. Tourist facilities (educational, recreational and infrastructure)
3. Accessibility
4. Local communities
5. Peripheral attractions

These were then broken down further, to include individual attributes. This approach is similar to that developed by Gearing et al. (1974), where attributes were grouped into 5 dimensions. The difference with the AHP approach here is that these dimensions can be further subdivided, allowing for a greater number of attributes to be included if needed. Lee and King (2010; 2016; 2019) have followed a similar approach, with the hierarchical structure divided into four dimensions, followed by factors, then attributes (Lee and King 2010, 2019). Whilst the individual attributes may vary depending upon the context, the dimensions appear the same in these studies, and are based upon Cooper et al.'s (1993) '4A's' of tourism: attractions, access, amenities and ancillary services. Lee and King's hierarchical structure for senior tourism (2016) is shown below for illustration.

Figure 3.3 The hierarchy of determinants of seniors-friendly tourism attractiveness



(Source: Lee and King 2016)

Once the hierarchy is constructed, experts are then invited to make comparative judgments between different attributes, in order to develop an overall priority weighting for these attributes (Deng et al. 2002; Crouch and Ritchie 2005). In Deng et al.'s (2002) study of protected areas, tourism resources were considered the most important attributes, and tourist attractions were considered most important for railway tourism (Lee and Chen 2017) and industrial tourism (Lee 2016), although accessibility was highest ranked for cycling tourism (Lee and Huang 2014) and the seniors' market (Lee and King 2016). Interestingly, experts considered tourism destination strategies to be the most important factor within the hot springs sector (Lee and King 2010).

Visitor evaluations

Many studies have taken earlier criticisms on board and sought the views of visitors. Whilst the main area of research continues to be on attributes which contribute to destination attractiveness, this has evolved to encompass perceptions based upon experiences at the destination, and how these influence attitudes and behaviours (Woyo 2018). Studies conducted during or after the trip have allowed researchers to investigate the influence of destination attractiveness on satisfaction and loyalty, place attachment, and responsible behaviour.

Visitor evaluations prior to visiting the destination

A number of studies have investigated what attributes make a destination attractive to potential visitors. These studies typically include a list of destination attributes, and respondents are asked to indicate the relative importance of these using a Likert scale. Hu and Ritchie (1993) were the first to survey potential visitors, selecting a sample of potential pleasure and recreational tourists in order to examine the effect of situational factors on destination attractiveness. Hu and Ritchie (1993) reviewed previous studies on the relative importance of different attributes, and noted that some had 'universal' importance, whilst others depended on the type of destination and the experience offered. Attributes with universal importance were 'natural beauty and climate' and 'price'. A total of 16 attributes were included in the study, based upon Gearing et al. (1974) and Ritchie and Zins (1978):

1. Climate
2. Availability/quality of accommodation
3. Sports/recreational opportunities

4. Scenery
5. Food
6. Entertainment
7. Uniqueness of local people's life
8. Historical attractions
9. Museum, cultural attractions
10. Communication difficulty due to language barriers
11. Festivals/special events
12. Accessibility
13. Shopping
14. Attitude toward tourists
15. Availability/ quality of local transportation
16. Price levels

Respondents were asked to rate these attributes on a five-point scale ranging from most important to least important, "regarding the relative importance of each touristic attribute in contributing to the attractiveness of a travel destination" (p.29). The most important attributes for recreational tourists were 'scenery', 'climate', 'availability/quality of accommodation', and 'local people's attitudes towards tourists'. For educational tourists, the most important were 'uniqueness of local way of life', 'historical attractions', 'museums and cultural attractions'.

Kim (1998), Chen and Hsu (2000) and Kim and Purdue (2011) extended this approach by considering how image influenced destination attractiveness. Kim (1998) noted that it is not only the destination attributes in terms of their potential for performance that influence destination attractiveness, but also the perceptions of "its personality or image" (p.341). Destination image refers to the perceptions individuals hold about a destination (Pike 2021) and can be defined as "the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination" (Crompton 1979, p.18). Baloglu and McCleary (1999) affirm that destination image is generally considered as an attitudinal construct, based on both cognitive and affective evaluations of the destination. As Kim and Purdue (2011, p.227) argued, "measuring only cognitive image by attribute lists, however, does not capture affective image domains such as fun, excitement, and atmosphere". To capture these elements, attributes from previous destination image research were included (see Echtner and Ritchie 2003). Kim and Purdue (2011) included 10 cognitive and

12 affective attributes, whilst Chen and Hsu (2000) included a total of 17 attributes. For illustration, the attributes used by Kim and Purdue (2011) were:

1. Cognitive image items
 - a. Quality of facilities
 - b. Quality of services
 - c. Quality of nightlife and entertainment
 - d. Quality of shopping
 - e. Variety of things to do for family
 - f. Value/quality for the money
 - g. Quality of ski mountain
 - h. Variety of ski terrain for your skill
 - i. Quality of snow condition
 - j. Overall quality of the resort
2. Affective image items
 - a. Big–small
 - b. Fun–boring
 - c. Expensive–affordable
 - d. Friendly–snobbish
 - e. Quiet–noisy
 - f. Crowded–uncrowded
 - g. Family-oriented–singles
 - h. Comfortable–uncomfortable
 - i. Young–old
 - j. Sophisticated–unsophisticated
 - k. Cool–uncool
 - l. Best–worst

Kim and Purdue (2011) conducted an online survey of respondents who had asked for information on ski resorts in the US, and identified three affective attributes ('fun and comfortable atmosphere', 'crowding', 'upscale atmosphere') and two cognitive attributes ('quality of skiing' and 'quality of community') as being the most important. Chen and Hsu (2000) surveyed outbound tourists as they departed Korea, and found the most important attributes were 'many interesting places to visit', 'adventurous atmosphere', 'safe place' and 'natural scenic beauty'.

Ye (2012) expanded on the affective elements to consider destination brand personality. As Blain et al. (2005) note, the concept of destination image and

destination branding are related, however whilst destination image exists in the mind of the potential visitor, destination branding focusses on the activities destination managers undertake to help create this image. Destination branding aims to offer “a promise that can be delivered and that matches expectations” (Morgan and Pritchard 2004, p.83). Ye (2012) focused on brand personality and surveyed Chinese residents about the attractiveness of Australia as a long-haul destination. They found that ‘sincerity’ and ‘excitement’ dimensions were the most attractive attributes.

Subsequent studies have based attribute lists on previous studies, including both cognitive and affective elements, and adapted these for the destination or type of tourist being investigated. Pompurova et al. (2024) focused their study on Gen Y and Gen Z residents in The Czech Republic. They found that ‘natural beauty’, ‘national or regional cuisine’, ‘attitude of local population’ and ‘climate’ were important attributes making a destination attractive for domestic tourism. Sztuk (2023) conducted an online survey of digital nomads to investigate factors which made a city attractive, and found that ‘favourable prices for accommodation’, ‘interesting culture and identity of the city’, and ‘safety in the city’ were most important. Wang et al. (2022) explored destination attractiveness for the short break drive holiday market in Australia and New Zealand, and found that ‘type of accommodation’ and ‘uncrowdedness’ were the most important attributes. Pike and Kotsi (2020) developed a model for stopover destination attractiveness. An international survey was conducted using 24 attributes, which were then grouped into three ‘A’s’: access, airport ambience, and attractions. A later study testing the model for Dubai showed that ‘perceived airport ambience’ was the most important factor (Pike et al. 2021).

Several studies have focused on particular attributes. Jeuring and Haartsen (2017) focused on the influence of distance on destination attractiveness. Based upon a survey of residents in the Netherlands, they found that the influence of distance on destination attractiveness varied by type of respondent, with those preferring closer destinations tending to be older with less income, whilst younger, more educated residents with higher income tended to prefer more distant destinations. Lapko et al. (2019) conducted an online survey focusing on pollution as an attribute influencing destination attractiveness. Whilst over half of respondents stated that air quality is an important attribute, few actually checked air quality before selecting a destination. Probstl-Haider et al. (2015) investigated the potential impact of

climate change on the attractiveness of Alpine destinations. They found that the predicted increase in sunny days had little impact upon destination attractive, rather the overall 'package' of what the destination offers is more important. However, in their study of Kenting National Park in Korea, Wang et al. (2019) concluded that potential detrimental changes to terrestrial and marine resources resulting from climate change would impact destination attractiveness. Rather than individual attributes, Li and Wan (2025) investigated how imagery used in destination marketing influences destination attractiveness. Using an experimental approach, they found that rather than solely destination resources themselves, the presence of a person in images increased the perception of destination attractiveness.

Visitor evaluations based upon experiences at the destination

A more common approach has been to research actual visitors, either at the destination or post visit. This obviously adds to the convenience of the research, but could potentially introduce bias, as they may already have experience of some elements of the destination (Edward and George 2008).

Several studies have investigated the destination attractiveness of whole countries or regions. One of the earliest studies was conducted by Ferrario (1979a; 1979b) in South Africa. For Ferrario, attractions were the key resources that needed to be evaluated: "the real pulling power remains the component 'attractions', which should be the first concern in any organized effort for the rational development of tourism" (1979a, p.18). He developed an exhaustive inventory of every activity and attraction in South Africa considered to be of touristic significance included in a range of guidebooks. In all, around 2,300 resources were identified, and these were classified into 21 categories. Ferrario conducted a tourist survey of overseas visitors to South Africa as they departed the country. He aimed "to collect information on what aspects of the South African tourist scene were most appreciated by overseas visitors and were likely to be recommended to friends or other visitors" (1979a, p.21). This has obvious overlaps with satisfaction, discussed below. He found that the most attractive resource categories were 'scenery and landscape', 'wildlife', and 'natural vegetation'. Woyo (2018) asked visitors to Zimbabwe to rate different attributes in terms of their attractiveness. Visitors were surveyed at the main attractions, and the most important attributes were 'destination ambience', 'destination's brand image', 'external access', 'internal

access', and 'general and tourism amenities'. Islam and Chaudhary (2021) surveyed visitors at attractions within Kashmir Valley, and found that the most important attributes were 'natural attractions' and 'site attractions'.

Many studies have taken place within nature-based destinations. Kim (1998) conducted a survey of visitors at entrances to national parks in Korea, to identify the most important attributes influencing the attractiveness of national parks. Twenty attributes were included in the survey, which were then grouped into six factors. 'Seasonal and cultural attractiveness' was the most important factor, which included 'seasonal attractiveness', 'uniqueness of the place', 'plenty of fun and sightseeing', and 'cultural experience and historical sites'. Lee et al. (2009) studied the destination attractiveness of hot springs in Taiwan. A total of 29 attributes were included in the study, which were then grouped into five main dimensions. 'Safety and security' and 'natural resources' were considered to be the most important factors influencing destination attractiveness. Ariya et al. (2017) asked visitors to a national park in Kenya to rate different attributes in "terms of their attractiveness" (p.8). The study was limited to twelve attributes, and 'safety and security inside the park' and 'unique wildlife resources' were the most attractive attributes. Islam et al. (2017) conducted a study into nature-based tourism in Bangladesh, and found the most important attributes were 'personal safety and security of the place', 'easy access to transportation services', 'variety of natural attractions', 'well-developed tourism markets and roads', and 'natural scenic beauty and calmness of the place'.

Several researchers have surveyed visitors once they returned home, which will introduce further issues to do with recall (Vengesai et al. 2009). Dimitrov et al. (2017) surveyed visitors who had been to Bulgaria, and found the most important attributes were cultural attributes ('architectural and historical artefacts', 'archaeological sites', 'carnivals and festivals', 'religion and religious rites', and 'authentic cuisine'). Vigolo (2015) conducted an online survey to investigate the attractiveness of South Africa as a long-haul destination for Italian tourists. The study used a single measure of destination attractiveness, to address the issue of incomplete attribute lists. Respondents were asked to rate destination attractiveness on a scale from one (very unattractive) to five (very attractive). The most important dimensions contributing to attractiveness were 'wildlife', 'facilities', and 'exoticness'. Cracolici and Nijkamp (2009) assessed the relative attractiveness of regions in Southern Italy, based upon data from a national tourism survey. The use of an existing omnibus survey limited the attribute list to eleven, of which the

most important were 'information and tourist services', 'quality and variety of products', and 'hotels and other accommodation'

Of particular interest is the study by Vengesai et al. (2009). They considered attractions to be important for destination attractiveness, indeed "attractions represent the first important group or category of destination attractiveness" (p.623). Their study was conducted on visitors to Zimbabwe. They developed a list of attributes based upon previous research, which were then grouped into three categories: attractions, facilities and people. Attractions encompassed:

1. Created attractions
 - a. Tours
 - b. Opportunities for sport
 - c. Special events
 - d. Sports facilities
 - e. Nature-based activities
2. Cultural and historical attractions
 - a. Historical sites
 - b. Cultural sites
 - c. Architectural sites
 - d. Traditional arts
 - e. Cultural arts
3. Unique attractions
 - a. Variety of attractions
 - b. Shopping facilities
 - c. Accessibility of attractions
 - d. Unique attractions
4. Natural attractions
 - a. National parks
 - b. Wildlife
 - c. Natural wonders/scenery
5. Recreation facilities
 - a. Pleasant weather
 - b. Water-based activities
 - c. Recreational activities

Respondents were asked to rate how each attribute contributed to destination attractiveness. They found that "most of the destination attraction types are

positively and significantly related to destination attractiveness (created, historical, unique)” and “destination attractions are the main determinants and predictors of destination attractiveness” (p.633). However, they note that the difference between the means for different attributes was relatively low, due to the range of attributes that contribute to destinations attractive. Also, they stress that their study may not be generalizable as destination specific attributes were included, and they only sampled visitors at the destination rather than non-visitors.

More recent studies have taken advantage of other data sources available to investigate what makes a destination attractive. Lee and Lee (2024) used open data sources to evaluate the urban nightlife attractiveness of districts in Seoul for Millennials and Generation Z. Seoul collects ‘floating population data’ based primarily on mobile phone data, credit card and smart card usage. They used this data to compare the length of stay of visitors in different areas, and compared this to the number of nighttime venues in each district. Findings indicate that areas that had a large proportion of entertainment venues were more attractive to the target markets, whereas districts with a larger mix of other uses (including business and residential) were less attractive. Li et al. (2023a) used WIFI data to track the movement of tourists within Beijing to estimate the attractiveness of different districts in the city. Areas where tourists spent longer were considered to be more attractive. Analysis of tourism resources within these areas suggests that restaurants and shops were important factors leading to destination attractiveness. Analysis also highlighted areas with high tourist frequency but shorter stays, which tended to include must-see attractions in the city.

Destination attractiveness and satisfaction

Rather than importance of attributes in influencing destination attractiveness, a growing body of work has investigated how the evaluation of destination attributes influences satisfaction. Lam and Ryan (2024, p.24) argue that “destination attractiveness is not simply an evaluation of attributes, but incorporates perceived benefits derived from experiencing those attributes”. For Nasira et al. (2020, p.446), destination attractiveness is concerned with the extent to which resources meet “tourist’s expectation”.

Bianchi (2018) investigated how the performance of destination attributes influenced satisfaction for long haul visitors to Chile. A total of 21 attributes were

included, grouped into 5 dimensions, of which 'physiography' was considered the most important. They found that visitors who rated performance highly against attributes in this dimension also reported higher levels of satisfaction and loyalty. Raimkulov et al. (2021) surveyed US tourists who had visited the Silk Road in Uzbekistan, and included a list of 16 attributes, which were grouped into five dimensions, of which 'cultural attractiveness' was the most important. They also found a positive relationship between performance on this dimension and satisfaction. As well as performance, Das et al. (2007) also considered expectation when investigating the destination attractiveness of Varanasi, India. They included 24 attributes in their study, and respondents were asked to rate their levels of expectation and satisfaction with these attributes. Attributes with high levels of expectation were considered to be the most important in making the destination attractive. Attributes were grouped into 7 factors, of which 'ancient flavour of the city' and 'distinctive local features' were the most important. In terms of meeting expectations, visitors were only satisfied with six of the twenty-four attributes.

Some studies have applied importance-performance analysis (IPA) to shine light on the relationship between destination attributes and satisfaction. IPA is considered a useful tool to investigate satisfaction, as it highlights the most important attributes to the customer, and how well the destination is perceived to perform against these attributes (Sever 2015). Edward and George (2008) applied IPA to investigate the attractiveness of Kerala state, India. Using 15 attributes, the most important were 'rest and relaxation', 'local culture', 'climate', and 'beaches'. The destination performed well on all of these, apart from beaches. Medina-Munoz and Medina-Munoz (2014) applied IPA to investigate the attractiveness of Gran Canaria for wellness tourism. Visitors staying in wellness resorts were asked to indicate the level of importance they attached to different attributes when selecting a wellness tourism destination. A total of 24 attributes were included which were then grouped into six dimensions. The most important attributes were 'the natural conditions of the destination', 'the relaxing environment of the hotel', 'differentiation based on personalized and professional attention', 'the attractiveness of the offer of wellness treatments and centers', and 'price competitiveness'. Gran Canaria performed well against all of these attributes, apart from price competitiveness. Mikulic et al. (2016) applied an adapted version of IPA to investigate destination attractiveness of Zagreb amongst hostel tourists. For this segment, the most important attributes were grouped into a 'fun and entertainment' dimension, notably 'events and festivals', and 'nightlife and evening entertainment'.

Rather than satisfaction as a measure related to expectations and perceptions, Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin (2017) considered wellbeing as an outcome. Subjective wellbeing is treated as consisting of both cognitive and affective components, although the overlap with satisfaction is evident when the items used to measure it are viewed: 'I was happy when staying at this destination'; 'I was pleased when staying at this destination'; 'I was satisfied when staying at this destination'. This study also added to the literature by taking a different approach to grouping attributes. Based upon Kaplan and Kaplan's landscape preference model (1989), they proposed that preference for a destination will depend upon its ability to meet two fundamental needs: understanding (labelled sense-making) and exploration. Understanding relates to the need to make sense of the environment, whilst exploration refers to "the need to explore, to find out more about what is going on in one's surroundings" (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989, p.51). Applying this model, Reitsamer and Brunner-Sperdin (2017) categorised attributes into whether they add to sense-making or add to the exploratory potential of a destination. Amongst exploratory factors, they note that attractions and activities have a role as they can strengthen the uniqueness of a destination's appeal. They surveyed visitors to three Austrian destinations, and investigated the influence of these attributes on wellbeing, and subsequently their intention to return or recommend. Their results indicate that visitors "will report higher levels of psychological well-being if a destination provides an adequate combination of sensemaking (i.e. access and amenities) and exploratory attributes (i.e. attractions and activities, entertainment options, and local community)" (p.68). Somewhat surprisingly, attractions and activities were found to negatively impact wellbeing, but they suggested that this may result from the type of destinations selected, as tourists visiting the winter Alpine destinations were there to engage in sporting activities and to relax.

Other studies have focused on the influence of particular attributes on satisfaction, most notably crowding. Li et al. (2017a) considered attractiveness as being dependent upon the experience at the destination, and considered the impact of crowding on perceived attractiveness at a national park in China. Their findings suggest that perceptions of crowding had a negative impact upon destination attractiveness and satisfaction, and there was evidence of correlation between attractiveness and satisfaction. Yin et al. (2020) surveyed visitors at an attraction in China, and results also indicated that crowding has a negative impact upon destination attractiveness, whilst destination attractiveness had a positive influence

on revisit intention. However, Jacobsen et al. (2019) surveyed visitors in Norway and suggested that crowding can also have a positive influence on destination attractiveness where it is associated with fun and excitement.

Some studies have specifically investigated how behaviour at the destination influences satisfaction. Li et al. (2023b) investigated the influence of a visitors' immersion within a destination upon satisfaction. They considered an immersive travel experience to be one where the tourist becomes physically or mentally connected with a destination or an activity. Visitors were surveyed at an attraction in China, and results indicated that those who had more immersive experiences reported higher levels of perceived destination attractiveness, resulting in higher satisfaction. Rather than immersion, which can occur on one site visit or more, Chang and Stansbie (2018) investigated whether the number of attractions visited influenced destination attractiveness. Tourists were surveyed at different attractions in South Korea, and they concluded that those who visited more attractions reported higher levels of destination attractiveness. However, they also reported that levels of satisfaction had a larger impact upon perceived attractiveness, highlighting the importance of their actual experience rather than number of attractions visited alone. Interestingly, they suggest that commitment theory supports these findings, where an individual's attitudes evolve from their behaviour, ensuring a level of consistency between their attitudes and past behaviour. This further indicates that perceived destination attractiveness, in itself an attitude, will be influenced by their behaviour at the destination.

Destination attractiveness and place attachment

Several studies have extended the focus on outcomes to consider the influence of destination attractiveness on place attachment. Reitsamar et al. (2016) argued that visitors develop attitudes toward the destination based upon cognitive evaluations of their experiences within the destination, and positive attitudes lead to higher levels of destination attachment being formed. Destination attractiveness attributes were grouped into four dimensions: accessibility, amenities and infrastructure, scenery, and local community. A survey of visitors to Austria was conducted, and their results suggested that all of these dimensions have a significant positive effect on visitors' attitudes toward the destination, and "all exert a significant impact on tourists' formation of attachment" (p.98). Lam and Ryan (2024) extended place attachment beyond the cognitive dimension, recognising that emotional and

symbolic elements can also generate destination attachment. They included fifteen attributes for destination attractiveness, grouped into three dimensions. They found that entertainment was an important dimension of destination attractiveness for Chinese visitors to Macau, reflecting the appeal of casino resorts at the destination. However, it was not a strong predictor of satisfaction and consequently place attachment. Nasira et al. (2020) surveyed visitors to Langkawi to determine the influence of destination attractiveness on satisfaction and place attachment, and subsequently destination loyalty. They included 21 attributes, and concluded that higher levels of destination attractiveness led to higher satisfaction and place attachment, which lead indirectly to increased destination loyalty. However, the measurement of destination attractiveness at the destination means that it may reflect their perceptions of destination resources based upon their experiences at the destination. This may indicate that those who were more satisfied reported higher levels of destination attractiveness, and subsequently increased place attachment (Nasira et al. 2020). Studies have also investigated the influence of place attachment on environmentally responsible behaviour. Findings suggest that visitors who reported higher levels of destination attractiveness not only developed higher levels of place attachment, but were also more likely to engage in environmentally responsible behaviour (Cheng et al. 2013; Wu et al. 2022; Li et al. 2023b; Zhipeng et al. 2024).

Destination attractiveness and influence on destination choice

Rather than focusing on outcomes, several studies have specifically investigated how attributes influenced their choice of destination. Haahti (1986) surveyed visitors to Finland and the most important factors influencing their choice were 'peacefulness', 'a change from the usual destinations', 'friendliness/hospitality', 'unspoiled countryside/camping', and 'beautiful scenery'. Mussalam and Tajeddini (2016) surveyed visitors in Switzerland, to determine which factors were important when selecting Switzerland for a short or long holiday. The most important attributes for short stay holidays were 'efficiency of transportation', 'location', 'natural resources', 'relaxation and health', and 'reputation of destination'. For long stay holidays, the most important attributes were 'location', 'quality of food', 'reputation of destination', 'perceived service quality', and 'access to the destination'. Suttikun et al. (2015) surveyed international visitors in Bangkok, and results indicated that 'sociopsychological factors' were most important, in particular 'attitudes of Thai people', 'cultural activities', and 'entertainment and nightlife'. Dey

et al. (2020) surveyed visitors to rural India, and found that cultural and rural attractions had a significant influence on their decision to visit. Kresic and Prebezac (2011) conducted a study in Croatia, and the most important factors were 'activities in destination', 'natural features', and 'destination aesthetics'. Haahti (1986, p.21) does raise an issue with surveying visitors at the destination, as "it is possible that respondents only justify their choice of Finland as a holiday destination" rather than how these attributes influenced their choice.

Qualitative destination attractiveness studies

A few researchers have adopted a qualitative approach to explore the types of attributes and experiences which added to positive evaluations of the destination. Alahakoon et al. (2021) interviewed travellers who reported having transformative travel experiences, in order to identify salient destination attributes which led to these experiences. Using cards as prompts, they found the most important attributes were 'local culture', 'friendly locals', 'history', 'natural landscape and attractions', and 'physical/adventurous outdoor activities'. Alahakoon et al. (2021) coined the term 'transformative destination attractiveness', defined as "travellers' perceptions of a destination's ability to provide transformative travel opportunities" (p.3). Jorgensen (2020) conducted interviews with Chinese tourists to the Nordic countries, and their analysis revealed that participants often mentioned what may be considered 'mundane' elements of everyday life in these countries. Three themes emerged relating to these 'mundane' elements: environment, lifestyle, and institutions. Elements of the environment which stood out included air and water quality, safety and security, and the fact it was not crowded. The lifestyle was seen as being attractive due to its slow pace, the perceived quality of life and friendliness of locals. Institutions were also considered an attraction, referring to the welfare system and supporting social systems. Moularde and Weaver (2016) interviewed mountain bikers in New Zealand who had previously travelled, to explore their destination choices and experiences. Their findings suggest that mountain bikers have a strong preference for destinations offering 'pristine' natural settings, including beautiful scenery, untouched landscapes and raw trails. They argue that "attributes of destinations are perceived according to the tourist experiences enabled" (p.300).

Summary

This chapter has explored the concept of destination attractiveness, where destinations are considered to be attractive if they are perceived to offer resources which meet visitors' needs. Destination attractiveness was originally conceived in relation to its influence on destination choice, but the concept has been extended to also consider benefits gained from perceptions and experiences at the destination. There has also been a change in approach to the study of destination attractiveness, away from the supply side focus based upon developing an inventory of tourism resources in a region, to a demand side approach which uses either experts or visitors to evaluate attributes of importance to destination attractiveness.

Given the inventory of attributes now used in destination attractiveness research, and the growth in research in this area, encompassing a range of destination types and tourism markets, it is difficult to state with any confidence what the most important attributes are. Many studies highlight the importance of natural resources, including climate, the natural landscape, scenery, natural features, and flora and fauna (see Pompurova et al. 2024). Cultural and heritage resources are also identified as being important in a number of studies, including both tangible and intangible resources (see Kim and Purdue 2011). What the destination offers in terms of entertainment and recreational activities was also found to be important in several studies (see Alahakoon et al. 2021), and a few studies highlight the importance of amenities such as accommodation and food and drink facilities (see Medina-Munoz and Medina-Munoz 2014). Beyond these core resources and attractors (Ritchie and Crouch 2003), studies also highlighted other factors which were important for destination attractiveness, including accessibility (see Islam et al. 2017), safety and security (see Lee et al. 2009), general infrastructure (Gearing et al. 1974), and attitudes of locals towards tourists (see Jorgensen 2020). Further, some studies report the importance of more holistic attributes, such as exoticness, atmosphere, peacefulness, rest and relaxation, and reputation (Haahti 1986; Edward and George 2008; Kim and Purdue 2011; Kresic and Prebezac 2011; Vigolo 2015; Wang et al. 2022).

Focusing on the role of attractions, the use of a range of attributes makes it even harder to ascertain their importance. Whilst several studies do identify attractions as being important (Hu and Ritchie 1993; Spotts 1997; Vengesai et al. 2009; Lee

2016; Tomigova et al. 2016; Lee and Chen 2017; Dey et al. 2020; Islam and Chaudhary 2021), there is no common approach to defining what attractions are. Indeed, attractions can be considered to overlap with many of the core resources and attractor categories developed by Ritchie and Crouch (2003). As McKercher (2017, p.122) points out, “the term ‘attraction’ has been used in an intemperate way to reflect everything from a single named site to a collective noun that describes a broad set of similar units”. The use of broad categories means the importance of individual sites can become muddled.

Finally, few studies directly investigate the benefits or needs of tourists. A large number of studies have collected data using surveys of potential or actual visitors, and these studies do shed some light on the importance of different attributes to different types of tourists and destinations (see Wang et al. 2022). However, information collected is mostly restricted to socio-demographic data rather than needs and benefits. Some recent studies have considered the benefits resulting from experiences at the destination, primarily in terms of satisfaction (see Jacobsen et al. 2019), suggesting a positive relationship between destination attractiveness and satisfaction. However, it is not clear how these destination attributes lead to higher satisfaction. By adopting a qualitative approach, this study will explore the role of attractions in influencing destination attractiveness in more depth. Given the limited focus on visitor needs and benefits within destination attractiveness research, the next chapter reviews the main motivation theories applied within tourism, to further develop the conceptual framework for this study.

CHAPTER 4: UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF VISITORS

Introduction

This chapter focusses on the demand side of destination attractiveness, emphasising the potential benefits sought by travellers. In the original definition proposed by Mayo and Jarvis (1981, p.203), destination attractiveness depends upon “the specific benefits that are desired by travellers and the capability of the destination to deliver them”. The benefits are the expected outcomes from the destination attributes as perceived prior to the trip (Mayo and Jarvis 1981), and these benefits are related to their motivations to travel (Frochot and Morrison 2000). As such, to understand the benefits desired by travellers, firstly their motivations to engage in travel should be recognised. Motivation is considered as a key force directing tourist behaviour (Crompton 1979; Huang 2021; Crompton and Petrick 2024) and is an important influence on destination choice (Pearce and Packer 2013).

In the literature, the terms need and motivation are used interchangeably (Tasci and Ko 2017). Needs result from a sense of imbalance, deprivation, or disequilibrium, whilst motivation refers to the desire to take action to satisfy the need (Tasci and Ko 2017; Crompton and Petrick 2024). Some researchers also discuss benefits, which result from the consumption outcomes of tourism and can be considered as the realized, or expected, outcomes from the motives to engage in the trip (Pearce 2011). Just as needs and motivation have been used interchangeably in the literature, Iso-Ahola (1982) argues that there is no reason to differentiate between motives, or reasons, and benefits, as reasons can be benefits, and benefits can be reasons. Crompton and Petrick (2024) make the distinction between motivation, which is the process that drives this behaviour, and motives, which are the specific reasons which underpin this behaviour.

This chapter begins by providing an overview of the main models which explain the process, and highlights the main motives identified in these models. It then takes a slightly different approach, framing these motives within the concept of curiosity. Within psychology, curiosity is used to explain why people engage in exploratory behaviour (Berlyne 1960), and this approach lends itself to a focus on external stimuli which may energise tourist behaviour.

Main motivational theories in tourism

Kay (2009) notes that scholars agree motivation is a complex area of research, with no overall theory of motivation within tourism accepted by all (Pearce 2011; Crompton and Petrick 2024). The most common frameworks applied are the push and pull model; Iso-Ahola's (1982) escaping-seeking model; and the career travel approach (Tasci and Ko 2017; Huang 2021; Crompton and Packer 2024). These models are outlined below, and rather than a detailed review of previous studies, this section follows the approach of Pearce (2011), where theories are reviewed to identify a range of common factors influencing tourists' behaviour.

Push and pull framework

The push and pull framework has been generally accepted within tourism since the 1970s (Dann 1977) and has been the most commonly used approach when considering destination choice (Crompton and Petrick 2024). McKercher and Tolkach (2020) state that the push and pull framework is the only theory to examine the link between motives and attractions, and their influence on destination choice. The push and pull framework highlights both the motivational forces which push tourists toward destinations, and the pull factors which draw them to a destination (Dann 1977; Pearce 2011; Huang 2021). As Crompton and Petrick (2024, p.130) argue, "motives drive behaviour and the direction of that behaviour is largely a function of the expectations that will arise from it".

In his early work, Dann (1977) focused on push factors which predispose the tourist to travel. He hypothesized that the motivation to travel is based upon two concepts: 'anomie' and 'ego-enhancement'. Within sociology, anomie occurs where societal norms no longer hold people together, resulting in lawlessness and meaninglessness. For the individual, there is a need to escape the isolation felt in society, reflecting a deeper need for love and affection. This results in a push factor to simply escape the home environment: "it is claimed that a possible "push" factor for travel lies in the desire to transcend the feeling of isolation obtained in everyday life, where the tourist simply wishes to 'get away from it all'" (Dann 1977, p.187).

As well as a desire for this social interaction, individuals also have a need for status and recognition, labelled here as 'ego-enhancement'. Travel allows for individuals who may feel a sense of 'status deprivation' to advance their social position, temporarily when away (by visiting places where their social position is not known,

or staying in exclusive resorts), and when returning by sharing stories from their travels (Dann 1977).

Dann's theory (1977; 1981) suggests that these needs are not being met in the home environment, and they have unfulfilled desires which tourism may help fulfil. Beyond the two concepts considered above, Dann (1981) also expanded this to include further examples of push factors:

- Escape from a mundane environment
- Exploration and evaluation of self
- Relaxation
- Prestige
- Regression
- Enhancement of kinship relationships
- Facilitation of social interaction

These push factors are based upon internal personal needs (Huang 2021), and they predispose the tourist to travel (Dann 1977). They precede the pull factors, indicating that the need to travel provides the push, and the destination attributes then 'pull' the visitor to the destination (Dann 1977). As Dann (1981, p.191) notes, the idea of pull factors "represents the specific attractions of the destination which induces the traveller to go there", and as such value resides within these attributes (Dann 1977). There is debate regarding the inclusion of pull factors in this framework, as these are not considered as motivational factors in the sense of being needs (Huang 2021; Crompton and Petrick 2024). However, Dann (1981) did clarify that in the push and pull approach, it is the former which focuses on motivation factors (Dann 1981).

Crompton (1979) further developed the push and pull framework, focusing on motivation factors which influenced destination choice. His framework is not only widely applied within destination choice research (Tasci and Ko 2017; Huang 2021) but is also one of the most highly cited articles, with over 6,400 citations (Crompton and Petrick 2024). Crompton (1979) noted that previous research included both push and pull factors, where push factors reflect socio-psychological motives, and pull factors "are motives aroused by the destination rather than emerging exclusively from within the traveller himself" (Crompton 1979, p.410).

Here, push factors energise the desire to travel, whilst destination attributes influence the choice of destination, which he labelled 'cultural' motives.

From his research, he identified nine motives, grouped into socio-psychological and cultural motives. The socio-psychological motives mirror those identified by Dann (1981):

- Escape from a perceived mundane environment
- Exploration and evaluation of self
- Relaxation
- Prestige
- Regression
- Enhancement of kinship relationships
- Facilitation of social interaction.

These factors suggest that tourists have both a need to escape a mundane home or work environment, and to discover more about themselves. Crompton (1979) suggested that this self-discovery comes from being in a new and novel environment, which may change their perceptions of themselves, and their feelings of self-worth. Crompton (1979) proposed two pull, or cultural, motives, which will influence the choice of destination:

- Novelty
- Education

Novelty refers to a destination offering new experiences, and embraces terms such as 'curiosity', 'new', and 'different'. It is about "actually seeing something rather than simply knowing of it vicariously" (p.419). Education was seen as being important in "developing a rounded individual", which can lead to a sense of "moral obligation" to see and experience a place (420).

The push factors provide an 'impetus dimension' of motivation, which creates a desire to go on a trip. Pull factors provide a 'directive dimension' which will influence the choice of destination (Crompton 1979). Which motives are aroused will depend upon the individual's personality, as well as the situational context (Crompton and Petrick 2024). In his early study, Crompton (1979) found that push factors were of prime importance, where holidays were essentially seen as a 'break

from routine'. For these trips, the "destination served merely as a medium through which these motives could be satisfied" (p.415).

Later, Crompton (Crompton and Petrick 2024, p.15) returned to this debate to clarify their categorisation:

"To be clear, all motives are push factors. What others mean by the erroneous use of pull "motives" invariably are a destination's "hardware" – the specific attractions, structures, facilities, artifacts, and programs which, after the decision to travel has been made, are the vehicles used to induce tourists to visit, or stay longer at a destination by suggesting it can deliver the benefit experiences that satisfy the push motives".

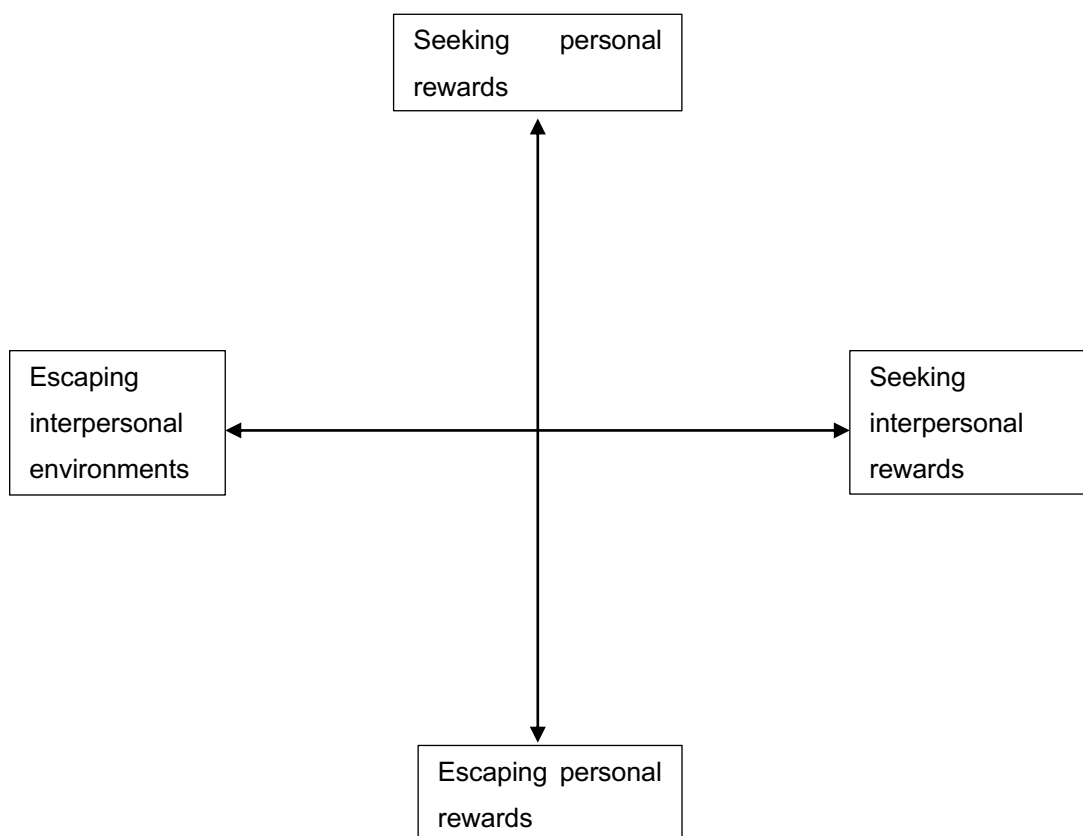
This clarification sits neatly with the concept of destination attractiveness applied in this study, where the focus is on the benefits desired and the perceived ability of the destination to meet them. Further, Crompton and Petrick (2024) frame the push and pull framework within the expectancy-value theory, where decisions are made based upon how the expected outcomes match the individual's needs. Again, this mirrors the concept of destination attractiveness previously discussed.

The push and pull framework provides a useful structure for exploring the role attractions play in destination attractiveness, in the sense of delivering the benefits to satisfy motives. However, there are limitations with this approach. Firstly, it is not just a matter of focussing on what the destination offers. Klenosky (2002, p.386) argued that: "people travel because they are pushed by their own internal forces and simultaneously pulled by the external forces of the destination and its attributes". As such, it is important to understand both the motives as well as how destination attributes pull the tourist toward the destination. This raises a further problem: a destination attribute can meet a range of different needs amongst potential visitors. Klenosky (2002) uses the example of a beach, which can meet the needs to socialize and have fun for some visitors, provide an opportunity to enjoy the sun and feel good about themselves for others, or just provide a chance to relax. Pearce (2011) also highlighted this issue, and more recently Crompton and Petrick (2024, p.104) stated that attempts to link push and pull factors in previous studies "confirmed that the large number of potential relationships among the variables make it improbable that systemic generalizations of relationships between push and pull factors can be identified".

Iso Ahola's escaping/seeking framework

Iso-Ahola (1982) developed a framework based upon two motivational forces: escape (avoidance) and seeking (approach), as shown in Figure 4.1. It is underpinned by the optimum stimulation level theory, which proposes that individuals aim to have a certain level of stimulation, and they will travel to escape an under-stimulating or over-stimulating environment to meet their optimal stimulation level (Mannell and Iso-Ahola 1987; Huang and Hsu 2009). The two forces mean they will have a desire to escape a stressful or routine environment, and a desire to seek rewards and benefits (Iso-Ahola 1982; Huang and Hsu 2009; Pearce 2011).

Figure 4.1 The escaping and seeking dimensions of leisure motivation



(Source: Mannell and Iso-Ahola 1986, p.323)

Within this model, these forces are categorised into personal and interpersonal dimensions. The relative importance of these forces may vary, and the primary motivation may be to escape the personal world (e.g. personal troubles, mood etc) and/or interpersonal world (e.g. family and friends, work colleagues,) or seek personal rewards (e.g. rest and relaxation, learning) and/or interpersonal rewards (e.g. interact with host community, new or old friends in different environment). Snepenger et al. (2006) operationalised these motivation factors by using explicit motive items. Focusing on the personal seeking dimension, these were: 'to tell others about my experiences'; 'to feel good about myself'; and 'to experience new things by myself'.

Tourists may inhabit one quadrant of the framework (such as escape personal environment and seek personal rewards), or move between cells dependent on their current situation, and even move between cells on the same trip. Iso-Ahola (1982) proposed that within tourism, it is likely that the escape motive dominates, however the escaping and seeking forces act concurrently, and the relative importance of these two forces will vary by individual and their context. For instance, in a study of sightseeing tourists, Dunn Ross and Iso-Ahola (1991) found that participants were seeking information and knowledge, and the main motivation was seeking general knowledge about the destination, including visiting the famous sites. Kay (2009) applied Iso-Ahola's theory to tourists attending cultural attractions in Australia. This study identified a range of motives, which were grouped into four dimensions: social consumption, novelty, relaxation and to learn. Kay (2009, p.361) also noted that there is a "complex bundle of product attributes and psycho-socio-physiologically related benefits".

The overlaps with the push and pull factors are evident within this framework, indeed Pearce (2011) suggests it can be considered an extension of push-pull theory. However, Crompton and Petrick (2024) contend that escape and seeking should not be considered as motives, rather these are concrete 'actions', whereas motives are hidden and abstract.

The Travel Career Approach

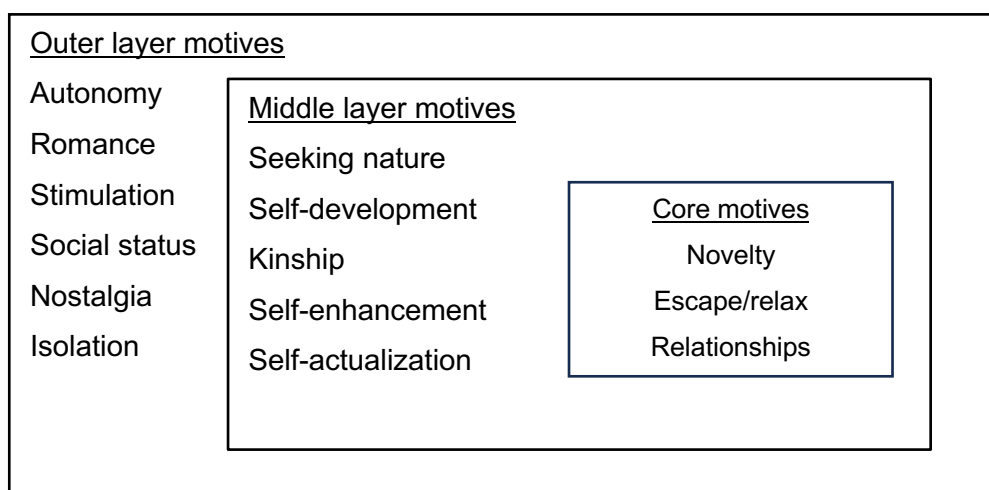
Within tourism, many researchers have applied Maslow's needs-based theory of motivation, where individuals are driven to engage in tourism to meet a range of physiological and psychological needs (Huang and Hsu 2009; Ryan and Zhang

2024). Pearce developed the Travel Career Ladder (TCL) based upon Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Pearce 1982; 2011). Originally, the framework proposed that motivations changed as individuals gained more travel experience, and as they travelled more, they would be more motivated by higher needs, such as self-esteem and self-actualisation (Pearce 2011). Following further research, this was later reworked into a Travel Career Pattern (TCP), to extend what he labelled the Career Travel Approach. The TCP stresses that rather than a ladder of needs which tourists climbed, all needs may in fact be important at any one time, but to different degrees, forming a pattern (Pearce and Lee 2005; Pearce 2011).

They identified fourteen common motives, which were then grouped, based upon their relative importance to experienced and less experienced travellers, as shown in Figure 4.2. A key finding was that there was a core set of motives shared by all travellers, namely:

- To escape/ relax
- To experience novelty
- To build relationships

Figure 4.2 The core structure of the Career Travel Approach

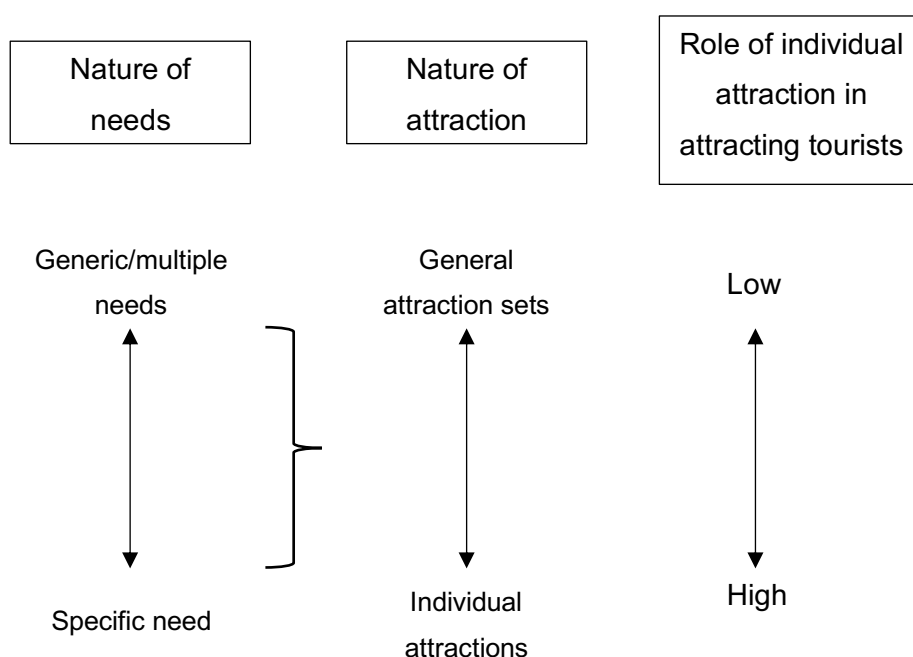


(Source: adapted from Pearce 2011)

These were labelled as core motivational factors (Pearce and Lee 2005). Beyond these core motives, the middle layer motives were more important to more experienced travellers, whilst for less experienced travellers, all motives were considered to be quite important (Pearce 2011).

McKercher (2017) developed a framework based upon the Career Travel Approach, to highlight the role attractions play in attracting tourists to a destination. The framework is built on a taxonomy of attractions and needs, which move from the general to the specific, as shown in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3 Role of individual attractions in drawing tourists to a destination



(Source: adapted from McKercher 2017, p.121)

McKercher (2017) argued that the importance of individual attractions increases where needs are specific and limited in number, but this importance decreases where needs are more general and varied in nature. This does not mean that attractions do not have a role if needs are more generic. Rather, whilst individual attractions may be unimportant, attractions still play a role as “decisions will be based on the perceived abundance of suitable attraction sets” (p. 124) which will meet their needs. McKercher suggested that visitors will have both specific and general needs, and here “a mix of specific attractions and broader attractions sets influence the trip decision’ (p.124). McKercher tested his framework in Singapore (McKercher and Koh 2017), based upon a review of published sources. Their analysis suggested a connection between the role of individual attractions in influencing appeal and the motive levels. For individuals where core motives dominated (novelty, escape/relax and relationships), individual attractions did not influence appeal, rather the appeal lay in groups of attractions being able to meet their various needs. Individual attractions became more important where middle

and outer motives dominated. McKercher also conducted primary research with tourists in Hong Kong, to further test this framework (McKercher and Tolkach 2020). Information was gathered on attractions they had visited or activities they had undertaken during their stay. Respondents were then asked to identify up to four which were important when choosing the destination. The survey design allowed the authors to provide a hierarchy of attraction groups, moving from the broad to the specific: product family (for instance general sightseeing); product classes (built attractions, heritage sites etc); and individual products (specific attractions). Results indicated that specific attractions played a role in the decision to visit for over a third (38%) of respondents, although a similar proportion (40%) stated that they played no role in their destination choice. For the remainder, rather than specific attractions, it was the broader offering which added to the appeal, leading to McKercher and Tolkach (2020, p.774) suggesting that it is “important to consider the destination's product offerings in a holistic manner when considering the role attractions have in influencing visitation”.

Curiosity and motivation

This section builds on the previous discussion of the main motivation theories in tourism to consider curiosity. Given the focus on destination attractions, a key issue is what draws the visitor to the destination. For this, the concept of curiosity is considered. This potentially incorporates some of the key benefits attractions offer, which overlap with some common motives highlighted above, most notably: desire for novelty; need for change; education; and exploration and discovery.

Within psychology research, curiosity is considered an important motivation, which underpins how individuals behave within the environment (Kashdan et al. 2020). It is grounded in the idea of ‘exploratory behaviour’ (Baumgartner and Steenkamp 1996), where individuals engage in exploratory behaviour to change their stimulus field (Berlyne 1960). Baumgartner and Steenkamp (1996) identified a range of different behaviours which contain elements of this exploratory behaviour, including variety seeking, curiosity, and novelty. Theories which explain this behaviour have underpinned research into novelty (and to a degree variety) within tourism, yet the concepts could also be used to explain the common motives identified within the main theoretical frameworks above.

Curiosity: concept and dimensions

Curiosity has long been considered as an important human motivation within psychology (Silvia 2012), however scholars have held differing views on its meaning since ancient times (Loewenstein 1994). Aristotle was one of the first scholars to suggest that curiosity related to a desire for knowledge, and this idea was repeated through the years by other philosophers and writers, with Hume identifying a 'love of knowledge', and others such as Bentham and Kant referring to an 'appetite' for knowledge (Loewenstein 1994). Other academics (Peterson and Seligman 2004; Reio et al. 2006) record that the concept of curiosity was widened in the 19th century, and trace this back to the writings of William James (1890). James identified two types of curiosity: scientific (or cognitive), which relates to the desire for knowledge; and sensory curiosity, where individuals explore objects in their environment for the purpose of enjoying their novelty, which produces a mix of excitability and anxiety.

Early researchers considered that a 'curiosity drive' existed, where curiosity produced an unpleasant sensation, called arousal, that is reduced by exploratory behaviour (Loewenstein 1994). This drive arises from an unsatisfied need, which may be internally, or externally, stimulated. This need is reduced by exploratory behaviour and by gaining knowledge (Berlyne 1954). This need was later recognised by Maslow (1970), who added cognitive needs to his revised theory of human motivation. Cognitive needs embrace the need to know and the need to understand, and these needs include curiosity and intellectual stimulation. He suggested that individuals are drawn to the unknown, and "the gratification of the cognitive impulses is subjectively satisfying", and "insight is usually a bright, happy, emotional spot in any person's life" (Maslow 1970, p.50). Further, he proposed a hierarchy within this cognitive need. Knowing leads to a desire to know more, and individuals search for more information to make sense and understand, suggesting a search for meaning. A desire to know predisposes a need to understand and the cognitive needs "form themselves into a small hierarchy in which the desire to know is prepotent over the desire to understand" (Maslow 1970, p.50)

Berlyne (1954, 1960) developed a theory of human curiosity to explain the motivation behind this quest for knowledge. He conceptualized curiosity as a response to novel stimuli that generated feelings of interest or uncertainty which

motivated individuals to explore these stimuli (Litman et al. 2005). He identified two types of curiosity:

1. Perceptual curiosity: individual aims to increase perceptions of stimuli in the environment
2. Epistemic curiosity: individual aims to gain knowledge

Berlyne (1960) also developed an optimal level theory in his studies to explain exploratory behaviour. He hypothesised that stimuli had 'arousal potential' in the sense that an intensification of the stimuli will lead to a rise in arousal. He noted that arousal is maintained by individuals at a particular level, which he labelled the 'arousal tonus', and is dependent on both internal and external factors. To maintain this level, the individual will need a certain level of stimuli, and if the level of stimuli falls below or above this level, arousal will rise and this will increase drive to return to the arousal tonus level. Thus, individuals will "strive to keep arousal potential near its optimum" (p.194), suggesting individuals have an optimal level of arousal. This concurs with the general principle of optimal stimulation developed by Leuba (1955) to explain exploratory behaviour, where overall stimulation can be positioned upon a continuum from minimal to excessive, and optimal stimulation lies within a band between these extremes. This suggests that, unlike drive theory where individuals seek to reduce arousal when too high, they also seek out curiosity when arousal/stimulation is too low, and this curiosity 'induction' is rewarding as it involves feelings of interest rather than uncertainty (Litman 2005). The optimum level of stimulation is evident within existing tourism motivation theories, most notably underpinning Iso-Ahola's (1982) escaping and seeking framework. When considering the push and pull framework, Crompton and Petrick (2024) talk of a 'gestalt disequilibrium arousal' that triggers holiday decisions, and individuals will look for destination attributes which will ease this disequilibrium.

Later models have been developed which extend on the work of Berlyne and include further dimensions. Reio et al. (2006) developed a three-factor curiosity model. They extended perceptual curiosity to two sensory factors: physical and social thrill seeking. Social thrill seeking is where individuals seek intense and varied sensations through people and social activities which involve an element of risk, such as partying and social drinking. For Reio et al. (2006, p.132), "humans are motivated by a combination for the need to answer questions in their daily lives and the need for new, diverse, intense, and complex physical and social sensations and experiences".

Sensation seeking is a dimension which has attracted a lot of attention from researchers. Zuckerman defined sensation seeking as “a trait defined by the seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take physical, social, legal and financial risks for the sake of such experience” (1994, p.27). Zuckerman identified four sub-dimensions to this construct:

1. Thrill and adventure seeking: “desire to engage in physical activities that provide unusual sensations and experiences”
2. Experience seeking: “seeking sensation and new experiences through the mind and the senses (music, art, travel), and through a nonconforming general lifestyle with likeminded friends”
3. Disinhibition: “seeking sensation through other people, a hedonistic lifestyle”
4. Boredom susceptibility: “an aversion to any kind of monotonous conditions and restlessness when confined in such conditions” (Zuckerman 2007, p. 13)

The link to Reio et al.'s (2006) sensory thrill-seeking dimension is clear from the above definition, and the sub dimensions do overlap with Berlyne's curiosity dimensions. As noted by Collins et al. (2004) and Litman et al. (2005), seeking novel sensory experiences is similar to sensation-seeking as defined by Zuckerman (1994), so this does relate to perceptual curiosity. However, sensory curiosity reflects a desire to increase arousal, and does not always involve physical and social risk taking, or the desire for an intense emotional arousal (Litman 2005).

The cognitive and sensory dimensions are also included in the work of Kashdan et al. (2020), who identified five dimensions:

- Joyous exploration: the desire for new knowledge and information
- Deprivation sensitivity: seek to reduce gaps in knowledge
- Stress tolerance: willingness to accept feelings of distress from exploring new and unfamiliar environments
- Social curiosity: desire to take physical or social risks to have intense experiences
- Thrill-seeking: willing to take risks to gain intense experiences

It is important to recognise that whilst there are different dimensions to curiosity, these may be interrelated.

In his later work (1966), Berlyne noted that curiosity led to different types of exploratory behaviour:

1. Specific exploratory behaviour: lack of knowledge arouses curiosity, and leads to specific exploration of particular sources, which can supply the information needed.
2. Diversive exploratory behaviour: need for stimuli arouses curiosity, and more general search for stimuli follows, where the individual seeks out stimulation “that offers something like an optimum amount of novelty, surprisingness, complexity, change, or variety” (p.26). No specify stimuli or information is sourced.

Specific curiosity has been called information seeking (Reio et al. 2006) and is more likely to occur in environments with novel stimuli (Litman and Jimerson 2004). Diversive exploratory behaviour is more likely to occur in less stimulating environments, where boredom leads to individuals searching for something new and interesting (Litman and Jimerson 2004). It is a more generalised desire to seek out new experiences and information (Kashdan et al. 2009). Diversive and specific behaviour can work together to optimise stimulation (Reio et al. 2006). Individuals may seek stimulation to arouse curiosity when bored, and then acquire new information once curiosity is aroused (Litman and Jimerson 2004). As noted by Kashdan et al. (2004, p.291), “diversive curiosity fosters contact with new stimuli and opportunities, and specific curiosity is activated by those stimuli that can be further enjoyed by obtaining more information”.

Kashdan et al. (2004) built on the diversive and specific dimensions detailed by Berlyne and developed distinct stages of curiosity:

1. Diversive curiosity or exploration: this involves allocating attention to scan, identify and follow novel or challenging experiences
2. Engagement: engagement in this activity leads to specific curiosity and exploration, and this fosters a flow-like absorption and investigative behaviours which result in discovery, pleasure, and use of skills.

For Kashdan et al. (2004), diversive curiosity leads to specific curiosity, but only if the individual becomes actively engaged in the activity and becomes absorbed in these exploratory behaviours. These two components can lead to a sense of mastery as new experiences and learning are integrated, and supports the notion that “curiosity begets further curiosity” (p.301). More recently, Kashdan et al.

(2018) developed a scale which measures these two dimensions of curiosity: seeking knowledge and new experiences ('stretching'), and a willingness to embrace the novel, uncertain and unpredictable nature of life ('embracing'). The embracing dimension reflects the ability of the individual to self-regulate attention to allow for immersion in novel activities.

The above discussion highlights curiosity as a need, where individuals will engage in behaviour to increase or decrease the level of arousal. Another strand of research considers curiosity as an intrinsic motivation, where learning and exploring are rewarding in themselves (Silvia 2012). Litman and Jimerson (2004) developed an 'interest/deprivation' model, which suggests that "both the satiation and activation of curiosity could be rewarding" (2005; p.799). Here, curiosity could be aroused when an individual feels deprived of information, but also when they want information purely to enjoy learning something new:

- Curiosity as a feeling of deprivation: activated when individual feels they are lacking some needed information. This has some negative feelings (tension, frustration, dissatisfaction) resulting from uncertainty.
- Curiosity as a feeling of interest: activated by feeling that it would be enjoyable to discover something new. This involves positive feelings of interest and joy from anticipation of learning something new.

Ryan and Deci (2000) also consider curiosity to be an intrinsic motivation. Within their Self-Determination Theory (SDT), curiosity is seen as a positive feature of human nature, reflecting "the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn" (p. 70). They based their theory on the view that organisms approach and function optimally in environments which provide them with a moderate level of stimuli. They noted that optimum level theories relate to physiological and psychological arousal. However, they argue that the main problem with these theories is they can explain behaviour but not what causes it; they do not consider the need. They identified a basic need for competence, and suggest that curiosity is implicit in this need (Deci and Ryan 2000). When people are intrinsically motivated to engage in an activity, they will feel interest and enjoyment, and these are the rewards of intrinsically motivated behaviour. As they suggest, "the inclinations to take interest in novelty, to actively assimilate, and to creatively apply our skills is not limited to childhood, but is a significant feature of human nature that affects performance, persistence, and well-being across life's epochs" (Ryan and Deci 2001, p.56). Self

Determination Theory stresses that curiosity is part of this need for competence, the desire to have an effect on the environment, to master and apply skills.

Loewenstein (1994) took a different approach, focusing on the cognitive dimension of curiosity. Loewenstein viewed curiosity as “a form of cognitively induced deprivation that results from the perception of a gap in one’s knowledge” (p.76). This theory suggests that a gap in one’s knowledge produces a feeling of deprivation which he labelled curiosity. This gap will depend upon what the individual knows, and what they want to know, which acts as a reference point. Thus, curiosity is evoked when the reference point is above the current level of knowledge. Individuals will seek information to close this gap, and curiosity will be greater when the information source is able to close this gap. However, this information gap must be manageable. If it is considered too large the individual will perceive that the chances of closing it are reduced, so they will not be motivated to engage in exploratory behaviour. Loewenstein also hypothesized that more knowledgeable individuals will be more curious, as the more knowledge individuals have, the more they focus on what they do not know, rather than what they already know. It is also suggested that motivation increases as individuals get nearer to closing the information gap, explained by approach-gradient theory which states that the intensity of motivation increases as an individual reaches goal achievement (Litman 2005).

In summary, curiosity is seen as being important as it is a main driver of exploratory behaviour (Loewenstein 1994; Kashdan et al. 2004; Reio et al. 2006; Park et al. 2011). Psychological research conceptualises curiosity as having two main dimensions: a search for knowledge, and a desire for sensations. These sensations can be social and/or physical, and can involve risks or not. However, issues remain due to different conceptualisations (Kashdan et al. 2009), and the fact it is multidimensional (Reio et al. 2006). In particular, some researchers argue that diversive curiosity differs from the historical use of the term, as it is more closely related to boredom rather than the ‘thirst for knowledge’ from earlier writings. As Loewenstein (1994, p. 77) notes, by including diversive curiosity in his classification, Berlyne “effectively institutionalised the tendency to classify the desire for change and novelty as curiosity”.

Curiosity and tourism research

Within tourism, only recently have studies directly applied the concept of curiosity. Rather, previous research has focused on the importance of novelty and change within tourism (Cohen 1972; 1974; Bello and Etzel 1985; Lee and Crompton 1992; Petrick 2002; Jang and Feng 2007; Weaver et al. 2009; Assaker et al. 2014; Blomstervik and Olsen 2022). Indeed, Mitas and Bastiaansen (2018, p.99) suggest that “novelty is somehow fundamental to the experience of tourism”. It has been used as a basis to segment tourism markets (Cohen 1974; Yiannakis and Gibson 1992; Mo et al. 1994; Plog 1974; 2002; Petrick 2002; Hu et al. 2002; Chang et al. 2006; Weaver et al. 2009), as a factor influencing destination loyalty (George and George 2004; Castro et al. 2007; Jang and Feng 2007; Bigne et al. 2009; Hong et al. 2009; Assaker et al. 2011; Cheng and Lu 2013; Kim and Kim 2015), and in studies investigating its importance at the destination (Basala and Klenosky 2001; Nicolau 2010; Pechlaner et al. 2011; Legohérel et al. 2012; 2015). This focus on novelty within tourism fits within the concept of curiosity, where novelty is considered a determinant of exploratory behaviour, providing stimuli which arouses curiosity (Berlyne 1950; Litman and Jimerson 2004). However, this underpinning is not explicit in these studies. Whilst many of these studies are based upon the optimum stimulation level (Lee and Crompton 1992; Petrick 2002; Hu et al. 2002; George and George 2004; Chang et al. 2006; Jang and Feng 2007; Castro et al. 2007; Bigne et al. 2009; Hong et al. 2009; Weaver et al. 2009; Assaker et al. 2011; Cheng and Lu 2013; Kim and Kim 2015), the research is framed as novelty-seeking, rather than curiosity. This is clearly illustrated by Lee and Crompton’s (1992) novelty scale, which is based upon the optimum stimulation theory.

Previous studies have also identified tourism motives which arguably fall within the concept of curiosity, such as discovering and exploring new destinations, different experiences, thrill and excitement, surprise, learning and education, boredom and change (Klenosky 2002; Petrick 2002; Yoon and Uysal 2005; Kay 2009; Nowacki 2009; Weaver et al. 2009; Falk et al. 2012; Poria 2013; Kim and Kim 2015; Dean and Suhartanto 2019; Douglas et al. 2023). However, as Mehmetoglu (2012) contends, these approach curiosity indirectly, and do not examine the relationship in any depth. A few studies do consider curiosity directly, although they do not embed this in existing theories. Foubert (2018) considered curiosity as a motive to analyse historical literary accounts of tourism, whilst Xie et al. (2007, p.452) talk of hip-hop tourists being attracted by “the curiosity about the other”. Within dark

tourism, several authors highlight 'morbid curiosity' as playing a role in motivating tourists (Stone 2006; Dunkley et al. 2011; Raine 2013). Shen et al. (2020) explored the motivations underpinning tourists taking part in gamified trips at destinations, and developed a typology which included 'curiosity seekers'. These tourists enjoy scavenger hunts, where they must explore the city to find the main attractions, giving their exploration a purpose. They also like to experience surprise, and a degree of uncertainty adds to the attractiveness of the destination.

More recently, several studies have explicitly focused on curiosity within tourism and applied existing theories. Mehmetoglu (2012) recognised that curiosity is "a major motivation of pleasure travel", and a focus on curiosity will "provide us with an invaluable basis for a deeper understanding of tourism motivation" (Mehmetoglu (2012, p.97). Mehmetoglu (2012) applied Berlyne's (1960) perceptual and epistemic dimensions in a survey of Norwegian residents, but findings suggest that other sociocultural motives were more important than curiosity. Guzel et al. (2020) considered curiosity as a push factor for coastal tourists to Turkey, and also included both perceptual and epistemic curiosity in their study. They found that both perceptual curiosity ('visiting unfamiliar cultural and historical sites', 'meeting locals', 'having social interaction with unfamiliar people') and the epistemic component ('increasing knowledge of new places', 'experiencing local traditions and lifestyles', 'gastronomy') were important push factors, along with other motives identified in the literature (escape, relaxation, prestige). Totsune et al. (2021) investigated the influence of curiosity on the travel behaviour (and subjective wellbeing) of senior tourists in Japan. They limited curiosity to epistemic curiosity, and included two dimensions in line with Berlyne (1960), labelled diverse curiosity and specific curiosity. Their results suggest that diverse, rather than specific, curiosity motivated this market to travel, highlighting the importance of novel and varied information at the destination. Rather than dimensions of curiosity, Maartensen (2018) investigated the influence of curiosity on holiday choice, using a survey of European residents. He operationalised curiosity based upon the optimum stimulation theory, where consumers engage in exploratory behaviour to change the stimulus field. He concluded that curiosity is important in driving variety-seeking behaviour.

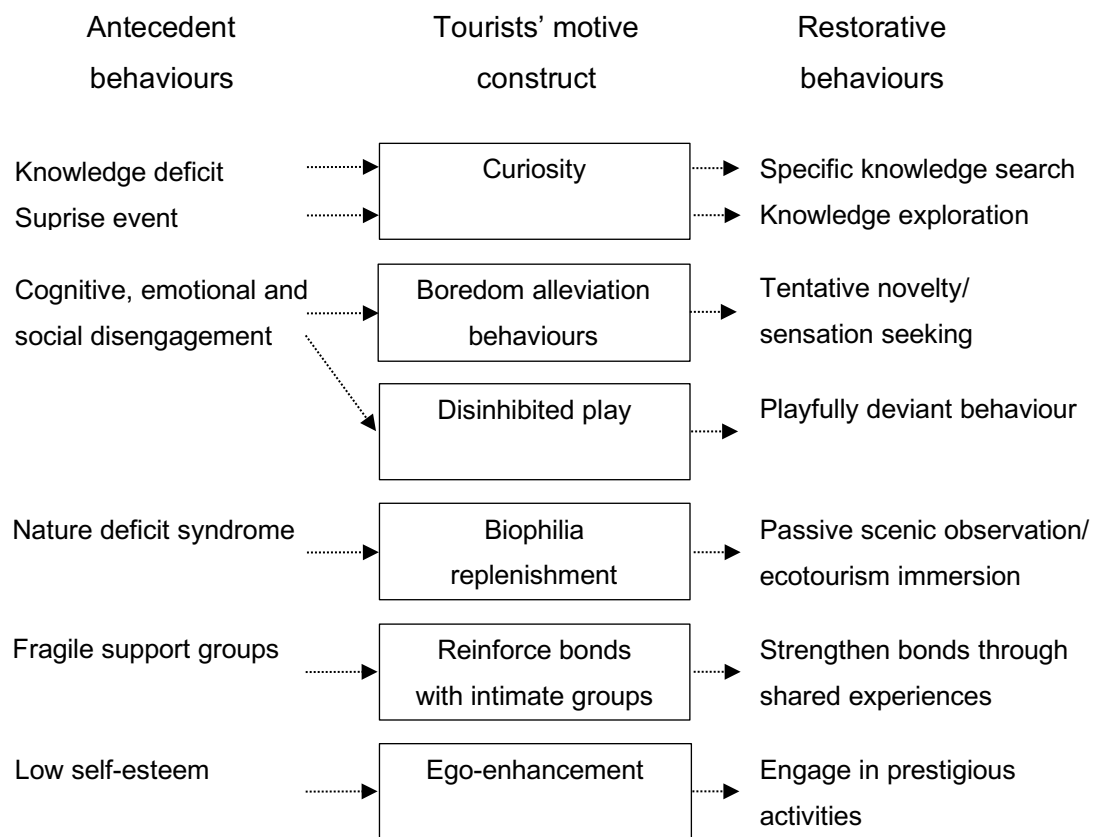
Chen and Hsu (2021) developed a scale to measure backpackers' exploratory curiosity to explain their behaviours. They defined backpackers' exploratory curiosity as "seeking sensational and novel stimulation from backpacking, new

destinations, new tourism events, or other backpackers that lead to engaging in various behaviours to explore new information about backpacking or related factors” (p.7). They considered both epistemic and perceptual dimensions of curiosity, and developed a scale with four components: excitement, new destinations, social contact, and new tourism events. Li et al. (2024) explored the anime tourism market, and developed the idea of ‘fantasy curiosity’. They talk of the “deep curiosity of anime pilgrims”, who want “to get closer to the anime world by acquiring new information by visiting the places that are somehow connected to it” (p.4545). This reflects epistemic curiosity, where these tourists are driven by an information gap, but rather than new information they rely on their own imagination to close this gap when at the destination, which acts as “a tangible environmental cue to enable and facilitate the imagination process” (p.4555). For these tourists, being there becomes important.

Davari and Jang (2024) considered destination curiosity specifically. They talk of two dimensions: depth and width. Depth “represents a tendency for thorough inquiry and analysis”, whilst width “reflects a preference for looking into a broad range of topics or interests” (Davari and Jang 2024, p.398). Depth incorporates both perceptual and epistemic curiosity, where there is a desire to explore novel and complex stimuli in detail, as well as a desire to know. Width also encompasses perceptual and epistemic curiosity, but captures the desire for variety and novelty. They define destination curiosity as (2024, p.399) “travel enthusiasm reflecting a curious behaviour that explores and seeks fulfilment in acquiring knowledge through meaningful travel experience at the destination”. To trigger this curiosity, Davari and Jang (2024) suggest a destination needs to offer both complexity and diversity.

Finally, the importance of curiosity has been recognised in Crompton’s recent (2024) conceptual article. Crompton (2024) identified six motive constructs that have emerged in tourism research over the years, shown in Figure 4.4. The motives prompt tourists’ actions and guide destination choice. Crompton (2024, p.9) suggests that the relative importance of these motives will depend upon the situation and whilst “one motive often is dominant and exerts greatest influence on a vacation decision, invariably there are subordinate motives that also have influence”. Crompton (2024) also identifies antecedent behaviours, reflecting the state of disequilibrium associated with each motive, and restorative behaviours which tourists engage in to re-establish equilibrium.

Figure 4.4 Crompton's (2024) six tourist's motive constructs



(Source: adapted from Crompton 2024)

Crompton (2024, p.9) reflects on his earlier work, and states that he “mischaracterized curiosity by interpreting his tourist respondents’ observations as “novelty””. Interestingly, he then argues that “rather, novelty is a behavioural response triggered by the desire to alleviate boredom” (p.9), which he treats as a separate motive construct. This argument reflects the ongoing discussion amongst psychology researchers highlighted earlier. Crompton (2024) recognised Berlyne’s (1960) diverse curiosity as being triggered by boredom, and this underpins his boredom alleviation construct, where individuals seek stimulation without a specific source in mind. For Crompton (2024), curiosity is triggered by knowledge deficit, and ‘surprise exploration’. He embeds these within Berlyne’s (1960) specific curiosity and a ‘search for knowledge’. This can result not only from a known specific knowledge gap (Lowenstein 1994), but also from a wider desire for knowledge, “from a sense of moral obligation to pursue an unanticipated cultural opportunity that “ought” to be pursued” (Crompton 2024, p.10). Further, rather than been driven to purely fill an information gap, tourists actively seek situations which will make them curious, where they “engage in ‘surprise-exploration’

behaviours” (p.10). This reflects the ‘interest’ dimension of curiosity proposed by Litman and Jimerson (2004), which is activated when tourists feel it would be enjoyable to discover something new. This leads to more general knowledge exploration at the destination (Crompton 2024).

Summary

The chapter has briefly discussed the main motivation models and frameworks applied in tourism. These suggest that there are a range of potential motives tourists may have when choosing and visiting a destination (Huang and Hsu 2009; McKercher et al. 2017; Yoo et al. 2018). As Crompton and Petrick (2024) conclude, there is a ‘constellation’ of tourist motives, with each of these existing within individuals. To extend this framework, and to focus on what may provide benefits at the destination, this chapter has explored the concept of curiosity, which underpins exploratory behaviour in psychology and more recently in tourism. Curiosity embraces the search for knowledge and the desire for sensations. It can be driven by a need to change the arousal level, to escape an overstimulating or under stimulating environment, or purely for its own sake, for the enjoyment it provides. The need for stimuli can lead to general, or diversive, exploratory behaviour, where the tourist will explore the destination in search of stimuli, or specific exploration of particular sites they know of, to gather more knowledge. The concept of curiosity also highlights the importance of novel, or different objects, which will energise this behaviour, as well as the need for change.

The concept of curiosity is also useful as it focusses on behaviour, which participants are more likely to discuss in their narratives, rather than their motives, which are harder to unravel and are often hidden (Crompton 2024). Motives are deeper needs, which individuals may not be aware of, or indeed willing to share if they lead to a loss of prestige (Dann 1981; Pearce 2011; Crompton and Petrick 2024; Crompton 2024). Further, with the expansion of tourism offering more choice, tourists may act like “dilettantes”, making it even harder to identify underlying motives (Pearce 2011, p.48), especially where responses may be ‘overdetermined’, where they only share a single motive (Crompton 2024).

CHAPTER 5: ATTRACTIONS AND DESTINATION CHOICE

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 3, destination attractiveness is grounded in the perceived benefits of attributes available at the destination. This chapter explores the role attractions play in destination choice, whereby attitudes lead to preference and a final choice. Research on destination choice aims to understand both the process of selecting a destination, as well as the factors influencing this choice (Sirakaya and Woodside 2005; Choi et al. 2012). It is recognized as a complex process, involving many sub-decisions over time (Decrop 1999; Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002; Smallman and Moore 2010). Nevertheless, as Li (2013) notes, there is general agreement that destinations are chosen based upon certain criteria. The aim of this chapter is to understand which factors or attributes influence destination choice, and how important these are in the decision-making process. This chapter explores the role attractions play, in terms of how they influence destination choice, and how they are incorporated into the decision-making process.

Influence of attractions as destination attributes

Most destination choice research is grounded in classical consumer buyer behaviour models (Sirakaya and Woodside 2005; Choi et al. 2012; Chen et al. 2014). In these models, tourists are seen as rational, or functional, decision makers who aim to maximise their utility (Sirakaya and Woodside 2005; Choi et al. 2012; Decrop 2014; Correia et al. 2014; Qui et al. 2018). The traditional view held by economists was that “goods are what are thought of as goods” (Lancaster 1966, p.13), but this did not take account of new products offering different characteristics, nor any variations in quality. Lancaster proposed that “the good, per se, does not give utility to the consumer; it possesses characteristics, and these characteristics give rise to utility” (p.135). It is these characteristics, or attributes, which enable it to meet the particular needs of the consumer (Correia et al. 2014). Under this approach, consumers are assumed to calculate the utility gained from consuming a product by summing the weighted utility provided by each product characteristic, in order to reach an optimal decision outcome (Correia et al. 2014). For destinations, choice results directly from comparison of destinations based upon their attributes (Decrop 1999; Decrop 2014).

Rugg (1973) was the first to apply this model to destination choice, and this approach has continued, with studies using a range of direct and indirect methods (Huybers 2003; Nicolau and Mas 2008; LaMondia et al. 2010; Opperal et al. 2015; Battour et al. 2017; Saikia and Goswami 2019; Pike et al. 2022). These studies have included a range of attributes or characteristics. Usefully, LaMondia et al. (2010) and Keshavarzian and Wu (2017) categorise these into three groups: personal characteristics, trip characteristics, and most importantly for this study, destination characteristics. The types of characteristics are shown in Figure 5.1.

Table 5.1 Factors influencing destination choice

Categories	Tyes of attributes
Destination characteristics	Climatic factors Cost of accommodation Crowdedness Cost of living at the destination Type of attractions Variety of activities Size of accommodation Rarity of natural attraction Quality and range of accommodation Proximity of accommodation to attractions Number of national museums Location of accommodation Events or festivals Destination area size Conditions of environment Availability and proximity of airport
Travellers' variables	Income Age Affective association Education Gender Marital status Presence of children
Trip characteristics	Total cost of travel Transport cost Travel time or distance Season Duration of trip Travel purpose Airline

(Source: Keshavarzian and Wu, 2017, p.550)

In their review of previous research, Sirakaya and Woodside (2005) grouped variables in a similar manner, labelling these internal, external, and trip characteristics. These were listed as:

- Internal variables: attitudes, values, lifestyles, images, motivation, beliefs and intentions, personality characteristics of a buyer, lifecycle stage, risk reduction methods, information search behaviour
- External variables: constraints, pull factors of a destination, marketing mix, influences of family and reference groups, culture and subcultures, social class, household-related variables such as life-style, power structure, role, group decision-making style
- Nature of intended trip: party size, distance, time, duration of trip (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005, p.823)

Destination attributes are considered as pull factors, and mirror those used in destination attractiveness studies, namely climate, culture and history, entertainment, activities etc. Indeed, Lee et al. (2010, p.678) state that the attributes of the destination “can be viewed as the determinants of destination attractiveness”. Attractions tend to be implicit within these categories, as they can fall within different groups. For instance, Lee et al. (2010) include beautiful scenery, climate, nightlife and cultural/historical assets, all of which could encompass attractions. Moscardo (1996) analysed secondary data to show that activities (which included visiting attractions) influenced destination choice. Huybers (2003) includes ‘environment’ as a category, labelled as the setting for activities undertaken (which are not explicitly considered). Few studies have looked specifically at attractions as an attribute. Pike et al. (2022) used ‘things to do’ as one attribute, varying from ‘very many’, ‘moderately many’, to ‘not so many’ for a study of Australians considering a stopover destination on a long-haul trip to Europe. They found that having a number of things to do influenced their decision to visit. Wu et al. (2011) included the number of ‘tourism spots’ as an attribute, and found in their study of tourists in Japan that this was an important influence on destination choice. These suggest that the quantity of attractions is important, but they do not consider why this is, or the importance of different types of attractions.

As can be seen, destination choice research has identified a range of factors which influence choice, showing an interplay between the visitor, the type of trip planned, and what the destination offers. This highlights the complexity involved in destination choice, especially when it is recognised that any decision is made

under certain constraints, namely time and money (Bull 1995; Stabler et al. 2009). This has limited research into the influence of attractions in most studies in this area.

Role of attractions during decision process

The role of attractions in destination choice is further complicated when the process of reaching a decision is considered. The most common models applied in destination choice are choice set models (Sirakaya and Woodside 2005; Smallman and Moore 2010; Cohen et al. 2014; Qiu et al. 2018). These process models highlight the way tourists reach their decision, and how these evolve over time (Decrop 2014). Here, visitors follow a funnel-like process, narrowing down the number of alternatives considered until a final choice is made (Sirakaya and Woodside 2005; Choi et al. 2012; Karl et al. 2020). Krakover and Corsale (2021) talk of visitors undertaking a 'sieving' process when selecting a destination, where destinations are separated into attractive places from those considered less interesting. During the process, the desirability of the destination and feasibility are key selection criteria (Karl et al. 2020).

In their review of previous studies, Pearce and Packer (2013) noted that the two most commonly applied models were developed by Woodside and Lyonski (1989) and Um and Crompton (1990). Woodside and Lyonski (1989) developed one of the earlier choice set models highlighting the sequence tourists go through when selecting a destination. Choice of destination is based upon their perceptions of what the destination offers, and their preferences. Preferences for a destination are based upon destination awareness and the affective associations they have. This construct is similar to attitudes, reflecting the affective dimension (Vargas-Sanchez 2016). Indeed "preferences are the rankings assigned to destinations by relative attitude strength, i.e., the ordering a consumer assigns alternative destinations from most liked to least liked" (Woodside and Lyonski 1989, p.8). Visitors with a positive affective association for a destination would consider visiting subject to situational factors (such as time and money).

Destinations that visitors are aware of are mentally filed into four categories: consideration set (aware and would consider visiting), inept set (aware but would not consider for particular trip), inert set (aware of the destination but does not have sufficient information to evaluate them, sometimes labelled the 'foggy' set), and

unavailable set (aware but constraints make it unavailable for planned trip e.g. cost/distance).

Um and Crompton (1990) developed a similar model, based upon awareness and attitudes. They hypothesised that destination choice involved two main stages, where a destination was selected from an evoked set. Visitors have an awareness set of travel destinations based upon their knowledge of these destinations, which may be considered as 'destinations of your dreams'. From this, an evoked set is developed, and potential visitors then actively gather further information on these destinations (Um and Crompton 1990; Lue et al. 1996; Sirakaya and Woodside 2005; Hwang et al. 2005). Based upon their preferences and constraints (time, money, skill and health), they will then select a destination from these.

Potential visitors generate an awareness set based upon passive information they already have. However, Um and Crompton (1990, p.433) acknowledged that "potential travellers generally have limited knowledge about the attributes of a destination which they have not previously visited". Travellers will then engage in active search for destinations in the consideration set, gathering information on destination attributes (Um and Crompton 1990; Hyde 2004; Decrop 2014; Qiu et al. 2018; Li et al. 2019). As they gather more information, they form attitudes and preferences to destinations in their consideration set (Hyde 2004; Decrop 2014).

Of key importance in this process is the potential visitor's attitude toward each destination. Attitudes are seen to be based upon destination attributes, however as visitors may have limited knowledge of what the destination offers, the destination image is also considered to be important. As Um and Crompton (1990, p. 432) state:

"the image of a place as a pleasure travel destination is a gestalt. It is an holistic construct which, to a greater or lesser extent, is derived from attitudes towards the destination's perceived tourism attributes".

These attitudes are formed based upon whether they facilitate or inhibit meeting the specific needs they have, taking into account situational factors. Needs identified included novelty, challenge, relaxation, learning, and curiosity (Um and Crompton 1990).

The discussion above outlines the main models applied in destination choice research. However, these do come with strong caveats. In their review of travel decision making models, Sirakaya and Woodside (2005, p.828) concluded that:

“the literature on behavioural decision making suggests that decision-making styles are individualistic. Therefore, developing a model that fits all decision-makers and every decision situation may not be realistic”.

By their very nature the models simplify the process, focussing primarily on the features and process of deciding upon a destination (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002; Hyde 2004; Choi et al. 2012). The models also consider tourists to be rational decision makers (Decrop 2010; Decrop and Snelders 2005; Cohen et al. 2014). They are seen as cognitive information processors (Decrop 1999), following a process from attitude, to intention, to behaviour (Cohen et al. 2014). To address this, researchers have applied the theory of planned behaviour (Sirakaya and Woodside 2005; Cohen et al. 2014; Qiu et al. 2018). Specifically, as well as attitude toward the destination, subjective norms regarding the destinations under consideration and the degree of perceived control will also influence the final choice (Qiu et al. 2018). Subjective norms highlight the influence of family and friends, whilst perceived behavioural control takes into account constraints the visitor faces, as well as their past experiences (Sirakaya and Woodside 2005). Qiu et al. (2018) suggest that including the theory of planned behaviour within choice set models may help provide fresh insight into the decision-making process.

Levels of decisions

The stage models outlined above focus on the destination choice made prior to the trip (Decrop 1999; Hyde 2004). However, visitors will make many decisions, and these can occur before and during the trip (Smallman and Moore 2010; Choi et al. 2012). As such, travel decision making can be seen as a complex and ongoing process (Decrop and Snelders 2005). As well as choice of destination, visitors also make a number of sub-decisions when planning a trip (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002; Decrop and Snelders 2004; Hyde 2004; Choi et al., 2012; Cohen et al. 2014). Woodside et al. (2004) identified seven components which need to be considered, including activities and attractions. These decisions are interdependent, in the sense that some decisions made are conditioned by others that have previously been made (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002; Hyde 2004; Choi et al. 2012). Fesenmaier and Jeng (2000; 2002) argued that the ordering of these decisions reflects the importance of these different components. Primary decisions are made

early in the holiday planning process and planned in detail. These are considered to be most important to the individual, and typically include the destination and length of stay. Secondary decisions are made after the initial planning stages and encompass elements which are considered to be of less importance. Jeng and Fesenmaier (2002) considered attractions and activities to be secondary decisions. En- route decisions are left until the trip begins, allowing for greater flexibility (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002).

March and Woodside (2005) developed a purchase-consumption system, to highlight the sequencing of decisions made and the interdependence of these decisions. They identified three levels of decision making. Level 1 decisions were made in the early stages of vacation planning, and involved selection of the primary destination, plus the attractions and activities to visit. Level 2 decisions were also made before the vacation commenced, and involved choice of travel route and accommodation. Level 3 decisions were made while on vacation, and principally involved choice of where to dine and where to shop. Interestingly, choice of attractions was considered a level 1 decision in this study, and made early in the process. The authors recognised that this may have been influenced by the study taking place in Hawaii, where the Volcano National Park is the main attraction and may have influenced the choice of destination (March and Woodside 2005).

Decrop (2010, p.23) also developed an integrative framework of holiday decision-making, highlighting a sequential hierarchy of decisions:

- Generic decision: to go or not to go?
- Modal decision: type of holiday?
- Specific decisions: focus on specific holiday decisions: destination, accommodation, transport and attractions

Here, attractions are considered after deciding on the type of holiday to take, along with other sub-decisions. Choi et al. (2012) also looked at the different stages in the whole travel trip process, taking into account the different decisions made for different elements, and the sequencing of these decisions. They considered the sequence of decisions prior to booking, after booking and prior to departure, and whilst at the destination. Their focus was also on how visitors gathered information during these sequences, and how decisions evolved over time. In their study of Chinese visitors to Macau, they found that a significant proportion of visitors chose

attractions and activities once at the destination, and suggested that as the destination had a cluster of attractions in a small area, they did not need to plan detailed itineraries before arrival. Other researchers have also recognised that not all decisions are planned in advance (Hyde 2004; Smallman and Moore 2010; Cohen et al. 2014). These studies suggest that the role of attractions in the decision-making process varies, highlighting the importance of the context and situation (March and Woodside 2005; Cohen et al. 2014).

Reaching a decision

An important factor to consider when reaching a decision is the amount of information visitors gather on destinations when making their choice. The level of information gathered reflects the perceived risk associated in selecting a destination, given the intangible nature of the product (Cai et al. 2004; Sirakaya and Woodside 2005; Decrop and Snelders 2005). Potential visitors will gather information to reduce these uncertainties when making their final choice (Sirakaya and Woodside 2005; Hergesell et al. 2019). This reveals the level of purchase involvement, or 'purchase decision involvement', namely the level of interest the individual has in the purchase (Sirakaya and Woodside 2005; Cai et al. 2004).

Selecting a destination can be considered a 'high involvement' situation (Woodside and King 2001; Correia et al. 2014), where time and effort is spent to gather this information. However, studies report different levels of involvement in the decision-making process (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002; Decrop and Snelders 2005; Hwang et al. 2005; Decrop and Kozak 2009; Yoo et al. 2018). Decrop (1999) talks of 'unplanned travellers', who limit their planning due to time pressures or other reasons. Decrop and Snelders (2005) developed a typology of tourists based upon their decision-making styles, highlighting different levels of involvement. These ranged from hedonic vacationers, who exhibit high levels of involvement, gathering information at every opportunity; rational vacationers, who plan their trips carefully; to opportunistic vacationers, who minimise planning and adopt a more passive 'wait and see' approach. The level of information gathered will affect the visitor's knowledge of destination attributes and their ability to differentiate between destinations, based on image and attributes (Decrop and Snelders 2005; Bowen 2022).

Researchers have also questioned whether tourists always aim to maximise utility when deciding upon a destination (Decrop 1999; Hyde 2004; Decrop and Snelders 2005). Decrop (1999) argues that the tourist is more than just a cognitive information processor, and motivations, personality and self-concept, lifestyle, and emotions all influence behaviour. Hyde (2004) argued that rather than maximising utility, it may be more appropriate to view visitors as pleasure seekers. This is based upon the 'experiential view' of consumption proposed by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982, p.132), where it is seen as a "steady flow of fantasies, feelings, and fun". This approach calls for a focus on the consumption experience, highlighting the hedonistic and symbolic characteristics rather than product attributes (Decrop 1999). Hyde (2004) talks of 'consumers at play', and rather than solving problems, they want to experience feelings and emotions. Decrop and Snelders (2005) stress the importance of these emotional factors on choices made. How individuals feel at a certain time can influence their decisions, and rather than weighing up alternatives, they may make choices in a more carefree manner (Hyde 2004).

In her study of decision making on holiday, Hyde (2004) proposed that visitors employed different approaches to decision making, where pre-trip decisions followed a more classical approach of processing information to make deliberate and reasoned decisions, whereas once at the destination, decisions follow the experiential approach, where choices are more "light-hearted, free-spirited and hedonistic" (Hyde 2004, p.161). She further proposed a model of the vacation as an 'evolving itinerary' (Hyde 2000). This model highlighted that whilst all travellers chose their main destination and mode of transport prior to departure, visitors differed in how they research and planned what to do when at the destination. Some visitors will research what was available at the destination, and some may even decide what to see and do, however others do not research or plan these elements prior to departure. In her study of independent tourists in New Zealand, she found that whilst where to visit was planned beforehand, what to see and do was not decided until they arrived at the different destinations within New Zealand. This allowed them to enjoy the experience of discovering the destination, and experiencing all the "fun of the fairground" (Hyde 2004, p.163). Decrop and Snelders (2005) also indicated that there may exist a plurality of vacation decision-making processes. They suggested that some tourists, such as independent travellers, may not use well-defined decision strategies but adapt their choices to the context of the trip.

This mixed approach to decision making is supported by the dual-system theory (Correia et al. 2014; McCabe et al. 2016; Bowen 2022). The dual-system theory stresses the different ways decisions are made. System one is a more automatic process which involves less effort, and relies more on intuition and emotion, whilst system two is a more rational process, involving a more systematic approach requiring more effort (Bowen 2022). Crompton and Petrick (2024) labelled these 'expectancy-values' and 'thematic-combination heuristic', and suggested that tourists' search involves both of these approaches along a continuum. Correia et al. (2014) argued that research suggests that most decisions are based on intuition, highlighting the predominance of system one (the thematic-combination heuristic).

The predominance of system one highlights the use of decision rules, or heuristics (Siriyaki and Woodside 2005; Scheibehenne et al. 2010; Li et al. 2017b; Hergesell et al. 2019; Bowen 2022; Pike et al. 2022). Heuristics are shortcuts, or 'rules of thumb', which simplify the decision-making process (Siriyaki and Woodside 2005; Pearce 2011), providing 'good enough' choices (Bowen 2022). Rather than evaluate all attributes, potential visitors will focus on the most important attributes (Li et al. 2017b; Pike et al. 2022). Jeng and Fesenmaier (2002) identify different rules that may be applied to these attributes. They may be considered as rejection-inducing attributes, where a minimal level of satisfaction is needed, otherwise the destination will be rejected. Or they may be relative preference attributes, where a destination will be selected if it performs well in a particular attribute, given that all other important attributes meet a satisfactory level. Li et al. (2019) categorised individuals based upon their approach to decision making. Those that approach a decision with a mind-set to maximise the benefits and weigh up all attributes can be considered as 'maximisers', whereas those that employ heuristics where important attributes only need to meet a minimal level of satisfaction are called 'satisficers'. The use of heuristics is of potential interest to this study, as how attractions as an attribute are considered when comparing alternatives can further highlight how important they are in the decision-making process.

Considering tourists as 'consumers at play' also highlights other emotions of value during the process. As Correia et al. (2014, p.299) note, "to buy a trip or a holiday is both a demanding effort and an enthusiastic pleasure". Decrop and Snelders (2005) stress how daydreaming and anticipation can be considered as part of the process. Indeed, they suggest that information search is more for daydreaming

than to inform actual choices. However, they do note that tourists tend to be more optimistic in the early stages of their decision-making, and become more realistic as the time approaches. This indicates a change in construal level as the decision process advances. Construal level theory suggests that individuals will have a different mental representation of an object depending upon its psychological distance (Scarpi and Raggiotto 2023). Psychological distance reflects the perceived distance of an object or event, and this includes temporal dimensions for future events and spatial elements for distant locations (Trope and Liberman 2010; Massara and Severino 2013). Where this distance is greater, people are more likely to think at a more abstract level, rather than having concrete knowledge of what is there (Kumar et al. 2014). At a higher abstract level, the focus is on the goal of the action, for instance to relax or have fun, whereas the more concrete level focusses on how the actions will be performed to meet these goals (Trope and Liberman 2010). This suggests that where there is greater psychological distance, visitors gather less information before making a decision (Halamish and Liberman 2017).

Li et al. (2019) suggest that the concept may be useful when considering destination choice. They note that few destination choice studies have considered destination attributes, given the wide range that need to be considered. To address this problem, they focus on two 'must-have' categories, namely desirability and feasibility. These categories relate to high and low construal levels respectively, with desirability referring to their goals, and feasibility to how these can be achieved, given costs and other constraints. They propose that preferences shift from desirability to feasibility as they move through the decision-making process, moving from dreaming and anticipating, to more practical considerations such as price and accessibility. As Tan (2018) suggests, visitors will shift from fantasy to reality, and whether attractions play a role in this is worthy of exploration.

Summary

This chapter has reviewed the role attractions play in destination choice. Firstly, under the traditional view, attractions are considered as destination attributes, which enable tourists to meet their particular needs. When selecting a destination, tourists are considered as rational thinkers, who will weigh up the benefits provided by each destination attribute and select the destination which provides the greatest utility (Decrop 1999; Correia et al. 2014; Decrop 2014). Studies adopting this

approach include a wide range of destination attributes, which mirror those used in destination attractiveness studies reviewed in Chapter 3. Given the wide range of destination attributes, few studies have explicitly considered attractions, and have instead used broader groupings which implicitly include attractions, such as climate and culture.

To highlight the importance of attractions in destination choice, the process followed has also been reviewed. The most common models applied are choice set models, which follow a funnel-like process, narrowing down alternative destinations until a final decision is reached. Here, destinations are chosen based upon the tourist's perceptions of what the destination offers, and their preferences, taking into account situational factors. Attractions will influence choice if they are perceived to help meet their needs at the destination. More recent research has highlighted the hierarchical nature of tourists' decision-making. As well as choosing a destination, tourists make many sub-decisions regarding different trip components. When and how these sub-decisions are made highlights the relative importance of these trip elements to the tourist. Fesenmaier and Jeng (2000; 2002) argued that primary decisions are made for important trip components at the beginning of the planning process, whilst decisions on less important elements are left until later.

Finally, how tourists gather information and reach decisions may also highlight the role of attractions in destination choice. Choosing a destination has always been considered to be a high involvement decision, where the tourist will gather information to reduce the levels of risk. However, recent research suggests tourists may adopt different approaches when reaching a decision, supported by the dual-system theory. Given the complex nature of decision making, scholars have called for more focus on the process tourists go through when making these decisions (Smallman and Moore 2010; Li et al. 2017b, 2019; Cohen et al. 2014). The process tourists went through will be considered in this research, to shed light on the role attractions play.

The literature review has informed the conceptual framework guiding this research, and identified gaps this research aims to address. Previous research has identified a range of destination attributes which contribute to destination attractiveness, and several studies point to the importance of attractions. However, given the range of attributes included in these studies, and different approaches taken to categorising

attractions, there is a need for further research to examine the role attractions have in influencing destination attractiveness.

CHAPTER 6: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter outlines the research approach adopted to meet the stated aims and objectives. It explains the different stages, and justifies the methodological choices made when collecting and analysing the data. It is structured to reflect the main stages for qualitative research outlined by Denzil and Lincoln (2008). Firstly, I outline how I approach the world, setting out my ontological and epistemological position. Secondly, I explain the narrative research strategy adopted to gather the information needed to meet my research questions. Thirdly, I explain and justify the research method used, including the design of the interviews, recruitment of participants and the analysis of the data. Finally, I consider ethical issues related to this study, how I tried to ensure trustworthiness, and limitations of the research undertaken.

Research philosophy

It is important to understand the researcher's paradigm, as the choice of method is closely linked to how the researcher views social reality and how it should be examined (Bryman and Bell 2015). Paradigms "represent belief systems that attach users to particular world views" (Denzil and Lincoln 2008, p.8). Making the researcher's world view explicit moves the research from what Braun and Clark (2013) call 'small q' qualitative research, which focusses on the tools and techniques used, to 'big Q' qualitative research, which sets out the framework for conducting the research. There are many interpretations of the concept of paradigms (Guba et al. 2018), indeed Munar and Jamal (2016, p.16) note that it has been employed in the field of tourism in five different perspectives, including "as a specific philosophical/methodological tradition or school of thought that acts as a model/exemplar for what and how to research". This is the focus here.

Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.105) define the researcher's paradigm as "the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways". The research paradigm provides a 'net' which captures their ontological, epistemological and methodological stances (Denzil and Lincoln 2008), and it is

important for the researcher to be clear and reflect on assumptions and values which inform their research (Braun and Clarke 2013).

Denzil and Lincoln (2008) stress that there is no one paradigm that is specifically only for qualitative research. Guba and Lincoln (1994) originally reviewed four paradigms for informing research inquiry, namely positivism, postpositivism, critical theory and constructivism. More recently, this has been extended to include the participatory/cooperative paradigm (Guba et al. 2018). They summarised the basic beliefs underpinning these paradigms based upon the answers to three interconnected questions, which taken in order inform the next:

1. The ontological question: What is the nature of reality?
2. The epistemological question: What is the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known?
3. The methodological question: How should the researcher go about finding out what is to be known?

These are addressed below.

The ontological question

All research begins with ontology (Grix 2002). In simple terms, it is the “study of what knowledge actually is” (Jones 2022, p. 20), or what we believe reality to be (Grix 2002). Jones (2020) states that researchers may adopt one of two basic positions, termed realism or relativism (Jones 2022), or alternatively ‘objectivism’ and ‘constructivism’ (Grix 2002). The realist position is where the researcher believes there is one real world that exists, and this external reality can be understood by the researcher, being “objectively knowable” (Ponterotto 2005, p.128). Post-positivists adopt a ‘critical realism’ position, where they share the belief that one external real world exists, but it is impossible for researchers to truly perceive it due to sensory and intellectual frailties (Guba 1990).

The relativist position argues that there is not one external reality but rather individuals develop their own subjective meanings of their experiences, which can lead to multiple worlds which the researcher must look for (Braun and Clarke 2013). Individuals seek to understand the world in which they live, and they develop subjective meanings of their life experiences (Cresswell 2007). Constructivism adopts a relativist ontological position, where realities are constructed “in the mind

of the individual, rather than it being an externally singular entity” (Ponterotto 2005, p.129).

As Levers (2013, p.2) states, “reality existing independent of human consciousness and experience, or reality existing within our consciousness and only through experience, is the eternal ontological debate”. My perspective on this has developed over many years working in industry and in education, and I have come to realise that even in the same situation, people’s experiences are different. An expression I learnt when becoming a neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) practitioner is that we all develop our own map of the world, and it is important to understand each individuals’ world map. Engaging in seminars and reading has further strengthened my own philosophical position regarding the nature of reality, and this has guided the development of my research question, and my approach outlined below.

The epistemological question

Epistemology relates to how knowledge about this reality is gained and what counts as knowledge (Jones 2022), to understand and explain “how we know what we know” (Crotty 1998, p.8). Ontological beliefs confine epistemological beliefs (Crotty 1998; Levers 2013), and similarly researchers may adopt one of two contrasting epistemological positions: objectivism (or positivism) or subjectivism (or interpretivism) (Grix 2002; Jones 2022).

The objectivism position states that objects exist in reality and carry their own intrinsic meaning, and it is for the researcher to discover this meaning, applying rigorous methods to ensure the ‘objective truth’ can be discovered (Crotty 1998). Objects and phenomena exist independently and are not changed by the observer, and “knowledge is universally applicable because the essence of the object does not change regardless of who is studying the object” (Levers 2013, p.3). This leads to an approach of ‘empiricist experimentation’ (Guba and Lincoln 1994) to discover universal laws of truth (Grix 2002; Levers 2013). This position underpins the positivism paradigm which believes in total objectivity where there is no interaction between the researcher and what is being studied. Post-positivists recognise that objectivity is an ideal which can only be approximated, and findings result from the interaction between the researcher and the object under study (Guba and Lincoln 1994).

Constructionism discards this belief in the objective truth, rather truth (or meaning) is created from the interaction between individuals and objects in their world: “there is no meaning without a mind” (Crotty 1998, p.9). Individuals form their own reality through social interaction and the historical and cultural norms in which they live (Cresswell 2007). This suggests that multiple realities exist, and it is not for the researcher to find the objective truth, but rather understand these different realities and recognise all knowledge is value laden (Crotty 1998). The researcher must construct their own interpretation of the individuals’ social world, adopting a relativist position where truth is not absolute but relative to the individual or groups who hold them (Jones 2022). Indeed, individual constructions are “not more or less ‘true’, in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated” (Guba and Lincoln 1994, p.111).

It is also important to stress that the researcher brings their own values and meaning to the research, and as such the version of reality reported is co-created between the participant and the researcher (Denzil and Lincoln 2008). As Guba and Lincoln note (1994, p.111), the researcher and participant are “interactively linked so that the ‘findings’ are literally created as the investigation proceeds”, and they argue that the distinction between ontology and epistemology is removed, as the interaction creates knowledge and reality.

Given my ontological stance, my research adopts a subjective epistemological position. This is particularly pertinent given the focus of this study, as by definition destination attractiveness is a mental construct which rests within the mind of the visitor (Mikulic and Prebezac 2011).

The methodological question

The methodological question focusses on how the researcher conceptualizes the process of research (Creswell 2007), and this will be informed by the ontological and epistemological positions taken above (Grix 2002). Within the realist ontological and objectivist epistemological position, researchers would theorise that behaviours can be observed and measured objectively (Jones 2022), and follow the scientific research method (Denzil and Lincoln 2008). These measures are typically numerical, and research which sets out to measure and analyse these ‘quantities’ is known as quantitative research (Jones 2022). For constructionists, the purpose is to understand participants’ social constructs (Guba and Lincoln

1994) and to capture meanings such as feelings, thoughts and experiences (Jones 2022). Research which sets out to explore a social or human issue and capture these 'qualities' is known as qualitative research (Creswell 2007).

As noted above, I fall within the latter, and this position provides part of the 'net' (Denzil and Lincoln 2008) to inform which research methods to select. However, there are many ways my inquiry could proceed, and it is important to select the methods and analysis which will help to address the research questions set (Denzil and Lincoln 2008). This is stressed by Grix (2002, p.180) who argues that:

"we should guard against 'method-led' research, that is, allowing ourselves to be led by a particular research method rather than 'question-led' research, whereby research questions point to the most appropriate research method".

Whilst there are different approaches that can be employed, there are some common characteristics of research within this ontological and epistemological position. These are outlined briefly here as guiding principles informing my approach, before more detail on the chosen approach is provided in the following section.

As relativists believe in the social construction of reality, the research approach needs to capture these meanings for different participants, with the understanding that there are multiple realities and a "complexity of views" (Creswell 2007, p.20). As these realities are linked to the situations in which they occur, it is important to gain 'local knowledge' (Denzin and Lincoln 2008; Flick 2009). To understand these contexts, the researcher needs to enter the participants' world, and conduct the research in a natural setting where possible (Denzin and Lincoln 2008). This allows them to reduce the distance between themselves and the participant (Guba and Lincoln 1994), aiding their understanding.

Once in this setting, the researcher needs to develop a "qualitative sensibility" (Braun and Clark 2013, p.9), build rapport with the participant and adopt an open approach to capture rich descriptions to understand the participant's perspective (Denzin and Lincoln 2008). As part of this process, the researcher adopts an inductive approach, where meanings emerge from this interaction with participants (Crotty 1998). The researcher also needs to reflect on their own values and be explicit, as this meaning is co-created (Braun and Clarke 2013).

Adopting a narrative approach

As noted by Creswell (2007, p.6) the researcher has a “baffling number of choices of approaches”, and Denzin and Lincoln (2011) offer the researcher eight major strategies to select from, which prescribe a flexible set of guidelines for the researcher to follow. Creswell (2007) narrows this down further to the five most common approaches, which are also found in other classifications (see Butina 2015): narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study. Smith and Weed (2007) stress that there is not one particular approach that is privileged above the others, rather the choice should fit within the researcher’s ontological and epistemological position, and be able to gather the information the researcher needs to answer the research questions set (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Having reviewed the five main approaches, and attended a distance learning programme on these, it became clear that whilst all fell within my ontological and epistemological position outlined above, the narrative approach stood out as being most suitable for my research focus.

Narrative research, or narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly 2000), or narrative analysis (Riessman 2008), can simply be stated as “the study of stories” (Polkinghorne 2007, p.471). Whilst the nature of narrative research is contested and many approaches are adopted (Smith and Weed 2007; Smith and Sparks 2009), it can be considered an umbrella term for a family of approaches which take a story as the object of enquiry (Riessman 2004; Smith and Weed 2007; Smith and Sparkes 2009). The use of narrative research has become more widespread in recent years, as awareness of the role of stories has increased (Murray 2003; Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000). Whilst the use of narrative research remains limited in tourism (Mura and Sharif 2017), studies have applied the approach to provide rich data on the tourist experience, including those of backpackers (Elsrud 2001; Noy 2004; Obenour et al. 2006); families (Gram 2005; Kozak and Duman 2012); senior tourists (Huber et al. 2019; Chen et al. 2024); urban tourists (Martin and Woodside 2011); food tourists (Guo and Qiu 2024); festival tourists (Wood et al. 2024); package coach tourists (Tucker 2005); and glampers (Xiang et al. 2023). Several studies have also applied the approach to visitor attractions, including national parks (McCabe and Foster 2006), slave plantations (Buzinde and Santos 2009), dark tourism sites (Mowatt and Chancellor 2011), and heritage attractions (Chronis 2005; Rickly-Boyd 2011).

Story telling is ubiquitous in human life (Polkinghorne 2007), indeed “storytelling is an elementary form of human communication” (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000, p. 57). A key tenet of this approach is that these stories have meaning, as “telling stories is one of the significant ways individuals construct and express meaning” (Mishler 1986, p.67). Individuals understand themselves and their world through the use of language (Smith and Sparkes 2006), and through language they organise their experiences into narratives (Moen 2006). As Smith and Weed (2007, p. 254) note,

“narratives form the warp and weft of who people are, and what they might, or might not, do. Thus, stories are not optional; people live them whether they want to or not”.

Essentially, the role of the narrative researcher is to solicit these stories from participants (Polkinghorne 2007), to understand “how human beings experience the world” (Moen 2006, p.56).

Riessman (2005) suggests that narrative research is useful if the focus of the research is on people and their experiences. Smith and Sparkes (2009, p.434) suggest that “narrative analysis may be a particularly good choice for researchers interested in complex, subjective experiences” (p. 434). As Carless and Douglas (2017, p.307) proclaim, “rather than ‘hovering over the surface’ of life, keeping lived experience at arm’s length, narrative accounts embrace the particularity and complexity of individual’s lived experience”. Given the research question, this approach was deemed to be most appropriate, as destination attractiveness is at heart a personal construction. Understanding the importance of destination attributes has advanced to general agreement of resources which may contribute to destination attractiveness (see Ritchie and Crouch 2003; Kim and Purdue 2011), however most studies have applied a quantitative approach. These studies highlight the importance of different resources to destination attractiveness, but this research has not uncovered how and why these factors contribute to destination attractiveness. A qualitative approach allows the researcher to explore these factors in more depth (Eirich and Corbett 2009), “to gain insights on the aspects that contribute to destination attractiveness” (Jorgensen 2020, p.471). Alahakoon et al. (2021, p.849) argue that it also allows the researcher to “capture the phenomena of destination attractiveness in a holistic manner”, by not only understanding the attributes which pull the tourist to the destination, but also the perceived benefits they offer. A qualitative approach also allows the researcher to

understand the meanings that participants attach to their experiences at the destination (Moularde and Weaver 2006).

More broadly, Smith and Weed (2007) call for tourism research to move beyond just describing tourist behaviour, rather to try to understand it, and the narrative approach allows for this understanding. Given that narrating their experiences comes naturally to people (Moen 2006), this approach should also generate rich data to meet the research aim, especially for tourists, where “the narration of the experience has long been recognized as an important part of the experience itself” (Smith and Weed 2007, p.257). Indeed, McCabe and Foster (2006, p.195) argue that “the natural attitude of the tourist is a ‘narrativistic’ attitude, that an account of touristic experience requires the development of a story, to define, describe and give reasons for touristic events”.

Narrative research can take many forms (Smith and Sparkes 2009), ranging from life biographies to shorter stories focusing on a specific topic (Riessman 2004). It is the latter which allows me to capture narratives on trips taken and planned by participants. These trips also share the characteristics of narratives; of being significant to the narrator and having a clear sequence of events with a beginning (planning the trip), middle (the trip itself) and end (returning and remembering the trip) (Riessman 2008).

Sampling and participant profile

Sampling design

The qualitative researcher has an array of sampling strategies to select from (Rapley 2014), indeed Patton (2002) lists 16 different approaches, many of which can be combined. The aim of these approaches is to gather rich detail and understanding, and for this the researcher asks: ‘what cases can we learn the most from?’ (Patton 2002). The researcher aims to select ‘information rich’ individuals or cases (Patton 2002; Rapley 2014; Schreier 2018), in order to gather detailed information to address the research questions set (Schreier 2018). Hence the term ‘purposeful’, ‘purposive’ or ‘judgemental’ sampling (Patton 2002; Flick 2009; Schreier 2018).

This stresses that the power of qualitative sampling comes from who is selected, rather than the total number (Patton 2002). Information rich individuals or cases

allow the researcher to provide a rich, or “thick description” (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p.125), which is important for the transferability of the findings (Nowell et al. 2017). As Crouch and McKenzie (2006) contend, it is important for qualitative research to formulate propositions which others can follow up on, without this research would be of little value. Qualitative research is not concerned with generalising to the whole population, rather whether the findings in one context may be applied by the reader to other instances in different contexts (Moen 2006; Schreier 2018). For this, it is important to provide this ‘thick’ description, as the researcher may not know the contexts in which others may wish to apply the findings (Nowell et al. 2017).

To aid the transferability of my findings to different situations, I decided upon maximum variation sampling, which is a form of stratified purposive sampling (Schreier 2018) and the most common approach in qualitative research (Creswell 2007). Maximum variation sampling aims to gather a mix of different participants, in order to “identify central themes which cut across the variety of cases or people” (Ritchie and Lewis 2003, p.84). It seeks to capture different world views: as Cresswell (2007, p.122) notes, “a hallmark of all good qualitative research is the report of multiple perspectives that range over the entire spectrum of perspectives”. Butina (2015) recommends purposeful sampling and maximum variation in narrative research in order to gather common patterns or themes, and this approach appealed as it promised to capture the core experiences and shared dimensions across participants (Patton 2002).

I aimed to gather information from a range of different people, as well as different situations and sites (Patton 2002). Previous destination attractiveness studies using visitor surveys have reported sample profiles which include a range of factors: age (Kim and Purdue 2011); gender (Vigolo 2015); education level (Das et al. 2007); marital status (Vigolo 2015); nationality/place of origin (Medina-Munoz and Medina-Munoz 2014); travel companion (Das et al. 2007); attitude to risk (Vengesayi et al. 2009); income (Kim and Purdue 2011); first time vs repeat visitors (Reitsamer et al. 2016), travel experience (Lee et al. 2009); and length of stay (Das et al. 2007). As well as different participants, it is also important to gather experiences at a variety of different destinations, the other side of the coin in destination attractiveness. As Crouch and McKenzie (2006) stress, individuals are not necessarily being sampled, rather variations of a particular setting and their experiences within it. There are a number of ways to classify destinations, in terms

of scale, ranging from groups of countries (e.g. Europe) to resorts (Disney); by type of location, namely urban, rural and seaside; and by travel patterns (single destination, multi-centred and touring) (Holloway 2009; Vanhoeve 2011; Fletcher et al. 2018).

Given the numerous factors which may influence destination attractiveness, in terms of the individuals and type of destination, it was not feasible to sample all potential factor combinations as suggested in a matrix approach (Patton 2002). Rather, these factors provided a broad framework to guide the sampling process, in order to select individuals to capture as much variation across these factors as possible (Schreier 2018). Patton (2002, p.235) comments on how this approach allows “a theme song” to emerge from “all the scattered noise”. The main criteria for selection included participants who had recently been, or were planning a holiday to a destination in the near future. This ensures that they would have the knowledge and experience to discuss the issue at hand and they would be information-rich (Braun and Clarke 2013). A matrix table was used to record the specific combination of characteristics of each participant, and this was used to guide participant recruitment, to ensure sufficient variation across key characteristics (Schreier 2018).

Sample size

In qualitative sampling, there are no rules for sample size, rather there is a balance to be made between depth and breadth (Patton 2002), and the general guidance is to study a few individuals in order to collect extensive data (Cresswell 2007). However, Schreier (2018) notes that some authors do provide recommended sample sizes, ranging from 10 to 60, and this reflects the use of interviews in different qualitative approaches. Within narrative research, Cresswell (2007) suggests the number of participants can be as few as one or two, whilst Riessman (2005, p.6) stresses that “narrative approaches are not appropriate for studies of large numbers of nameless and faceless subjects”. Meaningfulness comes more from the depth of data rather than the number of participants (Patton 2002), and this depth is not something that can easily be achieved with a large number of cases (Crouch and McKenzie 2006). Indeed, “it is much more important for the research to be intensive, and thus persuasive at the conceptual level, rather than aim to be extensive with intent to be convincing, at least in part, through enumeration” (Crouch and McKenzie 2006, p.494).

Many researchers consider that sampling should continue until 'saturation' is achieved, where new participants do not contribute new information related to the research questions (Flick 2009; Schreier 2018). Lincoln and Guba (1985) label this the 'redundancy criteria'. From my interview memos and initial analysis, I began to have a clear sense of my data after around 10 interviews. I continued interviewing, reaching 15 participants before reaching what Rapley (2014) called a 'eureka' moment, where key themes across participants emerged. Rather than carry on conducting more interviews, given the depth of data gathered I decided to focus on these cases instead (Patton 2002).

It is important to stress that I am not claiming that saturation was reached. Braun and Clarke (2021) highlight that meaning does not exist within the data, rather it results from interpretation by the researcher, and as such there is always the potential for new insights from more interviews. Rather than claiming saturation, pragmatic considerations influenced sample size. With this in mind, rather than adding more participants, I looked for more depth to develop my interpretation, and returned to interview several of the initial participants again, to explore themes in more depth. That said, as Rapley (2014) suggests, it is good to do a couple more interviews to see if my ideas would be challenged. After my initial analysis, I conducted two more interviews, where similar patterns emerged, so rather than continuing and using further resources and imposing on people's time, I stopped sampling at 17.

Gaining access

To gain access, snowballing or friendship pyramiding (Braun and Clarke 2013) was used. Initial contacts were approached through existing networks and they were asked if they knew anyone else who may be suitable and interested in taking part. This approach can limit variation within the sample, so to try to address this I followed Nowell et al.'s (2017) advice and asked participants if they knew individuals who met specific criteria (e.g. travelled alone, family holiday), or who were different from them in terms of trips taken (Nowell et al. 2017). There was also an element of gradual selection during the research (Flick 2009), depending upon the characteristics of participants already interviewed and trips they had taken. For instance, there were few families with young children amongst my initial contacts, so I endeavoured to recruit these participants.

Narrative interviews need to be designed to give participants the opportunities and space to share their stories (Smith and Sparkes 2009; Butina 2015). The setting is important to ensure participants feel comfortable and safe (Moen 2006; Carless and Douglas 2017). To aid this, participants were asked to choose the time and location for the interview. For some, this meant visiting their homes, whilst for others it was a 'third place' near their place of work, such as a café or sports club.

It is also important to establish trust with participants for them to feel comfortable to share their stories (Riessman 2005; Cresswell 2007). As Carless and Douglas (2017) note, this can only really be established over time. A benefit of using participants within shared friendship groups is that many were already known to me, and an open and accepting relationship had already been established. For participants I was introduced to through friends and acquaintances, I tried to develop rapport before the interviews by engaging in shared activities and conversations when I met them at social events. This helped reduce the 'distance' between me and the participants (Mishler 1986). Before the interviews started, I gained ethical clearance, and explained why they had been selected, and introduced the nature of the research (Cresswell 2007).

Participant profile

An overview of participants recruited is shown in Table 6.1. There is a mix of male and female participants within the sample, with ages ranging from 22 to 60. Given the location of the study, most participants were British, who travelled both domestically and internationally, mostly to short-haul destinations but with a few long-haul trips recounted. Participants were asked to report their own perceptions of their travel experience, and it is noticeable that many considered themselves to be highly or moderately experienced. This may reflect the nature of the sampling method, with those who are more experienced being more willing to be interviewed.

Table 6.1 Overview of participants

Name (pseudonym)	Gender	Age	Nationality	Self-reported level of travel experience	Types of travel party reported
Jane	Female	39	British	Moderate	Family with young children
Tom	Male	34	Polish	Moderate	Partner Partner and friends
James	Male	52	British	Moderate	Partner
Graham	Male	48	British	High	Family Friends Solo
Barbara	Female	24	Caymanian	Low	Family and friends
Marie	Female	56	British	Moderate	Family and friends Solo
Bill	Male	28	British	Moderate	Partner Friends
Mark	Male	55	British	High	Family with teenage children
Emily	Male	52	British	High	Partner
Max	Male	34	British	High	Family with young children Partner
Olivia	Female	22	British	Low	Family Partner
Mandy	Female	26	British	High	Partner Friends
Tracy	Female	46	British	Moderate	Partner Family with teenage children
Lily	Female	60	British	High	Partner
Michael	Male	46	British	Moderate	Friends and family Partner
Catherine	Female	24	Norwegian	Low	Family and friends
Pete	Male	45	British	Moderate	Solo Friends

Designing and conducting the interviews

Interviews are a common way to collect narrative data (Mishler 1986; Riessman 2005), as they allow for a detailed and extensive account of a lived experience (Murray 2003). For this, there is a shift from the question and answer approach common in semi-structured interviews, to a more open approach (Mishler 1986; Riessman 2005; Smith and Weed 2007). Indeed, Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) claim that the narrative interview goes further than any approach in avoiding a pre-structured interview, by not pre-selecting themes and the order of topics.

Interview design

There are many different types of interviews to choose from (Scheibelhofer 2008), however a key aspect of narrative interviews is designing the interview to allow the participants to share their stories. There seems to be different approaches suggested for this. Riessman (2004, p.709) proposes that the interview, whilst unstructured, should be “viewed as a conversation- a discourse between speakers”, where “rules of everyday conversation apply: turn taking; relevancy; and entrance and exit talk to transition into, and return from, a story world”. This conversational approach is needed as “events may be fleetingly summarized and given little significance” (Riessman 2004, p.709), and the interviewer needs to engage in conversation to elicit further depth. Open questions are asked to gather more detail, and whilst conversational, narrative interviews need to allow participants to take longer turns than they would in natural conversations (Riessman 2004). It is these dialogues that create meaning (Moen 2006), and both the interview and interviewer are ‘active’ participants who together produce meaning (Mishler 1986).

I did have concerns with this approach, as I did not want my pre-existing knowledge and experience to cloud participants’ stories, potentially “unknowingly “postpositivizing” constructivist qualitative methods” (Ponterotto 2005, p.126). I sought an alternative to this conversational approach to narrative interviewing, following the advice from Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000, p.60) who argued that “to elicit a less imposed and therefore more ‘valid’ rendering of the informant’s perspective, the influence of the interviewer should be minimal”. Yet I wanted to retain the opportunity to ask questions related to the research focus, as having worked and taught in tourism for over 30 years, I am aware that I have developed knowledge which may be useful in understanding the topic area. Johnson (2001)

acknowledges the usefulness of prior knowledge in interviewing. If the researcher lacks prior knowledge, they take on the role of student and the participant the teacher. This runs the risk of poor-quality interviews, as the researcher needs to have insight to be able to understand meaning.

Riessman (2005) notes that it is not uncommon for researchers to combine narrative questions with semi-structured questions if the research questions support such an approach, although methodological reflections on this practice are lacking. Some authors have addressed this, setting out approaches which combine both elements. Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) propose a narrative interviewing protocol which separates the interview into four main phases: the initial introductions, the narration phase, the questioning phase, and the concluding talk phase. The narrating phase allows the participant to recount their stories uninterrupted, with the interviewer only offering non-verbal encouragement for them to continue with their story telling (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000). In the questioning phase, the interviewer uses questions related to these narratives to gather more depth, asking for more detail of particular events and meanings of relevance to the study (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000). It is important for these questions to be framed in language participants understand, moving from 'exmanent' questions, which reflect the interest of the researcher and use their language, to 'immanent' questions which are linked to the participants narration, referring to events mentioned, and their language used (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000; Scheiblehofer 2008). Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) stress that questions should focus on what rather than why, and avoid exploring any evident contradictions. Here, the purpose of the questioning phase is to gather additional material, rather than to try to co-construct meaning. This is left to the concluding talk phase, where recording is stopped, and the interviewer engages in small-talk which allows participants to reflect on their stories, and interviewers can then ask 'why' questions, seen as the 'entry point' for later analysis.

Flick (2000) developed the episodic interviewing approach where participants are asked to recount specific events, before moving on to more general questions related to the topic under investigation. The interviews have two main parts: in the first part the participant is asked to recount a particular situation, using a sentence to introduce the topic. The participant is free to select an episode of importance to them, having 'subjective relevance'. This is then repeated for other occasions, resulting in collecting a series of relevant events. The second part of the interview

focusses on key themes linked to the research questions set, and moves to more abstract discussions rather than just recounting actual events. The participants' narratives form the basis for these discussions, and "interviewers and respondents, through repeated reformulations of questions and responses, strive to arrive together at meanings that both can understand" (Mishler 1986, p.65). Unlike Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000), Flick (2000) suggests that the researcher can take a more argumentative stance in this stage, to address any contradictions that may have emerged to arrive at this shared meaning.

The problem-centred interview (PCI) follows a similar approach, combining both narrative based and semi-structured components. The PCI begins with a narrative section, using an opening question as "a tool of general exploration" (Witzel and Reiter 2012, p.68), producing material which informs later questioning. This initial narrative "is largely 'uncontaminated' by the interviewer" (Witzel and Reiter 2012, p.75), and priority is given to the practical knowledge of the participant. Following the narrative element the interview then moves to the semi-structured section. For this, an interview guide is developed, based upon a conceptual (or 'sensitising') framework developed from the literature review. The interview guide is used to make sure the interview centres on the research question, to act as an aide memoire, and also to allow for comparability between interviews. It is important to note that the guide does not have set questions, but rather themes which may include key words or categories, which may include some questions. It can be used to stimulate further discussion when themes are mentioned, or be used to formulate additional 'ad hoc' questions if the topic has not previously been mentioned by the respondent.

The questioning phase allows the interviewer to take a more active role, not only by using active listening throughout, but also 'active understanding' through probes and further dialogue, to develop meaning and knowledge, in a sense co-creating knowledge (Witzel and Reiter 2012). What is particularly attractive about PCI is the way it treats the prior knowledge of the interviewer to arrive at this knowledge. Whilst PCI is based upon a constructionist stance (Witzel and Reiter 2012), it does not attempt to put aside existing knowledge and for the interviewer to be a 'tabular rasa', rather prior knowledge defines and structures the research approach. Witzel and Reiter (2012) build on the metaphor of Kvale (1996), who compared the interviewer to a miner or traveller. For the miner, knowledge is seen as buried material which the miner sets out to excavate, whereas the traveller embarks on a

journey and returns with a story to share. Witzel and Reiter (2012) use the idea of a 'well-informed traveller', one who researches the trip beforehand and has certain ideas and expectations of what to find, but what they actually end up doing is influenced by the people they meet who share their local knowledge and from this they decide what to see and do.

It is this idea that suited my viewpoint. As previously mentioned, I am aware that I have developed knowledge which may be useful in understanding the topic area. This is not only acknowledged as in some approaches, for instance when bracketing in phenomenology (Flick 2009), but is stressed as having usefulness in PCI, providing the researcher with a guide for the terrain. However, this does raise a potential pitfall, and it has to be used in a way "which ensures that the principles of qualitative research are not undermined" (Witzel and Reiter 2012, p.18). Interviews need to progress in a reflexive manner (Gubrium 2013), and the PCI approach aims to "reduce the distance between the researcher's knowledge and the respondents knowledge, and invites respondents to co-construct and reconstruct problems together with interviewers in an interactive and interpretive process" (Witzel and Reiter 2012, p.18).

These staged approaches outlined above seemed to offer the best of both worlds: an opportunity to capture an unpolluted account of their experiences, and an opportunity to co-create meaning with participants. The use of questions after the narrative section allows participants to elaborate on particular topics of interest (Scheiblehofer 2008), particularly useful where participants are not used to the 'long turns' taken in narrative interviews (Riessman 2004), and to address themes which may not have been covered in the narrative session (Witzel 2000). I was particularly concerned before conducting the interviews that attractions may not be of 'subjective relevance' to participants and may not be mentioned in their narratives (Flick 2000).

Several authors recommend conducting follow up interviews, to gather more material where relevant, and to discuss the researcher's initial interpretations (Smith and Weed 2007; Butina 2015). Follow up interviews were conducted with several participants for this purpose. These were brief and often informal, but proved useful to explore particular experiences in more depth and provide further insight for my initial analysis.

Conducting the interviews

Based upon the discussions above, I broadly followed the four phases suggested by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000), incorporating elements of episodic interviews (Flick 2000) and Problem Centred Interviews (Witzel and Reiter 2012) where appropriate. I started the interviews with general introductions (Riessman 2004) and explained the study aim in general, discussing what makes a destination attractive to them (without mentioning any focus on attractions). Consent forms were signed and permission sought to record the interviews (which all agreed to). The procedure of the interview was outlined, and I reassured them that they just had to share their stories in their own words. They were keen to share their holiday stories, an advantage of this approach as participants can share their stories of experiences significant to them (Flick 2000).

I started the conversation with a general discussion of their holiday habits. I then invited them to share their story using a broad question to encourage them to recount a particular holiday of relevance to them (Flick 2000; Witzel and Reiter 2012):

“Thinking about your last holiday (or any one that stands out to you, including one you are planning), tell me what makes a destination attractive to you. Please tell me about the whole holiday experience, from thinking about a holiday, what you looked for at the destination (including things to see and do), why and how you selected your destination, what you did at the destination and your memories”.

Following the advice of Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000), I tried to avoid interrupting their stories until a clear pause was evident signalling the end of their story or coda, when the participant returns to the present (Riessman 2004). I followed Mishler's (1986) advice for active listening, providing non-verbal signals such as nodding and smiling, as well as verbal prompts to show support and encourage them to continue, such as 'so what did you do next?', 'that's interesting', remembering that they would not be used to taking such a long turn in normal conversations (Riessman 2004). I made brief notes of points of interest for questions later, but limited this to avoid distractions whilst they were talking (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000). Once they stopped, I would ask if there was anything else they remembered, or wanted to tell me about the trip. I then asked them about other trips they would like to recount (Flick 2000). All participants took this opportunity to recount other trips, with most telling three or four stories before tiring.

Following the narrative phase, the interviews moved to the questioning phase. This phase almost acted as a safety net for me. For this, I developed an interview guide based upon the conceptual framework developed from the literature review. The interview guide did not have set questions, but rather themes which included key words and categories (see appendix A).

Following guidance from Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) and Flick (2000), I linked my questions related to these themes to the stories they shared, to explore these aspects in more depth. For instance, rather than attractions, many participants mentioned things to see and do, so this expression was used. Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) suggest 'why' questions should be avoided at this stage, and also avoid argumentative questions. However, I found it useful in my interviews to explore why questions at this stage, and also use argumentative questions where apparent contradictions existed, as suggested by Flick (2000) and Witzel and Reiter (2012). Having established a more trusting relationship with participants through prior engagement, I sensed that they did not feel as if they were being interrogated.

In order to ensure I gathered rich data, I also included elicitation techniques in the questioning phase, to encourage participants to share what they know, feel, think and believe (McGivern 2009). Rook (2006, p.145) recommends that a "battery of different techniques" is used to get depth and a wide variety of data. The techniques used included direct elicitation, 'ideal type', card sorting and photo elicitation, although this did vary by participant, as many were tired after the narrative stage. Direct elicitation was used as a 'baseline' to gather destination attributes (Breivik and Supphellen 2003). Here, participants were asked to list the attributes they would use to evaluate destinations (for different holidays of their choice). This is based on the theory of spreading activation, which suggests that there is a semantic network in the brain where information is stored, so when one attribute is mentioned, this leads to further linked attributes (Johnson and Wheeler 2002). This helped identify what attributes make a destination attractive, which can then be probed further with questions. Another approach used was the 'ideal type'. Participants were asked to describe an ideal (or dream) destination within the type of destination they visit (e.g. city break, beach holiday etc).

These approaches aimed to generate destination attributes which are important to destination attractiveness. The means-end chain approach then takes free

elicitation a step further, using a laddering procedure (Gutman 1982) where probing questions are used to elicit consequences and values associated with these products or activities (Jervis and Drake 2014). Respondents were asked why these attributes are important to them to establish consequences (e.g. get a sun tan), and then asked why this is important to them to establish values (e.g. self-esteem). This study used a 'soft' laddering technique, where these probing questions are asked in a more conversational manner, as this is considered more useful in complex situations (Jervis and Drake 2014). In order to help classify resources, sorting tasks were also used. Participants were asked to sort a set of stimuli into piles (Blanchard and Banerji 2016). As the focus is on attractions, Ritchie and Crouch's (2003) categorisation of core attractors was used. Free sorting was used, where participants were asked to group cards into categories of their own choosing, which they then labelled.

The above techniques rely on verbal communication, however there are limitations with just asking for verbal responses (Pavesi et al. 2017). Zaltman and Coulter (1995) stressed that thought is image based, and most communication is non-verbal. The use of visual methods allows the researcher to tap into and gather a different type of data, as the part of the brain that processes visual information is different from that which processes verbal information (Glaw et al. 2017). In this study, photo elicitation was also used, where photos were used to elicit further discussion (Breivik and Supphellen 2003). They were asked to either bring their own photos of favourite destinations, or browse from a selection during the interview. For this, Pinterest was used, with a board created for each participant who chose this option, however most participants preferred to share photos on their smart phones.

The final phase is concluding talk (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000), where more general discussions took place in the form of 'small-talk'. These proved interesting, providing further context on the participants as well as their personal reflections. Due to rapport developed before and during the interview, I decided to keep recording these phases. I also collected social and personal characteristics as part of the interview guide to aid my later analysis.

Data analysis

Analysis is the way the researcher makes sense of the data, and there are different ways in which researchers analyse narrative data (Smith and Sparkes 2009; Butina 2015). Riessman (2004) suggests four main approaches suitable for analysing oral narratives of participants' experiences: thematic analysis, structural analysis, interactional analysis and performative analysis. Smith and Sparkes (2009) grouped these different approaches into two ways of analysing narratives: as the story analyst or the story teller. The story analyst approaches the narrative text as data to be analysed, and uses techniques to scrutinise relevant features in order to develop theoretical abstractions (Smith and Sparkes 2009). The most common approach used for this is thematic analysis (Riessman 2005). The story teller treats the stories as analytical in their own right (Smith and Sparkes 2009), analysing the way the story is told (structural analysis); the dialogic process between the participants and researcher which co-creates meaning (interactional analysis); or how the story is performed to engage the audience (performative analysis) (Riessman 2005). These approaches focus on either what is said, or how it is said.

Smith and Weed (2007, p.264) contend that there is no best way to analyse narratives, rather "there is clearly a need for analytic diversity in the consideration of narratives". The method selected will depend upon the aim of the research project, and the types of texts gathered (Riessman 2005). A key distinction between the story analysis and the story teller is the added layer of analysis added to the story by the story analysts (Smith and Sparkes 2009). As Reisman (2003, p.2) notes, "narratives do not speak for themselves or have unanalysed merit; they require interpretation when used as data in social research". Whilst analysis can set out to simply describe an experience (Flick 2009), as noted earlier, Smith and Weed (2007) call for tourism research to not just describe behaviour, but also understand what produces this behaviour. This resonated with me, and given Butina's (2015) advice to select the approach most suited to the research questions set, following the story analyst approach was seen as the most useful approach to analyse the interviews. Further, Butina (2015) also suggests undertaking thematic analysis of narrative interviews, where segments from narratives are compared to find patterns or themes in the data, and the researcher interprets these to add meaning. For episodic interviewing, Flick (2000) suggests using thematic coding, whilst Witzel and Reiter (2012, p.101) do not favour a specific approach for problem centred interviews, suggesting that "in principle, PCIs can be analysed using the

whole spectrum of available techniques for text analysis". Mura and Sharif (2017) conducted a review of narrative analysis in tourism research, and found that thematic analysis was the most common approach used to analyse data.

Thematic analysis is simply a method used to identify themes within qualitative data (Terry et al. 2017), and is beneficial when the researcher aims to theorise across a number of participants (Riessman 2005). There are different approaches to thematic analysis, although two broad approaches have been recognised (Terry et al. 2017; Braun and Clarke 2021). The first approach, labelled 'coding reliability', adopts a more deductive method where themes are identified earlier in the process, often guided by existing theories and questions used in interviews (Terry et al. 2017). The researcher then looks for evidence to support these themes within the data, and develops codes which almost act as 'topic summaries' (Braun and Clarke 2019). The second approach follows a more inductive method, where codes are developed following detailed engagement with the data (Terry et al. 2017). The researcher immerses themselves in this data, and themes are the outcome of this process rather than from pre-existing theories (Braun and Clarke 2019). This allows the researcher to move beyond descriptive (or semantic) coding, to more interpretive (or latent) coding, which aim to capture implicit meaning and uncover underlying patterns in the data (Terry et al. 2017).

Braun and Clarke developed a widely used approach which follows this more inductive process (Terry et al. 2017). In later iterations, this has been labelled reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2019; Braun and Clarke 2020; Braun and Clarke 2022). This approach involves not only the initial analysis of the data, but also the interpretation of the data, and the focus shifts from the content of interviews to themes which are "what you're aiming to get to" (Braun and Clarke 2020, p.40). Rather than topic summaries, these themes reflect patterns of shared meaning between participants (Braun and Clarke 2019). The title highlights the importance of the researcher in this analysis, indeed Braun and Clarke (2021, p.39) stress that "themes cannot exist separately from the researcher—they are generated by the researcher through data engagement mediated by all that they bring to this process". It requires the researcher to reflect on their own assumptions throughout the analysis (Braun and Clarke 2022).

Braun and Clark (2019; 2020; 2022) outline six phases to reflexive thematic analysis: familiarisation; coding; generating initial themes; reviewing and

developing themes; refining, defining and naming themes; and writing up. The first phase, familiarisation, is important for the researcher to get to know their data. It involves transcribing, reading and re-reading the data and this needs to be done actively, noting patterns and oddities, and asking questions of the data (Terry et al. 2017). Audio recordings from the interviews were personally transcribed in verbatim, and this was done soon after the interviews when they were still fresh in my mind, allowing me to add annotations as I went (Butina 2015), and also record paralinguistic elements where appropriate, such as pauses, and changes in tone (Riessman 2005). Once transcribed, I read and re-read each interview to get a feel for the data, and kept notes using interview memos, to capture my initial thoughts and analytic ideas (Terry et al. 2017).

Once I had a grasp of the data, I moved on to generating codes, where I attached labels to words and phrases in the transcripts related to the research questions (Saldana 2021). I worked through each transcript systematically, highlighting text I felt would be important to the research question. The approach was exploratory at this stage, and a lot of codes were generated which at first glance did not appear of direct relevance to the research question. However, they were included as they may be potentially relevant, offering more insight to the data and helping me understand the data in a different way as my analysis progressed (Braun and Clarke 2022). Some text was assigned to more than one code, whilst some passages were not coded at all, as they did not seem to be relevant or offer potential insight. Terry et al. (2017) stress that thematic analysis does not require every line of data to be coded, rather coding needs to start to synthesise the data and organise it into patterns. Most coding at this early stage was descriptive in nature, capturing what the participants said. From this process, it became evident that many codes related to participants' experiences at the destination, which did not relate to the original focus on destination choice. The literature was revisited, and it became clear that many studies also considered destination attractiveness at the destination. It was decided to group codes to reflect this difference, to highlight the role of attractions prior to visit, and whilst at the destination. Many researchers separate the tourist journey into stages, encompassing the pre-trip, the visit to the destination (or attraction) itself, and the post-visit stage (Aho 2001; Shaw and Williams 2009; Kirchberg and Trondle 2012; Frochot and Batat 2013; Packer and Ballantyne 2016; Park and Santos 2016; Soltani-Nejad et al. 2024). Given the scope of this study, the post-visit stage was not explicitly considered.

I also started to develop more conceptual and abstract codes, looking for more implicit or latent meaning (Braun and Clark 2022). I worked through the interviews several times to ensure the process was comprehensive and systematic, and as noted by Braun and Clarke (2022), this helped develop my analysis. Once I felt the code labels captured the range of meanings in the interviews, I moved on to the next stage. After coding the data, I started to look at generating themes, taking a step back to reflect upon the codes to identify broader patterns of meaning shared across participants (Terry et al. 2017). Braun and Clarke (2019) stress that in reflexive thematic analysis, these themes need to capture shared meanings around a central concept, rather than summarise everything said about a particular topic. I reviewed my codes to look for shared meaning across these, and began to group them into initial themes at a more conceptual level. In this process thematic maps helped me group my initial codes into potential themes and show how these related to each other.

The fourth stage is reviewing these initial themes, to see whether they reflect what participants actually said, and whether there is any opportunity to develop better themes (Braun and Clarke 2022). I went back to the initial codes to see what participants said, to make sure the themes reflected these, and whether my interpretation could be developed further. An important aspect is whether the theme captures different meanings across participants, so I checked the data for each theme to see if there was coherence across participants. Once I was happy that the themes were developed and evidenced within the data set and told a story related to my initial research question, I moved on to stage five: refining, defining and naming themes (Braun and Clarke 2022). For each theme, I wrote a brief definition which explained what each theme was about (central concept), what was included within it (particularly anything unique or specific), and what it contributed to the overall analysis. Finally, I named the themes to capture their essence, and tried to come up with titles that would engage the reader.

Ethical considerations of the research

Jones (2022) highlights the importance of ethical issues when conducting research, ensuring that research is socially and morally acceptable. As Flick (2014) comments, researchers face ethical issues at every stage of the research process, and the researcher needs to act ethically throughout the process, in terms of research design, recruiting participants, conducting the interviews, and sharing the

findings (Cresswell 2007). The key ethical issues qualitative researchers need to consider are that the research should produce positive benefits (beneficence) and protect the welfare of participants (non-maleficence) (Flick 2014).

The positive benefits of the research were considered by the BU ethics panel as part of the ethical approval process, and it was agreed that this research would gain new insight and understanding. This process also considered the welfare of the participants, and steps were taken to ensure informed consent, and to safeguard the confidentiality of participants. A key concern regarding participant welfare is informed consent, to protect the rights and dignity of participants (Flick 2014). Participants need to know that they are being researched, the nature of the research, and how the data they provide will be used (Ryen 2004). When recruiting participants, the nature of the research was explained to them, as was the commitment required from them. Only if they were comfortable with this was an interview arranged. In line with common practice and BU policy and procedures, prior to the start of the interview, all participants were given a consent form to read and sign, whereby they agreed to participate in the study based upon information provided to them prior to the interviews. The reasons for the research and the use of audio recording were also explained to the participants, and it was made clear that there was no obligation for them to take part in the research, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time (Ryen 2004).

To ensure confidentiality, data was anonymized, using pseudonyms for participants. The data was stored on a personal computer and the files were password protected. A key for pseudonyms used was held in a separate file and also password-protected. In line with GDPR legislation, only the researcher had access to the data once stored. The contact details of participants were deleted once the follow up interviews were completed. Recordings and transcripts from the interviews will be deleted within 6 months of the completion of this study.

One issue with qualitative research is the depth of information collected about a participant, which may make it easier for them to be identified (Flick 2014). The approach adopted, focussing on particular holiday episodes meant that I did not need to collect detailed life histories, which makes individuals less identifiable. Any data collected which could identify the participants was also anonymised if used in the analysis (for instance, hotel visited, partners name). I also tried to avoid collecting data that was personal, by not actively listening when topics were raised

which were of a personal nature. Ryen (2004) stresses that whilst rapport is needed to allow participants to share their stories and provide depth of data, it is important that the participant does not intrude into their personal or private space. When participants began to share personal material which was not relevant to the research question, I listened politely but did not actively encourage further divulgence, avoiding any prompting or non-verbal signals of encouragement.

When analysing the data and writing the findings, the rigorous analytical process detailed above ensured that the themes were grounded in the data, to ensure I was doing justice to the participants (Flick 2014).

Ensuring trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that trustworthiness is simply about how the researcher can persuade their audiences (and themselves) that the research findings are worthy of paying attention to. For this, they need to address questions relating to the 'truth' of the findings, how applicable the findings may be in other situations, whether the findings would be repeated in a similar research setting, and whether the findings are based upon the data rather than the researcher's perspectives. Creswell (2007) notes that researchers also use established terms such as validity, which may have been reformulated for qualitative research. Flick (2014) highlights a common criticism of qualitative research is the transparency of the process, and validity is important to show the researcher's interpretations are based upon the views and experiences of participants. Silverman (2017) also focuses on validity when considering the quality of qualitative research, to show how 'truthful' the findings are.

Focussing on the approaches adopted in this research, Polkinghorne (2007) discusses the importance of validity within narrative research, which relates to the "believability of a statement or knowledge claim" (p.474). To be believable, arguments need to be based upon evidence, and readers will make this judgement based upon the strength of the argument made, and these need to be trustworthy. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that a rigorous thematic analysis can produce trustworthy results, but acknowledge the inherent flexibility within reflexive thematic analysis can undermine this (Nowell et al. 2017). The reflexive nature of this approach means there is no rigid formula (Braun and Clarke 2022), and quality is not based upon consensus or accuracy, but rather "immersion, creativity,

thoughtfulness and insight” (p.268), highlighting the central role of the researcher in ensuring quality.

As Tracy (2010, p.837) notes, “the literature is brimming with criteria for qualitative goodness”. Whilst there are no universally agreed criteria for judging qualitative research (Braun and Clarke 2013), criteria developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) are the most widely accepted (Shenton 2004; Flick 2014; Nowell et al. 2017). Shenton (2004) and Nowell et al. (2017) highlight how these overlap with the established criteria used in quantitative research:

- Credibility (in preference to internal validity)
- Transferability (generalisability/ external validity)
- Dependability (reliability)
- Conformability (objectivity)

Credibility is considered the main criteria for qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Shenton 2004; Flick 2014). For this, the researcher needs to show how they have represented participants’ multiple realities effectively in their findings and interpretation, to show there is a ‘fit’ between these constructions (Nowell et al. 2017). Silverman (2017) stresses the importance of qualitative research being conducted in a methodical and rigorous way to be credible, and it is important to detail the process followed to enable the reader to determine whether the process is credible. I followed an established method, and provide details of each stage in this chapter.

To ensure that the data collected allowed me to produce credible findings, I designed an approach which allowed for prolonged engagement and triangulation (Lincoln and Guba 1985). When recruiting the sample, I used maximum variation to hear multiple voices, and developed a relationship over time with participants to establish trust (Shenton 2004). A key threat to credibility in narrative research is the potential difference between participants experiences and the stories they share (Polkinghorne 1995). Narratives are not ‘mirrored’ reflections of experienced meanings, as they may include unclear aspects due to limitations with language, limited reflection, and resistance to share certain aspects. To address these issues, I encouraged them to share their stories in their own language and in their own time. The second stage of the interviews allowed me to gain more depth on relevant themes, and the use of probes and confrontational questioning (where appropriate) allowed me to clarify any contradictions that emerged. This

triangulation of methods (in addition to data triangulation) allowed me to benefit from both of these approaches and address their potential limitations (Flick 2014). I am aware that triangulation cannot claim findings are truthful (Silverman 2017), but it is seen as an important step to increase the probability that the findings are credible (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Shenton 2004).

To further aid credibility, I also engaged in a form of member-checking. I returned to participants to gain clarification where needed, and to explore certain aspects in more depth (Polkinghorne 1995). This proved useful, for instance, one participant mentioned they never looked at what was at a destination before going, yet had bought guidebooks on the chosen destination. At the follow up interview, he reflected on this and suggested that he travelled with an expectation that there would be things to see and do at the destination, based upon general knowledge, without actively looking to see what was there.

Returning to participants also allows the researcher to share their initial interpretations and refine these based upon their reactions, and Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider this the most important way to ensure credibility. However this approach does raise concerns, especially if the interpretation does not show participants in a good light (Shenton 2004), or if the interpretation is more abstract and not recognisable to them (Braun and Clark 2021a). Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest member-checking may be less useful when developing latent themes, and instead suggest 'participant feedback' as a more suitable approach for reflexive thematic analysis. Following this advice, the wider concept of 'member reflections' proposed by Tracy (2010) was used. Here, my initial thoughts were shared and discussed with participants, allowing them to contribute their own insights to the analysis in a more iterative process (Polkinghorne 1995). These interviews were more informal, and I took notes rather than recording them.

Member reflections were an initial step in helping me establish the credibility of my findings and interpretations, an important stage in all qualitative research (Nowell et al. 2017) and especially in narrative research (Polkinghorne 1995). As well as participant reflections, my analysis also benefitted from peer-debriefing (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Working in a tourism and hospitality department allowed me to share my ideas with colleagues, not only my initial interpretations, but also my methodological approach (Flick 2014). They raised ideas I had not considered, and these discussions helped make my biases and assumptions more explicit to me.

It is important to recognise the researcher's existing knowledge, and reflexivity is an important practice within narrative research (Polkinghorne 1995; Mura and Sharif 2017). It is essential to clarify the researchers' position, as this will shape both the data collection and analysis (Shenton 2004; Terry et al. 2017). Terry et al. (2017) suggest that it is useful to start with the researcher's personal interest in the topic. I have always enjoyed travelling, and in my youth I spent two years travelling around the World, inspired to not only see the famous sites, but also lesser known places I had read about before, such as Wave Rock in Western Australia. These experiences led to one of my early assumptions, that people travelled because they wanted to visit certain places. Later, I worked in specialist travel agencies for a number of years, and I soon realised that this was not always the case. There was many a Saturday afternoon when people would sit down excitedly at the desk with a vague idea of where they wanted to go, usually Australia or Southeast Asia. Often, their final choice was determined more by the available air fares rather than what was there, and the destination could quite easily change, for instance from Thailand to Vietnam, or Mexico to Venezuela. These experiences further developed my assumptions about what is important to visitors when choosing a destination, and strengthened my interest in this topic.

I have also taught units related to destinations and visitor attractions, gaining knowledge of theories and concepts of relevance to this topic. I realised it was important for me make my assumptions and previous knowledge explicit, and try to 'bracket' this when analysing and interpreting my data, to avoid 'prior knowing' (Witzel and Reiter 2012). Polkinghorne (1995, p.483) stresses that within philosophical hermeneutics, the researcher "encounters a text from within his or her 'prejudice'", and the interpretation will result from this interaction. Thus, the interpretation presented is not the only one possible, and the researcher needs to argue that their interpretation is a credible one based upon the narrative texts.

To aid this process, I kept a reflective diary throughout, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2022). I recorded my thoughts as I progressed, documenting my own theoretical perspectives when I arrived at the data and how these developed as I analysed the data, questioning what worked and did not work, and how my themes developed. It included feedback from peer and member reflections as well as my own. I also kept a more formal audit trail, describing the process and the decisions made (Nowell et al. 2017). This included interview memos containing summaries

of stories shared and details on the context, lists of codes and collated data, thematic maps and theme definitions (Braun and Clarke 2022).

To avoid the potential for ‘anecdotalism’, I worked through all the interviews systematically (Braun and Clarke 2022). This was important when developing my themes, looking for how patterns were shared across participants. Where cases did not seem to fit my initial interpretation, my ideas were revised, or explanations sought for these cases, and I also returned to previous studies to see how my analysis sat with these studies (Flick 2014). Data was included in my discussions to support these findings (Silverman 2017), and commentary provided to show the meanings of these descriptions included.

Transferability relates to how the findings of the study can be applied in other contexts (Schreier 2018). This may be done on a case-to-case basis (Nowell et al. 2017), but it is not the job of the researcher to do this, rather to provide sufficient data for others to make judgements about its suitability in specific contexts (Lincoln and Guba 1985). To aid transferability, the findings presented provide ‘thick description’ (Lincoln and Guba 1985), including relevant contextual information to ensure that practitioners and researchers feel confident to make this judgement (Shenton 2004).

Dependability relates to the question of consistency, in the sense that others should be able to replicate the study, and the process followed must be logical and documented (Nowell et al. 2017). It does not mean they will replicate the findings, as the broader concept of dependability takes account of changes in the research context over time (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress that the approaches used to provide credibility go some way to ensuring dependability. The process followed has been documented in detail in this chapter (Nowell et al. 2017), an audit trail kept (Flick 2014), and quotes from participants included in the findings section (Silverman 2017). In addition, I received training in qualitative methods, interview guides were checked by supervisors, and a pilot interview conducted to check the formulation of the questions and elicitation techniques.

Confirmability relates to the characteristics of the data (Lincoln and Guba 1985), and that the findings are derived from the data rather than the views and preferences of the researcher (Shenton 2004; Nowell et al. 2017). Confirmability has been aided by including quotes from participants, and providing a commentary

to explain how interpretations and conclusions have been arrived at (Nowell et al. 2017).

Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest a number of approaches to ensure the quality of reflexive thematic analysis, many of which have been included above. They suggest that the researcher needs to maintain an open stance during the process and stress the importance of using a reflexive journal throughout; allow time for immersion and reflection; gain insight from others; develop an audit trail; and name themes carefully.

Limitations of the research

A limitation of this study is the difficulty in what to include as attractions. Participants were asked a broad question about what makes a destination attractive to them, and this question was framed to capture what they you looked for at the destination, including 'things to see and do'. This allowed the analysis to not only highlight the importance of wider elements, such as access and amenities, but also to narrow the focus on visitor attractions ('things to see and do'). Attractions mentioned fall within common inventory categories (Lew 1987; Swarbrooke 2002; Leask 2008; 2010; Robinson et al. 2020), although they may not necessarily meet the narrower criteria of being managed and designated as such (Pearce 1991; Middleton 1996; Hu and Wall 2005).

A number of criticisms regarding trustworthiness are levelled at qualitative research in general (Shenton 2004), and I have discussed these and how I have tried to address them in the section above. In particular, to address the issue of flexibility in the use of thematic analysis undermining its rigour (Terry et al. 2017), I have detailed the systematic approach followed, in line with that suggested by Braun and Clarke (2021; 2022). Within narrative research, a key issue is whether the stories shared reflect the actual experiences of the participant (Polkinghorne 1995). I have tried to address this in the design of interviews, but there may be some aspects of importance to the study which have not been revealed, especially regarding historical trips where memories fade (Vengesai et al. 2009; Jones et al. 2012). Further, there may also be an element of participants justifying their choice post consumption, rather than focusing on what was actually important at the time. The use of a questioning phase aimed to minimise this limitation.

However, this did mean that interviews were lengthy and placed more demands on both the participants and the interviewer (Scheibelhofer 2005). It meant that the elicitation techniques planned were skimmed over at times, and did not prove as useful as hoped. In particular, participants rarely talked of their motives or benefits. As noted earlier, individuals may not be aware of their motives, or willing to share them (Dann 1981; Pearce 2011; Crompton and Petrick 2024). Probing questions were asked in the questioning phase, using a 'soft laddering' technique (Jervis and Drake 2014), however only a couple of participants were enthused by this. Instead, returning to their own narratives and framing questions in a more relaxed manner proved more beneficial. The narrative approach also led to copious amounts of data being collected, which meant more time had to be devoted to the analysis (Butina 2015).

Another issue with narrative research, which is also shared with qualitative research in general, is the role of the researcher in the analysis of the data (Moen 2006; Braun and Clarke 2020). As discussed above, I followed a systematic approach, acknowledging the role of the researcher in narrative research (Polkinghorne 1995), keeping a self-reflective diary to record my thoughts and decisions during the process. However, there is no denying that my interpretation is just one potential story that can be told.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the qualitative approach adopted in this research. A total of 17 narrative-based interviews were conducted with a variety of individuals who had recently been on holiday or were planning to. These interviews were designed to collect rich data on trip experiences, which was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Each stage has been explained and justified to help the reader judge the trustworthiness of the approach adopted. The findings from this research are presented in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 7: CHOOSING THE DESTINATION

Introduction

This chapter explores the influence of attractions at the start of the journey, when choosing a destination. The stage models outlined in Chapter five highlight that tourists narrow down the number of alternatives considered until a final choice is made, based upon their perceptions of what the destination offers, their preferences, and situational constraints (Woodside and Lysonski 1989; Sirakaya and Woodside 2005; Choi et al. 2012; Karl et al. 2020). The hierarchical approach to decision making recognises that decisions regarding the most important trip components are made in the early planning stage (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002; Decrop and Snelders 2004; Hyde 2004; Choi et al. 2012). This chapter focusses on this early stage, and whether attractions played a role in choosing the destination. The following themes emerged from an analysis of participants stories, illustrating the influence attractions have in destination choice:

- Attractions providing inspiration
 - Attracted by the “must-see”
 - Inspired by sites of personal interest
 - Activities as inspiration
 - As a catalyst of discovery
- The appeal of place
 - Adding to destination image
 - The appeal of things to see and do
- Swaying the balance
 - Influencing the choice of accommodation
 - Confirming the final choice
- Attractions overlooked at time of booking
 - Booking with expectations
 - Avoiding distractions

Attractions providing inspiration

Participants talked of trips where attractions played a central role in their choice of destination. They were inspired to visit based upon their initial preferences for what the destination offered, in terms of things to see and do.

Attracted by the “must-see”

Several participants had or wanted to visit a destination because of specific attractions. For some, these were famous attractions they had heard about, which inspired them to visit the destination. Mandy wanted to go to South America after hearing about Machu Pichu:

I think, for me the thing that started South America was I wanted a challenge, so it started with us wanting to climb Machu Picchu. Now, that, that doesn't really apply to the rest of the three months. So Machu Pichu was probably number one. What it was, about two years ago my sister asked me to do it, my sister works for Emirates. So she flies all over the world. I don't know who she found out about it from, I mean, Machu Picchu is quite a big thing, it's one of the seven wonders. She wanted to do it and we're quite similar, and she sort of asked if I would do it with her a couple of years ago. And then I said no, but ever since I've sort of regretted it.

Tracy was also inspired to visit the USA primarily to see the main sites:

I did a great trip in California because I wanted to see the national parks, because I want to see redwood trees. We went to national parks, and went down route 66, and that was to see things, because they are quite iconic, I suppose.

Bill is planning a trip to Croatia, and watching Game of Thrones inspired his interest:

But yeah, we like watched Game of Thrones, so we really wanted to see the castles where it was filmed. We've got friends that have been to Dubrovnik, they've said good things. I think also it was a case of where would be good during school holidays as well, because flights go up and Croatia came out as a good destination. But yeah, we like the warm weather, like the fact you can see these castles, you know a lot of exploring. Just a bit of relaxation, bit of exploring, find out the history.

These must-see attractions can be considered as iconic (Becken 2005; Weidenfeld 2010), or flagship attractions which draw visitors to an area (Sharpley 2007). The appeal of such sites is not new, indeed Greek authors talked of sights that ‘must be seen’ (theamata), or ‘wonders’ (thaumata) (Shackley 2006). These attractions were the main inspiration for these participants when choosing the destination. Dai

et al. (2022) conceptualised inspiration as part of the travel journey, treating it as a motivational state that drives behaviour. Thrash et al. (2014) identified three characteristics of inspiration: evocation, transcendence and motivation. Evocation refers to being inspired by something external to the individual, transcendence occurs when the individual becomes aware of new or better states, and motivation drives the behaviour to achieve these states. Further, Thrash et al. (2014) considered how inspiration can be divided into two stages: being inspired by and being inspired to. Being inspired by reflects the individual “being awoken to the (perceived) intrinsic value of an elicitor object” (Thrash et al. 2014, p.497), which awakens their needs recognition by providing something new they may desire, which then motivates them to travel (Khoi et al. 2021). Applying this approach to tourism, Dai et al. (2022, p.2) defined travel inspiration “as a motivational state that drives a prospective tourist to bring the obtained new travel ideas into realization”. Adopting this conceptualisation, attractions can be seen as external objects which inspire individuals to visit certain destinations. This inspiration can come from a range of sources, including films and tv, social media, and friends and family (Dai et al. 2022).

Inspired by sites of personal interest

For others, rather than attractions awakening a needs recognition, the desire to visit appears more deep-seated, reflecting a more profound interest in visiting the destination or attraction. Kashdan and Silvia (2009) note that it is interest that motivates individuals to try new things, including travelling to a new place. Pete talked passionately about seeing the Northern Lights. He went on a photographic tour specifically to see these in Iceland:

Yes we went to Iceland, to see the Northern lights. It was just kind of purely that really, and there wasn't really time to do much else. We booked a tour and went for about seven nights I think. We were purely there chasing the Northern Lights.....

Yeah, but that's something basically that I've always wanted to do. Cause when you were a kid it's all like, yeah you know, seen it on TV and stuff like that and it looks amazing.

Whilst the Northern Lights can be considered an iconic attraction, Pete talked of a deeper interest, based upon what he had learnt about them in his childhood. This personal interest was also apparent for Barbara, reflecting on why she visited Paris to see the Louvre, and Florida to visit the theme parks:

You know I did art history at A level and never really did anything else much of it, but I suppose that's why, I still am interested in the stories behind the works...

We did parks a lot growing up, like big family trips. And I went to school in Orlando, so a lot of our classes were theme park based, I guess, the content, and I just, I fell in love with the life of a theme park I guess, with the rides and the stories, so yeah.

Other less well-known attractions also inspired participants to visit different destinations, based upon their personal interest. For James, any destination with attractions linked to communist era heritage becomes attractive:

Some of the overseas holidays in particular, you know recent holidays in the last five years to Poland and Lithuania, were far more about seeing attractions. So Lithuania, the fundamental purpose of going on holiday was to visit a theme park of communist-era statues and a place called Druskininkai. This was my 50th birthday present. So that's a type of heritage I'm very interested in, anything to do with the Cold War basically, and so the whole holiday was orientated around that.

Tracy went to Rome just to see paintings by a particular artist:

I went to Florence because I wanted to see some Hieronymus Bosch, which I've always been fascinated with, utterly weird stuff indeed. So I went purely because of that, because I'd seen some of his work at the British Museum....

So a lot of it comes out of things that I've been reading, or have seen somewhere else.

This interest seems to be based upon a degree of knowledge about the attractions, and it is this which inspires them to visit, reflecting a need to gain more knowledge (Berlyne 1960), where knowing leads to a desire to learn more (Maslow 1970). It also highlights the knowledge gap proposed by Loewenstein (1994) as a driver of exploratory behaviour. Loewenstein (1994) suggested that a perceived gap in one's knowledge will lead to individuals' desire to find out more. Loewenstein (1994) hypothesized that the more knowledge individuals have, the more they focus on what they do not know, and they will engage in behaviour to reduce this gap.

As well as knowledge gained from learning, interest can also come from a closer connection with the attraction. Harry arranged a trip to Normandy with his family to see the D Day memorials. He had been before with his own dad, and remembered how he felt:

It's living history first. People are still alive who were involved in it. And it was very impactful on me as a youngster when my dad took me over there, I didn't really as a little lad appreciate the horror of it all. I do now. My elder daughter has been pushing me for years. When she heard that her granddad had been involved in D-Day she'd always wanted to do it. Can we see what granddad did where D-Day was concerned? And I promised it. So I was backed into a corner this year, I had to do it as the time was there.

The appeal of attractions with a personal connection highlights the importance of how individuals perceive a heritage attraction, as it is this perception that will influence their desire to visit (Poria et al. 2006). The importance of this connection is further highlighted by Dunkley et al. (2011), who suggest that tourists visiting battlefields with which they have a personal connection consider these trips to be a form of pilgrimage.

Activities as inspiration

Several participants were inspired to visit destinations specifically to engage in activities. They talked about how these activities were important to them, not only on holiday but also at home, if they have the opportunity. Tracy has always had horses, and has been on several riding holidays within Europe. Lily and her partner are keen surfers, and surf in the UK, and have also been on surfing trips to Portugal, Hawaii and Australia. Pete is a keen mountain biker, a so called 'weekend warrior' who has been on trips in the UK as well as to Italy, specifically for downhill biking. For Graham, a passion for golfing has taken him to Portugal, Spain, and Scotland. Michael enjoys climbing mountains, however at home he does not have the opportunity as there are no mountains, so these become more important when choosing a destination. He may be considered a 'munro bagger', having climbed many of these in Scotland, and all 14 on Skye.

They exhibit a clear commitment to these activities, suggesting a high involvement in their chosen activities (Higham 2005; Havitz and Mannell 2005). Within leisure research, involvement is considered to include a number of elements: attraction, centrality and self-expression (Chang and Gibson 2011). Attraction refers to the interest in participating in the activity and the pleasure it provides. Centrality refers

to how important the activity is to them in their life. Self-expression highlights the importance of the activity to their identity.

Michael visits Skye every year, originally attracted by the chance to hike in the mountains:

Members of my family had been there and told me about it and showed me photos and I thought it sounds brilliant. So the main attraction was the mountains, they are so different from where I live.

The main attraction for Michael was the mountains on Skye, on the recommendation of his family. Having returned a number of times, it becomes clear that the environment, and the combination of different elements, plays a key role in the destination's attractiveness and inspires him to return:

You get the mountains but also the light's different, you get the mist, you get the sun, you get the rain, the wind, it is totally unlike anything in England.....

So I guess it is a mix of things. First of all it is the best outdoor part of the UK so it's got mountains, it's got rivers it's got cliffs, sea, it's got changeable weather, locks, it's got a lot more than people think. The restaurants pubs and bars as well. A combination of all of that put together really.

Other islands are similar but they don't have as many mountains. I think there are 14 Munros on Skye. You have all the things you can do and be flexible from. Not like going to Disney World where you say right I am going to Disney World I am doing this.

For Michael, mountains are only part of the natural landscape, it is their setting that is important. Murphy et al. (2000) highlighted that the destination environment in which attractions are set contribute to the atmosphere of the destination. As noted by Kaplan and Kaplan (1989), people view the environment in a holistic way, and prefer environments which meet the needs of understanding and exploration. The way Michael talks of the environment, as a combination all put together, suggests coherence, which helps meet the need for understanding, whilst the richness he conveys, talking about the light and the mist, suggests complexity, which offers the opportunity for exploration. As well as this richness and coherence, it is also the number of mountains which adds to the attractiveness of Skye. Other Scottish islands may well have similar scenery, but Skye offers a wider range which provides variety for hiking trips, as well as a variety of amenities. Here, quantity and variety add to attractiveness when selecting a destination, providing flexibility.

The environment in which activities are undertaken was also important to Tracy. Tracy is a keen horse rider, and has been on many riding holidays in Europe. Whilst facilities are the most important factor making a destination attractive, Tracy also talked about the environment in which they will ride making a destination attractive:

Trail riding tends to be in really quite stunning scenery, you take that as a sort of given, and you can see so much more on horseback. So previous trips, we look at the riding trails, which can be point to point, so you don't come back to the same place, or go from spot to spot. We like to just go out and have lots of routes, it's, it's a lovely way to, quite a lazy way sometimes, to see scenery.

Riding holidays not only allow her to continue her interests, but also to ride in different environments. For these participants, whilst the main inspiration is the activity, the destination environment becomes important as a backdrop for these activities, allowing them to undertake activities in a “preferred environment” (Higson 2005, p.33).

Given the central importance of the activity, participants also shared how they researched the destination prior to booking. Tracy is currently planning a riding holiday in Canada with her extended family. The main reason to go is for riding, but as she is travelling with a group, the variety of attractions and facilities offered becomes important:

Right the holiday I'm planning or is planned is the one to New York. Yeah, so I'm going to fly to New York with my daughter, picking up a car and then driving to Vermont to a ranch resort in Vermont. Why is that attractive, because we were looking for somewhere that would have activities for the grandchildren, who are three and one, and would enable Emma and I to do some riding, and if possible my son to do some riding too. So it is by the lake, and we have a big cottage, and there's spas and stuff like that. And it's safe for little ones.

So I started off looking on Hidden Trails and In the Saddle and all the usual horse riding sites in the States, because neither Emma nor I were familiar with the types of ranch holidays they had, or the types of horses they had. And so yeah, and Emma settled on two I think, they both seemed to offer similar, set in a huge National Park. So you had, you could do school work as well as trail riding, and normally on riding sites they are graded by the level. So these two were both competent, and the Mountaintop one had a jumping clinic which Emma wanted to do, and dressage clinic. But one of them, the accommodation wasn't up to my daughter-in-law's standard, so that was struck from the list, but the Mountaintop Inn is very nice.

So that was okay. That was on Hidden Trails. We had to do a bit of negotiation to get the prices down to the level we were paying, for

the two adults and the little ones. Yeah, because they're not cheap. And we've been, yeah, this is probably the last holiday, I would imagine, that we all manage to do like that, and it is really important that the horses are good and the instructors are good. Yeah, and the trails, the types of trail rides that you do, because some of them they won't, they won't go faster than a trot, which is a bit boring.

So the search process is, look at what actual rides are available, types of rides, like are they point to points or round and back. Whether it's coastline or historic, there are historic ones where you go from castle to castle, which are really nice, the ones in Europe tend to be a little bit more interesting historically, in where you can travel. Because you can do old trade routes on horseback. When we started looking in the US it was a bit of a blank canvas because I've only ridden in the Catskills where my other son, which is Upstate New York, and I don't know the terrain. I assumed because this one in Vermont is also a skiing resort that they will have mountainous areas, but it will also be geared up. So the trails will probably be quite clear and relatively safe for if Thomas was going to go with the girls. And we knew we weren't going to do point to point. So it just had to be reasonably interesting.

But you can see, you know, if you want to see the routes you just go on these sites. We watch everything, so we've got an idea of what we're going for, and what it's going to be like. I think it's just information, on what you're going to be doing.

Tracy's account shows the search process she goes through before deciding. Tracy displays high involvement, given the importance of the holiday to her extended family, the centrality of riding to her lifestyle, and the risks of selecting a resort with appropriate facilities (Kyle et al. 2007). Tracy reviews what is on offer in detail, including the schools and clinics offered, types and grades of trail rides and terrain ridden, the quality of the horses and trainers, the quality of the accommodation, and of course the price. There are a number of sites offering riding holidays in different locations, and this high degree of choice suggests a degree of substitutability between destinations, which will be selected based upon an evaluation of the amenities offered (McKercher 2017). These include facilities or attractions for group members who do not go riding, highlighting the need for destinations to offer a range of attractions to meet different group needs (Lue et al. 1996).

The appeal of a mix is also evident for Lily, who went on a long-haul trip to Australia. They were inspired to visit Australia because of the surfing, but other factors also made it attractive:

Why did we choose Australia? Well obviously because of the surfing! We probably started thinking about it, about six months beforehand, no, nine months beforehand. So first, we listened to a little bit of what our surfing friends had done, and other people we've known who've been round there, then what I normally do is, I normally buy a couple of guide books just to see what places to go. I look at places some of the big companies who do self-drive tours, look where they're going, because that gives you an idea of where might be good, things to see. Natural beauty is probably the most important thing on those holidays, and interesting places. So they give you an idea where to go and then what we did is I worked out where all the good surfing beaches were, where all the vineyard areas were, and then worked our way around that. We ended up trying to make a holiday that was involved with surfing, vineyards, walking, cycling. I Like exploring, like trying new things. So obviously first of all we decide where we're going to go roughly, and book the plane flights. We went into Melbourne, drove to Adelaide, flew to Perth, then flew back from there.

The variety of activities and attractions contributed to the appeal of the destination, adding to its cumulative attraction (Hunt and Crompton 2008). The range of vineyards and surfing beaches added to the 'similar cumulative' attraction, where a variety of the same type of attraction added to the appeal of the destination. Dissimilar attractions (Weidenfeld et al. 2010), such as natural attractions, walking and cycling, added to the 'complementary cumulative' attraction, offering the potential to meet their different needs, such as to explore and relax (Hunt and Crompton 2008).

As a catalyst of discovery

Whilst surfing and vineyards were the main inspiration for visiting Australia, this initial inspiration also energised Lily to discover what else was there. Knowledge of certain attractions can provide the impetus to discover more, before choosing the destination. For Mandy, after originally being inspired by Machu Picchu, she engaged in further research and discovered more places she wanted to visit:

Before that, I don't think I really knew much about Peru, or South America in general and then, it sort of snowballs a little bit. So it was Macchu Picchu, then it was Rio, that became a big one that I wanted to do, again another wonder of the world sat on top of it. It started off as we'll go on like a couple of weeks trip, try and do like Machu Picchu, then it was let's like hop over to Brazil, and then we sort of realized that as you Google South America more, and think, if you put like things to do in South America or places to see there's so

much that comes up, and the more you read about it the more you want to see. And then it sort of became, like a two-page A4 list of stuff that we wanted to do, just from reading around because you click on, it's like 'hey look you can also go and see the Amazon right next to Machu Picchu', click on that. There's a lot of travel blogs.

This research led to them developing a list of places they wanted to visit, and from this they booked their international and regional flights, and eventually a planned two-week trip became three months, to fit everything in.

Jane had always wanted to go to Disney, and this became the inspiration for her family's 'epic' trip to America:

So my last holiday was Florida. It was this time last year, in a week's time last year. So, basically because this was an epic holiday. This was our big big family holiday. We knew that we wanted to go to Disney, the destination was Disney and that's what made it attractive to me.

So then we were like, there's no point in just going all that way to Disney because we knew Disney wasn't going to be a holiday, relaxation destination for us. So then we were like well, what else can we do. So then we thought, let's visit our friends house and yeah chillax for a week, and then we had to fly out of Washington because that was the cheapest, like way of doing it. So then we were like, look if we're going to fly home from Washington DC we might as well do some sightseeing whilst we're there. So it was really important to do a little bit of kind of educational stuff at the end. So White House, for the kids but I liked the look of DC so, so we had to do that as well.

After initially wanting to visit Disney, she looked for other things to see and do, not only to make the most of the long-haul trip (Sheth et al. 1991), but also to meet a range of needs (Lue et al. 1996). Following Thrash et al.'s (2014) approach to dividing inspiration into two stages, attractions here also play a role in inspiring participants to discover more about the destination.

The appeal of place

Rather than attractions being the primary driver, some participants talked more about the place. Here, the destination image held seems to be the main catalyst to visit. Untangling the role of attractions for these trips is more complicated, but it is suggested that attractions may add to the existing destination image, or for destinations with a weaker image, participants will look to see if there are enough things to see and do before booking.

Adding to destination image

Rather than specific attractions, for some participants the appeal was more the general image they held of the destination. Marie visited Rome, inspired by the history she had read about:

Well I decided with my sister, and we had both been reading a book about how the Popes are selected, like this fiction thing, and that made us both want to go, and we both like ancient history, we didn't really talk that much about it, because we have this thing where we must go to a different European city every year, so it could have easily been Budapest and it wouldn't have taken that much thought.

I feel really silly because it took me so long, given that I really love the history, I am not like really good at it or anything, but I do dip in and out of it, but I've really got a thing for ancient history and so I just felt that the idea of being in a place where all these, I mean, 2000 year old structures, and obviously the Vatican's there, and that was almost like a bonus because what attracted me were the ancient ruins but then the idea that you've got another bit of history that is so important to you know, like, civilisation, and the Sistine Chapel and so it just felt like oh my God it's going to be a feast.

For Olivia, Venice seemed like the ideal destination for a romantic break with her partner:

We chose it because well, it's just somewhere that me and my boyfriend always wanted to go to. So obviously like most of it's on water and you like travel around on the boats and stuff and yeah, I just wanted a different experience, like getting the gondolas around and stuff. You see it in the media and stuff, on the telly like you just see like the people on the gondolas going around, and it always just appealed to me, and it just seems really different, I just want to do that. I always see it as quite a romantic place. I kind of wanted to like experience that with my boyfriend, and like the history of it, like the Cathedral and the Basilica and stuff, and I felt like it had lots of different things.

I think it was because Venice is like mostly, like because it's on water isn't it, and I think it was the novelty of that, like the rest of Italy does appeal but I think like, oh, I think it was because like maybe we were worried it was going to sink, so like we have to do it now so if it does sink later we've been, we've done it.

I booked it, in the end it was a BA package, because their sale came up luckily when I was looking and so yeah, I did find a good deal. Luckily. It was a nice hotel, it was fairly central actually. It was like around the corner from Saint Mark's Square. We only went for like four nights in the end, because obviously like it was a package that they'd already put together in the sale.

Marie talked of a place full of history, and Olivia talked about the romantic image of Venice. This suggests that the appeal was based upon the overall image of the destination, to which the attractions added. It is clear that both Marie and Olivia had strong holistic impressions of the destinations (Echtner and Ritchie 2003), but the exact role attractions played in its formation is not so obvious. Marie talks of a place full of 2,000 year old structures, and also mentions the Vatican and the Sistine Chapel. Olivia also mentions several attractions at the destination, such as St Marks Square and the gondolas, as well as intangible attributes such as the romantic atmosphere, but whether these informed their holistic impressions, as proposed by Tasci et al. (2007), is open to debate.

The appeal of things to see and do

Other participants decided to visit destinations for which they initially held a weaker destination image, and were less aware of the tourism offer at the destination (Rodriguez-Santos et al. 2013). Mandy recently visited Budapest with her partner. When selecting the destination, they wanted to visit somewhere different, and checked what was there to see and do before booking a trip to Budapest:

I wanted to go somewhere I'd not been before, I've always kind of gone Spain, France, Italy kind of way I wanted to go more the other away. It was somewhere that neither of us have been, and we didn't know many people that had been there. So the whole wanting to set a trend is coming out again. I just like going places that other people aren't, it's a conversation starter.

Yeah so I had heard about Budapest, so I had a look on Google. If you Google things to do in Budapest or wherever there is normally like a top 10 things to do, whether it's a blog or some like newspapers do it too. Blogs are quite a big one for me. And even if you just Google it, like there's like a little slide bar that comes up of the main things. I think obviously you have a quick look before you book. Yeah, and then found the flights which were quite cheap and the accommodation was quite cheap, so sort of went for it. I wouldn't book somewhere without knowing, yeah, what is there. I look for the destination first, and then I go and find the cheap flights.

For Mandy, an initial look at what was on offer made Budapest attractive enough to book flights and accommodation. Harry also checked attractions when selecting the destination for a city break with his partner, a change from their usual family sun holiday. They had loyalty points for a Spanish Hotel company they could spend anywhere. They searched places where the group had hotels, and decided upon Genoa:

We looked at places where this hotel group had hotels, all over Spain and Italy, and this one stuck out that there was some history around. And also the gastronomy of the area's nice too, and we just thought yeah, this'll work. So the hotel costs us nothing on these loyalty points, the history looked good, it looked like a nice port and there's the merchants houses or palaces which are a UNESCO world heritage site or something. We both wanted to see that, and the shopping of course.

After a quick check, they felt the history of the destination, as well as the food and drink, and the shopping, added to the attractiveness of the destination, and they booked their flights.

It is clear that where participants had less knowledge of a destination, they did a quick check to see what was there, and the existence of attractions made the destination appealing. This suggests they have a role in setting expectations, providing a 'signal' of the quality of the destination (Chung and Kalnins 2001). Pike (2021) calls this the 'halo' effect, where a product (or destination) rated highly on one attribute is then presumed to be better across other attributes. This is also evident for Tom, who regularly goes on city breaks with his friends. They have a particularly unique way of selecting a destination, where attractions play a key role:

For these we have been to many places. Usually we choose capitals, the European cities, that would be Berlin, that would be the Prague, Rome, Lisbon, Paris, Copenhagen many of those. You will not believe what we do but, it's kind of, well...so we like to do these short trips with our friend. And so we just pick up three places, three capitals, they don't have to be capitals but they usually are. Every person picks three places that they have never been to, for instance I pick Copenhagen and two other places, and the guys, of course, they pick other places that they would like to go to but never been to, within maximum four hours of flight, that's important. We put the names into the envelopes, we have nine envelopes, we throw them up in the air, and we pick up one, and then this is the one that we are kind of in a way obliged to go, even though for example, one of the persons could have already been there. But you cannot say no, and then we start booking. I go because I know that with these guys I'm going to have fun. I like it. So those places we usually do in the summer. Last summer was Lisbon, and it was Copenhagen.

When we ask each other it's let's pick the three places that you would like to go to but you have never been to, I don't think about the hotel as the first place, I think about I'd like to go to Madrid, which is probably our destination in September. I've never been and I heard that it's nice from some people. They said that it's much better than Barcelona and I've seen Barcelona. So now I would like to compare it to Madrid. I heard things like that, that it is better than Barcelona. I think people are fed up with the amount of tourists in Barcelona, so they choose Madrid because it's not so much trodden upon. My second choice would be Porto, and again because I heard that people said that Porto is more beautiful than Lisbon. I've seen Lisbon already, I would like to compare, see if I can agree with this. I really don't know yet what's in Porto because I have not made any research, but I will definitely do before I put it on the name in the piece of paper. TripAdvisor probably, looking for what can I see like, in the city centre, not around but rather in the city centre. So I do some quick research than add to the paper.

You know, what is more important for me for the city breaks, that I have a hotel somewhere in the city centre, and I would like this hotel to be close to everything, so that I don't waste too much time on getting on the Underground to get somewhere, because as I said, I'd rather prefer walking along to see the place. For instance for Manchester we have a hotel which is somewhere next to this huge Square in Manchester. So I thought that it would be a good place to have a hotel there.

Tom and his traveling group do some initial research on what is at the destination to ensure that it will be interesting enough to visit. To limit the initial choice set, filters are applied: destinations must be within 4 hours drive, and the destination must be new to the proposer. This highlights the use of decision rules, or heuristics, to limit the time and effort spent in choosing a destination (Hergesell et al. 2019; Bowen 2022; Pike et al. 2022). For Tom, attractions are an important attribute (Li 2013), and may be considered a 'relative preference attribute' (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002). Here, a destination will be chosen if it performs well in terms of things to see and do. Prior to booking, attractions also influence the location of the accommodation chosen, with Tom looking for a hotel in the centre.

Sometimes, this initial search may send out the wrong signal, and reduce the attractiveness of the destination. Lily was looking for a city break, and having been to Barcelona previously and enjoyed it, they thought about Madrid:

So like going to Madrid, that was just we felt like having a holiday that time of year. So we had a look and actually, as a city itself, it may just be what we looked at, it didn't inspire us that much, not really into 18th Century palaces, and I'm not into the sort of the, the guilty type, you know the Spanish type stuff. Didn't really fancy it.

But then it was like, yeah, the World Heritage sites outside Madrid. I always check this site, because we once went on a holiday a long time ago, and we just came across this amazing castle, and it was on the UNESCO World Heritage site. That was in Switzerland, we were just driving around and 'ooh let's go to that place', it was one of those moments, and since then, wherever we go, we look to see where the UNESCO World heritage sites are. And the towns around the outside of Madrid looked amazing, the history involved, the old monasteries and churches. Yeah, so we booked for eight days, had to fly into Madrid, but then we stayed in the villages.

For Lily, the idea of attractions as a signal of quality is reinforced by the UNESCO World Heritage status.

Enough to see and do was also important for people travelling in groups, to meet their different interests. Barbara visited Paris and Rome with a group of friends. As they were travelling from the Cayman Islands, the general idea was to visit Europe together, but they had to decide where:

It was between France, Italy and Barcelona, and originally we were supposed to spend three days in each, but then someone wanted to spend their birthday in Paris. So we ended up cancelling Barcelona. So I think it's the main ones for us I guess that we know of, it's like England, France, Italy, from school, movies, friends. We've all been to England so we wanted somewhere else.

We decided France and Italy, and Paris was the obvious choice for France. It wasn't attractive as a destination per se, because I heard a lot of bad things about Paris. So I didn't go into Paris with high expectations, but I really wanted to see the museums and iconic like buildings and towers that are everywhere. My cousin had this grand expectation of Paris, and the Eiffel Tower. And then we kind of had a debate about where to go in Italy, because we all wanted to go different places. So like one of my cousin's wanted to go to Florence, another to Venice, and I wanted to go to Rome, and then my other cousin wanted to go to an island or something like that. Yeah, and so we decided to like research each city, to see what attractions they had that we wanted to see, because we had such a short time. So that's what we did, and we went with Rome. It was different, well like two of us argued that we didn't want the seaside experience. So the island was out, because we have it at home. So we wanted to see more, I guess, grandiose buildings so we went with Rome. We decided a week in Paris and three days in Rome, as there was more to see in Paris.

The appeal of attractions in the city informed their choice of final destinations. As Barbara and her friends were visiting from the Cayman islands, they wanted to visit somewhere 'different' from home, and a mix of attractions allowed them to meet the different needs of the group (Lue et al. 1996). The mix of attractions in Paris

also influenced how long they stayed there, spending more time here than in Rome. The broader appeal of things to do points to the destination being considered as an assortment, where a mix of attractions means they are more likely to find something to meet their individual and group needs, and provide options to choose from at the consumption stage (Hart and Rafiq 2006; Scheibehenne et al. 2010).

Swaying the balance

Participants also talked about holidays where attractions were not a key consideration during the early booking stage, when selecting the flight and accommodation. Attractions played a lesser role in the selection process, influencing the choice of accommodation, or later to confirm their choice. These trips were mainly taken for escape or relaxation, and for many it could easily be themed as 'attraction of the sun'. Heliotropism refers to the attraction of the sun, and was first used by Williams and Zelinsky (1970) to explain international tourism flows between countries. Not surprisingly, given the location of the research, escaping the British weather and seeking a sunnier destination was the most common reason for wanting to go on holiday. For Jane it is "*definitely the weather, it's like 'where's hot'*", Emily "*wanted somewhere where the weather would be good that time of year*", whilst Mandy was looking for "*a sun holiday, just go somewhere and just have a week in the sun*".

Influencing the choice of accommodation

For several participants, attractions were considered when selecting the accommodation, and the location of attractions nearby influenced their final choice. Harry goes on a summer holiday every year with his extended family, and whilst the most important factors were convenience and accommodation, attractions played a part in narrowing down the selection of accommodation:

This year we went to Menorca, the year before, again Menorca as well. We've been to Menorca two years running, before that Algarve, before that Majorca, so it's those sort of things. We go probably, and it didn't quite work this year, it's the wall to wall sunshine. Just to get out of the greyness of the UK over the winter. It is family bonding as well. You know it's a week we can get together and row together! I think we're quite an unusual family actually that we do get together very frequently. I guess it's the idea of making a break from the mundane is what a holiday is all about, isn't it, really.

Well we like Villas, because we like to do our own thing where most of the meals are concerned, certainly breakfast, and in the evenings even with young kiddies we like to eat out. So that takes the pressure off he or she who might otherwise be chained to the cooker. The freedom really of being in a villa. We do like a good position. In other words, we like to be certainly within sight of the sea if we're going to the sea. Particularly when we used to go to the Algarve, wasn't a particularly brilliant villa, but it was right on the cliff tops and the beach was down there. The golf course was between us and the beach, my daughter plays golf. Bear in mind, my daughters are in their thirties. So for them, that was perfect, they could whizz off and play.

We went to Menorca because my daughter's been there before with friends and she knew the areas, and we had somewhere that was 20 minutes from the airport, fine, without the airport noise, half an hour into Mahone the capital city, and literally a five-minute walk to as far as we're concerned the best beach in the bottom corner of the island. And a little village that had lots of restaurants so there's enough for a different restaurant for every night.

We look at villa sites. Well, we sound awfully snobby but we like to go somewhere of a reasonable standard. Everywhere we go, we do tend to look on TripAdvisor, see what the reports are for a lot of stuff, the resort or whatever, and you generally get a good vibe as to what it's going to be like in terms of what's there. Even the little beach we go to, you know, you can find a rating for that. Basically I'm spending X thousand, I'm reassuring myself that it might be money well spent! I think the villa is number one, it's very very important. Then it is the beach, little village nearby whether it's got reasonable restaurants. We like villas with a bit of garden around them, discreet. We're not into places where it's almost like a terraced street of villas.

For Harry and his family, attractions play a part in selecting the villa, as the location of the villa needs to be near to the beach. Harry also mentioned the importance of a nearby town. This is again mainly for convenience, so they can shop for groceries, but also restaurants and souvenir shopping.

The influence of attractions when selecting the accommodation was also evident for Max. Max planned a domestic break to get away with his young family:

Again, it was a case of just getting away from home, and like just going somewhere to relax. So, suddenly like the first six months of getting away. So getting away from like, the hustle and bustle. Like I mean, I'm quite happy when there's no one around. That's relax. I suppose in terms of relaxing, it's getting away from right, I need to go to a food shop, I need to put the washing on, I need to go to work, I need to do this. It's getting away from just like those chores.

We just did a search on Airbnb sort of thing in like the West of the country, South West. I grew up going on holidays to Cornwall and Devon, so you just have a general idea of the places. We were after a cottage holiday, two and a half to three hours drive from home, which is doable with your kids in the back. Yeah, and you know that you could find somewhere which is a bit remote.

For the accommodation, we did look at Cornwall, did look at Devon, did look at the Cotswolds, I think by the time we were booking the accommodation there wasn't masses on there. So we were like what's available, what sort of fits what we need from having the little one, and then what's in the area, and then you sort of ended up with like a short list of some 6 to 8. The two kind of went hand in hand. I guess it's like a job description, you've got essential and desirable. So there wasn't, we didn't have a list, but the general ideas of things were it would have been great if it was on the outskirts of a village, so we weren't near people but we could have walked into the local pub for like lunch or early dinner sort of thing. Where we were didn't have that but that would have been like in our filtering.

The place we stayed at was a cottage attached to a farm. We chose it mainly for availability. But that kind of thing, that kind of property, the place we stayed was the kind of thing we would generally look for. It would be like, this accommodation is good, what's around? Okay, there's not much around there, so maybe not that accommodation. This place, the wildlife park is close to drive to, there's a village. You knew that, there's a kind of expectation that there's going to be interesting villages and towns to visit.

For Max, the main filters were again convenience (travel time), and he had a general idea of the type of place he wanted to stay (South West England, rural location). These filters were applied to help choose accommodation. Once narrowed down, nearby attractions did add to the appeal and swayed the decision of where to stay, adding to the perceived benefits of the destination (Oh 1999; Petrick 2002). As he states, they may not be 'essential', but rather 'desirable', suggesting attractions again have a role as a 'relative preference attribute' (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002).

Confirming the final choice

Attractions were also considered later in the process, almost confirming their choice. They were important after other factors had been considered, mostly the accommodation and convenience. Mark is typical of this. He went with his partner and two teenage children for a summer holiday last year:

We went to Kefalonia, a Greek island for one week. Six weeks before we started planning because we wanted to get a late deal. Rebecca had been with James Villas and a couple of others so we

went through them. They had deals in Corfu and Kefalonia, both were value for money and good accommodation. But in Corfu, the beaches were not as good, and Kefalonia was also good because of the flight times, about three hours, it is a beautiful island, it had very dramatic landscape, mountains going into the sea, a lot of history there as well. We had a hire car with the deal so we could see things. Cos it's not enough just sitting on the beach, I like to look at different, you know the way people do different things. I don't necessarily want to go to the beach all day, I would like to go at some point but not all day at the beach, I like to look around.

For summer breaks, he wants a convenient location with good weather where they can relax, then it is about narrowing the choice down based upon what is available, price, and convenience. At this final stage, having things to see and do becomes important, and again almost sways the balance in favour of the destination offering a bit more.

For Tom, the key draw was the accommodation, but the location offering something new, with towns to explore encouraged them to book:

A couple of months ago we went to the south of France and that was interesting, because actually this one was the first time when we combined a little bit relaxing and a little bit of sightseeing. It was again a villa and it was again a villa for gay people. The villa was the most important thing. We chose it because my partner found that villa advertisement on some Google website, completely by chance, and it just looked beautiful.

I really bought it because of the pictures of the villa. So just like when they say that you buy something with your eyes, that was exactly the thing that I did. We did look first on Tripadvisor, about the whole villa, and we read comments from people who had been in that villa before, because it's really like a large mansion. So I was looking for what do the rooms look like? What are the owners of that villa like, are they nice, what kind of people go there? So we expected only again gay people being there. So some kind of nice people to chat with, with common topics. So that was the first thing, to TripAdvisor, and also what else was there. It's next to Montpellier, Carcassonne. All these places around, so it just looked beautiful there. So we said, okay, let's do it in this nice way. I also had my birthday this year which was like a special birthday, so I think it was also part of a birthday present. It was really expensive. But you knew exactly what you were paying for, and you could see exactly what you were paying for.

Whilst they researched the villa in detail, the surrounding area added to the appeal, a chance to explore the nearby towns. This was enough for them to confirm their choice and book their trip. Again, these stories reinforce the role attractions have, with nearby places to visit adding to the appeal, but given the late stage of

consideration, they may be seen as 'satisficers' (Li et al. 2019), where only a minimal level needs to be met.

Attractions overlooked at time of booking

Some participants recalled trips where little thought was given to attractions before booking, suggesting they were of limited or no importance. However, their stories highlighted that some travelled with an expectation that there would be things to see and do at the destination, or researched what was there after booking the transport and accommodation. On a rare occasion, attractions were excluded from the process, where the main purpose was just to relax at the destination.

Booking with expectations

It became clear that for some participants, whilst attractions were not explicitly considered when choosing the destination, they travelled with the expectation that there would be things to see and do. James likes to take a domestic holiday with his partner every year, in addition to the European trips which are mainly to see heritage attractions. These holidays are all about relaxing:

So the whole holiday experience. Well our typical holiday, there are two types of holidays, there's the purpose for going to a place because there's normally an attraction there we want to see. They tend to be abroad, and our domestic holidays are very much orientated around relaxation.

So yeah, we'll search online for holiday cottages by the sea, or holiday cottages with a sea view, and that is the fundamental thing. To a certain extent where it's located doesn't matter so much, so long as it meets that criteria, being a holiday cottage by the sea. It has to be relatively isolated, which sort of means you are going to end up in the Southwest or Norfolk, or the Northeast quite a lot. That's just, it's part of the escape thing, getting away from it all which means peace and quiet, and peace and quiet means not being in the middle of a caravan site. So long as it's somewhere that offers relative peace and quiet, that's all we're looking for.

I don't worry about what is there because pretty much in any destination in the UK you can find something to visit. I think fundamentally so long as the destination meets our requirement of being seaside, sea views, we're not actually bothered about what else there is to do there and certainly for domestic holidays, you know that you can just spend a week slobbering around reading and stuff like that. And if there's anything to see in the area, it's an additional advantage.

For James, attractions do not play a role when deciding where to visit on a domestic holiday, rather the accommodation and the location near to the sea are important. They booked with an expectation that there would be things to see and do at the destination, without researching this in detail before selecting the destination. The main purpose was to relax, however things to see and do would provide an added bonus, reflecting the benefit of options providing a 'hedge' against potential changes in preferences (Kahn 1995), especially where doing the same thing can lead to satiation (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982).

For Max, the accommodation was also the primary consideration for a family holiday to Corfu, although there was a general expectation that there would be places to see:

It was a case of should we go on holiday, it wasn't a case of where do you want to go, but, I suppose it... it's hard to explain, why did we go there? I suppose because it's abroad, you got guaranteed sun near enough, it was relatively easy to get to. Yeah, I don't think it was a case of we have to go to Corfu, it was we've done Spain so much, we fly into Malaga and then go across to Porto Banus. There's only so many times you can do that. So somewhere different, hot, easy to get to.

Her parents sorted out the villa, it would be like we found these different places, what do you think, and especially with like us and Nikki's brother having kids, it's like is that kid friendly? Does it have a travel cot or do we need to take our own? So we'd of had, probably a short list of four or five, and again it would have been like well that's not going to work because, like the stairs don't look safe. I mean it didn't matter so much for Tim because he wasn't even crawling, but for Sara she would have been two and a bit at that age, she would have been walking around. So it was kind of making sure it was child friendly, checking online, checking the photos and reviews. Yeah and the accommodation had its own private pool. It's just so much easier if you're in a villa or a house and you've got a kitchen, even if it is attached to a hotel, so self-catering, but you still got the option. And we knew there would be places to visit, like local towns.

For Max and his family, the villa is important to make sure it meets their requirements, especially regarding safety for young children. The expectation that there would be local places to visit meant they hired a car for the length of their holiday, but these were not explicitly considered.

These extracts suggest that whilst attractions were not actively considered when choosing the destination, visitors did expect the destination to offer things to see

and do at the destination. The concept of consumer value offers some insight here. Consumer value is defined as “the consumers overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given” (Zeithaml 1988, p.14). It can also be referred to as ‘perceived value’ (Gallarza and Gil Saura 2020), or ‘exchange value’, resulting from an evaluation of the trade-off between perceived benefits and the perceived costs (Oh 1999; Petrick 2002; Varshneya et al. 2017). Sheth et al. (1991) developed a framework to identify the influence of consumption values on the consumer’s choice. Sheth et al. (1991) identified five consumption values: functional value, social value, emotional value, epistemic value, and conditional value. They argued that it is likely that a mix of these values will influence choice. Previous research on destination choice supports this argument, finding that all these value dimensions influence choice (Denys and Mendes 2014; Phau et al. 2014; Tapachai and Waryszak 2000). What is considered most important here is the functional value of attractions to the destination, derived from the “possession of salient functional, utilitarian, or physical attributes” (Sheth et al. 1991, p.160). They can be considered as ‘must-be’ (Kano et al. 1984), or ‘basic’ attributes (Macmillan and McGrath 1996), which visitors expect and take for granted that they will be available at the destination, otherwise they will be dissatisfied (Wittel et al. 2013).

This dissatisfaction is illustrated by Emily, who shared her disappointment about a recent trip to Lanzarote:

We went to Lanzarote this year and again I didn't really research, again it was last minute, it was from Bournemouth and we wanted to get away so we did that but the resort was quite remote. It was a good 30 minutes walk into the main place where anything was going on and you did feel a bit, it was fine, the food was good but the entertainment was a bit rubbishy and lots of children and you just felt that it was too much of an effort, the walk, we did walk in the daytime to see what was there and have a coffee and come back but it was just that bit too far.

There was a nice promenade along the seafront that took you to the main village, there wasn't really that much there to be honest, in hindsight maybe we should have researched it a bit more and then we would have realised there was actually nothing really around whereas if we had been a bit more central we could have had the option to go out somewhere else if we wanted to.

Emilys’ disappointment reinforces the value attractions can provide at the destination, even if they were not important at the time of booking.

Avoiding distractions

Whilst these participants considered attractions later in the process, or booked with an expectation that there would be things to see and do at the destination, there were times where participants just wanted to relax, and they did not want any distractions. Tom stressed this when choosing to holiday in Gran Canaria, which was all about relaxing in good company:

So why did I decide Gran Canaria? The sun, this one is actually 4 hours flight so it was like okay, but usually the book will solve the problem. So it's about four hours. I always do this one. It could be Gran Canaria, it could be Tenerife or it could be any of the Canary Islands because they're just like next to each other to be honest.

For Gran Canaria, I only choose one type of hotels, and it's usually kind of a gay Boutique Hotel, and that's what I choose because Gran Canaria is a completely unattractive place for me, in terms of what's to see around, there is nothing to see. But it absolutely doesn't bother me.

So if I want to have something which is completely full relaxing, I would definitely choose a place which will be quiet, meaning not too many tourists as well. So probably will be a little bit boring place. I did check what there was to do before but honestly, there was nothing to check, there is just like two places worth seeing.

For Tom, the trip was purely to relax, so whether there were things to see and do at the destination was excluded from his decision making. The exclusion of attractions to be able to relax is also evident for Emily, who returns to the same apartment in Gran Canaria every year with her husband:

We went to Gran Canaria last year as well, we tend to, whenever we come back from holiday I'm straight on there (taps computer) 'right where are we going next', erm but we do tend to do Gran Canaria every year, probably January March time, so I will try and get that booked up pretty soon, just so we can get a good deal. We go back to the same apartment which is right in the centre of Playa Del Ingles, great views because it is quite a tall block and from your balcony you can look over towards the sea and the town, you know what you are going to get and it is quite cheap, erm, and it is right in the middle of everything with all the bars and shops, so we go self-catering when we do that so we go out every night to eat, during the day we might go to the beach or just stay on the balcony. And this block of apartments has a roof terrace on the top so you can sit up there, and the views are just fantastic. It is fab.

When we go to Gran Canaria we only go for a week, but it is a full week because as soon as we get there we relax because we know what to do and where to go, there's no 'let's go out and explore', you know it so you don't have to, we can go to an old restaurant or go

out and find a new one if we wanted to, but we can take it as it is really, there's no kind of pressure to feel like you have to go and explore.

For these participants, the main purpose of their trip was to relax, and visiting a destination they are familiar with removes any pressure to visit (Stebbins 2000). For these trips, attractions can be considered as 'inconsequential' (McKercher 2016), or 'irrelevant' (Goldstein and Busemeyer 1992), even 'trivial' (Miljkovic et al. 2003), as visitors do not have a preference for these attributes, and they have no influence on the decision to visit.

Summary

This chapter has highlighted the influence attractions have when choosing the destination. For many, attractions played an important role, influencing the choice of destination and the desire to see specific attractions or engage in activities. They knew of these attractions before booking, and some had a stronger desire to visit based upon a personal connection, from what they had learnt about them, or through family connections. These attractions also inspired them to research the destination further before booking. For others, the choice was more about the destination providing the environment for them to engage in activities of relevance to them.

Some participants talked more about the place itself, so it is harder to be clear on the role attractions play here. However, it is suggested from the participants narratives that they play a role in the destination image, which influences choice, and for destinations they are less familiar with, they look for what there is to see and do before booking.

Finally, participants also talked of trips where attractions were not explicitly considered before travelling to the destination. This could be because they travelled with an expectation that there will be things to see and do at the destination, or they waited until after booking to research what was there, or simply they wanted to relax, and attractions offered no perceived benefit to them.

These findings add to existing frameworks which highlight the influence of attractions on destination choice. Leiper (1990) identified primary attractions, which influence destination choice, and secondary attractions, which on their own do not

play a significant role in the decision. For McKercher (2017), attractions are either important or not important in driving demand to a destination. These findings offer a deeper insight into the varying role attractions play when choosing a destination. The next chapter expands on the role of attractions prior to the visit, after they have booked the main elements, and start to plan and prepare for the trip.

CHAPTER 8: PREPARING FOR THE TRIP

Introduction

This chapter explores the planning and preparing participants undertook after booking the main transport and accommodation elements. Many decisions are made after the destination itself has been chosen (Yagi and Pearce 2019), following a sequential process (Payne et al. 1993; Park and Fesenmaier 2014). When preparing for a trip, tourists may gather further information (Bieger and Laesser 2004; Hyde 2004; Yagi and Pearce 2019), and develop plans to guide their behaviour at the destination (Hyde 2008; Park and Fesenmaier 2014). The level of information tourists gather can vary by the type of trip, as well as the characteristics of the tourists (Fodness and Murray 1999; Hyde 2004). Recognising that tourists may have different approaches to preparing for the trip (Becken and Wilson 2007; Hyde 2008; Hwang and Fessenmaier 2011), this chapter explores the research and planning undertaken by participants. Whilst discovering and planning was an iterative process, they are discussed separately here, to highlight the different approaches taken. This helps illuminate the importance of attractions after booking. The following themes emerged:

- Discovering more about the destination
 - Finding things to see and do
 - Learning about the place
 - Looking for something different
 - Delaying discovery until the trip
- Planning what to do
 - Planning to fit it all in
 - Arriving with options
 - Making the unknown known
 - Building anticipation

Discovering more about the destination

Whilst some participants researched the destination in detail before booking, where accommodation or attractions and activities were important when selecting the destination, a more common approach was to secure the main flights and accommodation, with a general idea of what the destination offered. After booking, participants gathered more information on the destination, in terms of things to see

and do, the local culture and history, and anything new or different it offered. Others took a more relaxed approach, and were happy to wait until the trip to discover more about the place.

Finding things to see and do

For trips where attractions were the main inspiration when selecting the destination, participants researched the destination in more detail, to discover what else the destination offered. Bill is planning a trip to Croatia and Montenegro, having been inspired by the castles used as locations in the Game of Thrones series. After booking cheap flights and the accommodation, he explores in more detail what there is to see and do:

We normally know what we want to do before we go somewhere. We read up and take tips from our friends, watch vlogs. So a friend of mine, he went there with his wife, maybe March or April, and they only went for two or three nights, but they did a lot, and their photos looked really good. They had like, you know, they went to a restaurant on top of Dubrovnik that had the panoramic views that look really nice. So I approached him, I said, can you give me your tips, and again when he sent them through they sort of chimed with what we'd want to do as well. So that made it easier.

Bill looked for tips on what to see and do. James also wanted to gather more information for a trip to Krakow, mainly inspired by the war time attractions:

We visited it as we knew it had a lot of war time things to see. We probably planned it six months in advance, booked it six months in advance, the flight and accommodation, Lisa takes care of all that and closer to the time, maybe two weeks, a week before, I would start to pay a bit more attention to what there is to do there. I look at the Lonely Planet in advance and check stuff out in Wikipedia. And there's a series of guides on Eastern European capital cities called 'In Your Pocket' written by expats who are staying in those places. So I tend to look at those as well. Obviously the main things in Warsaw, the Palace of Culture in the old town and things like that, so we made a point of doing all those, and I wanted to visit the site of the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial and things like that. We knew we were going to go to Auschwitz, and we were going to visit like the Schindler's Factory and so on.

James undertakes more detailed research into the destination and attractions offered nearer the time. Harry visited Normandy with his family, and whilst they were also aware of the main places to visit, they researched what was there further, before planning what to see and do:

So the whole trip was because of D-Day. Obviously I knew the main sites, but my daughter did some research to fit it all in. She really wanted to go to Omaha Beach, she's watched Saving Private Ryan,

and then of course the British beaches where her granddad landed, so it was a matter of seeing what was there, and making a schedule which worked.

After being attracted by the main sites, participants then engage in further research to see what else the destination offered, which adds to the appeal of the destination (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002; Yagi and Pearce 2019). Gathering knowledge of what else is available informs their subsequent planning (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002), reducing the risks and uncertainties involved in making future decisions (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002; Cai et al., 2004; Sirakaya and Woodside 2005; Decrop and Snelders 2005). Building a bank of knowledge helps with making these choices (Bloch et al. 1986). It provides them with an assortment to choose from, providing flexibility and freedom of choice (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002; Broniarczyk 2006; Chernev et al. 2015; Scheibehenne et al. 2010).

This was particularly evident for multi-destination trips, which are complex to plan, involving many sub-decisions (Fesenmaier and Jeng 2002; Hyde 2008). Participants on these trips undertook further research once the international flights were booked. For Lily, it was more about the activities when booking her trip to Australia, but she also wanted to make the most of it when there:

Normally we tend to like spending two days at the place, you have a day to get there and a whole day to see what's there, some places don't, don't justify that and we just have one day. Some places we had three or four days and they were places we really wanted to spend around, where there's more things around them I wanted to see, or relax. One place we really liked the look of was Margaret River. So we made sure we spent longer there because we just thought it was going to be a surfie / vineyardy relaxing place, everything I wanted in Margaret River. Some places you're travelling through, you're literally doing them as a stopover because you just need a stopover. So it's a little bit based on what we thought there was around those areas or whether it was an area we were going to really just flop out for a couple of days.

Discovering more about what the different places offered informed their more detailed itinerary planning, including where to visit, and how long to stay in each place (Fodness and Murray 1997). Mandy also researched the destination further after booking her international flights to South America:

We sort of realized that as you Google South America more, and think, if you put like things to do in South America or places to see there's so much that comes up, and the more you read about it the more you want to see. There's a lot of travel blogs. I'd say any trip like that, I've always read someone's blog, or a couple of people's because some people can be a bit biased.

Mandy sought out as much information as possible to inform their planning, suggesting a 'comprehensiveness goal' in her information search (Zarezadeh et al. 2023). This research led to them developing a list of places they wanted to visit, and from this they sorted the itinerary. It reflects a desire to make the most of an expensive trip, and not waste time:

I didn't want to waste days. I don't like wasting days when I'm somewhere because I didn't want to find myself being in the first country for, like, a month and then realising I have to miss out on another country because I've spent too much time dilly-dallying around. I think this is probably another reason why we chose South America and not Asia, because I think Asia is big for the whole hanging out vibe, taking it as it is, like finding yourself moment, which is just not what we wanted. But we wanted the experiences. We wanted the activities. I don't know if, I know other people have been traveling to other parts of the world and they, I know they don't do as much. Obviously you have an idea of what you want to do, and honestly if we had not planned it and booked the amount we had, I don't think we would have done as much.

For Mandy, this research meant they did not waste time at the destination, highlighting the role of information search in also ensuring efficient consumption (Vogt and Fesenmaier 1998).

Others booked their destination with a more general image of what the destination offered. This was informed by their knowledge of the main attractions, and limited research was conducted before choosing the destination. Unlike her South America trip, Mandy booked her city break to Budapest based upon a general idea that there were interesting places to visit. She then researched the destination further, and realised how much there was to see and do:

To be fair with that one we did a lot more research, because I think Budapest has quite a lot to do, and it was only three nights. So we googled quite a lot, we knew exactly what we wanted to do....

For Olivia, the romantic image of Venice was the main reason they booked a long weekend to Venice, and then they researched what else was there, beyond the main sites they were aware of:

Like we sort of looked at what there was to do, I was only there for like four nights, so we wanted to make the most of it and do as much as we could while we were there, and so obviously we did like research the different islands that we could go to. It was all online, I'd just be like things to do in Venice or whatever. I think I remember TripAdvisor was probably one of the first things that came up. It was mainly reviews, like they were quite descriptive about it and sort of describe what was there and what you could do.

I guess St Mark's Square was probably a big thing, because obviously like that's their main attraction. I felt like we wanted to go in the cathedral and stuff, experience their culture, the buildings. Yeah and we thought we'd do the islands, so there was like water buses that would sort of stop off like at each one so it was quite easy to sort of get around. I've heard a lot of people say that they only stop off at Venice for a day and then they just go somewhere else, but I think, I don't know how people do that really, because there's so much to explore.

So that would be the idea, that we intend to do it, we would research about things to do in Venice, so we sort of had that in the back of our minds. We really did want to do the gondola ride, like obviously we know it's so much money for what it is, it's like 50 euros, but we were like we have to do it.

Once booked based upon this general image, they started to do more research to see what was there. These included the main sites, but also the nearby islands, providing potential places to visit. This research allows them to know what the destination has to offer in more detail. As Tracy contended:

Yeah, I do take time to read up on the destination, because I don't like to just helicopter myself in and not know anything about where I am. You have to plan otherwise you can't do the things, because you can't just rock up and find the stuff you want to do. So most of the stuff I want to do I need to plan. I guess the excitement of discovering stuff is what I'm actually planning to discover, but unfortunately in order to discover it, I need to research it.

Again, this research added to the perceived value of the destination (Yagi and Pearce 2019), and provided them with options to select from when deciding what to do at the destination (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002; Chernev et al. 2015). However, it is noticeable that these participants engaged in more detailed research once the destination was booked. They book with a general knowledge of the destination, based primarily upon the destination image, and further research was conducted after, as the trip approaches. Construal level theory suggests that individuals will have a different mental representation of an object depending upon its psychological distance (Scarpi and Raggiotto 2023). Psychological distance reflects the perceived distance of an object or event, and this includes temporal dimensions for future events, and spatial elements for distant locations (Trope and Liberman 2010; Massara and Severino 2013). Where there is greater psychological distance, visitors gather less information before making a decision (Halamish and Liberman 2017). They are more likely to think at a more abstract level, rather than having concrete knowledge of what is there (Kumar et al. 2014). In a sense, when the trip is distant, tourists will focus on the desirable features, but

as it nears, they focus more on what is feasible (Li et al. 2019). For Olivia, the romantic image of Venice was the main attraction when booking, suggesting a motive for kinship and relationship enhancement (Pearce 2005; Filep and Matteucci 2020). Discovering more about the destination allows them to see what is feasible to meet their goals (Trope and Liberman 2010).

However, researching the destination in more detail can also put participants off the chosen destination. After enjoying her trip to Rome, Marie booked to go to Florence and Venice, but when researching further, she changed her mind:

I have booked to go to Florence and Venice but yes this is really bad, and I will go but what put me off that was I am not sure there's enough there for two weeks. I looked at it in detail. I've been to Rome, but I think I made a bit of a mistake because I love Rome, the ancient attractions and the buildings and stuff, and I felt like God, Italy's amazing for culture so I ought to go to the other places but then I realised they are what, what do you call it, Renaissance cities and it didn't feel like I could spend two weeks there. I was going because of all the perception of all the culture, museums, buildings, you know the art, but I don't feel like, I am probably wrong, others will probably love it, but there's not enough there for two weeks. I was actually put off going for 2 weeks because there's no point me being in a city, even if it is beautiful, as a relaxing thing, I actually want to be busy when I'm in a city seeing things.

I don't know why the hell I did it. I started to realise in the last few weeks, I started to feel a bit claustrophobic about going to Florence for two weeks, like what will I do with myself. I was thinking like it is a lot of money, I don't want to relax in Florence, I can do that cheaper at home, so what will I do to fill every day? I have emailed the woman, and basically said I can't go cause my mum is ill, and she offered me the deposit toward a trip next year, and I will go to Florence for three or four days and then Venice.

What is interesting is that the fact that there was not enough to do became a concern after booking. She booked the flights and accommodation with a general idea that there would be lots to do, but further research suggested otherwise. As she moved from the desirable to the feasible stage, she recognised that there was not enough to do for two weeks, and the lack of attractions undermined the perceived value for money of the destination (Murphy et al. 2000; Sanchez et al. 2006).

Where attractions played less of a role at the time of booking, some participants did research the destination further after booking. Max booked a domestic holiday with his young family, and the location of nearby attractions swayed the balance

when booking a cottage. Once booked, they did some general research on the local area:

We looked at things to do in the area and I suppose there was like the local Tourism Board website which we looked at before we went. Yeah. I mean I left most of that to the wife, she was looking for things to do, we would have been looking for things like buggy friendly walks. You just Google buggy friendly walks and see what comes up, it may be that one of the top-ranked websites would have been like Mumsnet something like that. There are a couple of websites, I think there is a website which is basically like Buggy Walks.com, so it is something like that and it sort of says what's in the local area. Also local places and things of interest, like the Wildlife Park, Cotswold Wildlife Park, which has lions, it has rhinos, and then it's got like the smaller sort of like farmyard animals.

For Max, it was more about recommendations on what to do in the local area, again reducing uncertainty and providing options to select from (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002; Chernev et al. 2015). For Harry, after selecting a villa for a family holiday to Menorca based upon the location of a nearby beach, other features became important:

Part of the family thing is that we'll probably book the whole holiday six months in advance, and we'll talk around what we're going to do, and where we're going to go, and if anything new has come up. Because there are basically three sets of people, maybe four, and we're all looking at ooh that's come up this year, or there was a new restaurant this year and we drove past it but no, it wasn't any good. This is probably the part in the afternoon and the dinner. Unless it's occasionally it's a whole day trip into Mahone or something like that, you know, mainly shopping. All of my family, and I'm not immune from this, want to come back with something to remember the holiday for, and in days gone past It was the donkey with a sombrero. No, I don't mean that literally, we haven't got any of that at home, but my mob always want to come back and 'I bought this dress in Menorca' or something like that.

For Harry, part of the pre-trip experience is discussing what to see and do, but rather than engaging in further research, as they are already familiar with the destination (Zarezadeh et al. 2023), they rely primarily on their existing, internal, knowledge (Vogt and Fesenmaier 1998; Gursoy and McCleary 2004).

For these participants, attractions are checked before booking, and also play a role after as they prepare for the trip. However, the importance should not be overstated, as the research is more cursory, just looking for things to do in general. This is further illustrated when Max recounted a family trip to Corfu, where the villa was the main factor when selecting the destination:

Once that was sorted [the villa], we do look a bit at what is there, looking at local towns. We rented cars, so could go on a couple of excursions for a day. I knew the main town, it had like a fort. Yeah, it's basically just to have a look and see you know, and it sounds a bit sort of unappreciative, but it's just something to do.

Attractions simply provide 'something to do'. Yet, research conducted after booking can lead to further inspiration to discover more when at the destination. Tom recently went on holiday to France, where the main pull was the villa. Once booked, they received a brochure from the owners of the villa:

The owners of the villa, when we booked the rooms, they contacted us and they made something great, which I still even have at home, they sent to us a guidebook that they made themselves. This guide book is about 30 pages, and it's about everything that you want to do within about 50/60 kilometres around the villa. An unbelievable thing because not only do you have like, really little places that you would never even find on TripAdvisor or Google Maps. They knew them because they had been living there for 25 years. So honestly, it was like, that sounds interesting, I want to go there, from browsing through that guidebook.

So TripAdvisor and all the Google stuff was not really helpful in that case, the guidebook that the owners of the villa prepared was like a Bible for the whole place around. If I go to a certain city, let's say that it's going to be Paris, and I wanted to spend in Paris 4 days. I will definitely read as much as I can before, and make the list of what places I would like to see, because that four days is what I exactly pay for in that town. So I want to see as much as I can. Whereas when I go to some, let's say that look in the middle of nowhere, but there is a nice beautiful town 25 kilometres away, where I can spend a day or half a day or maybe even two three hours, I just go there and walk around the city centre, the old markets, something around it, but rather not knowing exactly what I can find on my way. So I'm not prepared. I'm prepared to go and see the town but I'm not prepared what's in the town to be honest. It's rather discovering. It's surprise, the element of surprise, and sometimes the surprise is good and sometimes the surprise is bad. It is sometimes the possibility that you can make completely unplanned decisions that can also make a place interesting.

For Tom, learning more about what the destination offered added to his interest, opening up possibilities to explore and discover the local area, building excitement for the trip and adding to the attractiveness of the destination (Wei et al. 2019).

For others, the trip was booked with little consideration of attractions. Rather, attractions were considered not to be important, or there was an expectation that there would be things to see and do at the destination. James has been on several cottage holidays in the UK. They select a cottage based upon its location, looking for an isolated place to relax. Attractions are not explicitly considered when booking, rather they book with an expectation that there will be things to see and do. However, attractions do seem to be important, as further research is conducted after booking:

And you know, we buy a Lonely Planet guide to each part of the country, but we very rarely open it before we get there. Now, okay, when we go to these places, I often go out for walks, but not always, and you know, you can walk anywhere. I mean every destination we go to, I buy the map of it and will spend quite a lot of time poring over the map. I do do that before we go there, to look at where we are staying and what there is around, and yeah what walks are available and things like that, and the holiday we've got planned for this summer in two weeks is in Saunton in North Devon, and you know, I bought the map, I've looked at the map and spent quite a lot of time on Sunday looking at it on Google Earth and Google Maps. And in fact, I was researching things to do in the area, but they tend to be like coastal walks or natural features, local geology, stuff like that. I've looked at it on the map and on Google Earth and Google Maps and on Wikipedia, and making a note of things to visit there, because it's, it's an area of natural heritage, you know there's the biggest sand dune complex in England there. And so I've kind of clocked these places, doesn't necessarily mean I will visit them. There's the only surviving example of a Saxon three field system about a mile away from where we are staying, so I'll probably trek out to look at that. So again, we got the guidebook and we'll open it when we get there, and that might tell us about towns and attractions to visit, but personally I start off with a map.

In preparation for the holiday, he primes himself by looking at maps to get an idea of where he could walk to, studying natural features which look interesting. He also buys a guidebook, but they do not read this until they arrive. Tracy also explored the local area after booking a package holiday to Croatia, to see what else was on offer:

I liked the idea of biking, so I did have a look, I mean I did look at historic places, and caves and that sort of stuff. Similar to riding, in that how far you could go and what the routes were like away from it, so what you could get to essentially. I have to admit I wasn't that keen on going, it could be boring, I mean in terms of doing interesting things outside. So I presumed it was, I looked on it as just a physical activity holiday.

Mandy likewise did some cursory research after booking a package holiday to Lanzarote, to relax in the sun:

I kind of Googled things to do and I had just got my scuba diving Padi, So I did Google scuba diving spots to see if it was worth doing, or like any sort of activities we can do, but we didn't do anything. I thought it was good that you could do it, but I didn't know if it was worth it, because the quality of the sea. Like you couldn't see as much and also, well, it's the Mediterranean Sea, not the Atlantic, yeah, so I sort of like looked at pictures of other people's scuba diving experiences, and I thought 'that's not going to be the same as the experience I had previously', so I didn't bother. So I thought it was good that they offered it, but I didn't think it was worth the money to do it to be honest. I also looked at, like you know those little boat tour type things and it takes you around, like a boat trip that shows you the sites, and you can jump off, kind of a mixture of everything. I mean I'm saying this, we didn't do this either but, you can tell the kind of week it turned into! I think it does make it more attractive as a destination to know that there are things that you can do, like before you go, obviously once you're there, like to be honest we just couldn't be bothered. I don't think it would have, and this is only the Lanzarote one, I think other holidays it probably would add more, but I don't think a boat trip around the island would have added a great deal to our experience of the week. Whereas if it was somewhere like Bali or Gili Islands, more like one of those paradise sort of destinations, I think a boat trip or some sort of activity like that adds a lot more to the experience of the holiday.

After booking, Mandy looked for things to do, considering scuba diving and a boat tour, and these added to the appeal, again highlighting the importance of options before the visit (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002; Hart and Rafiq 2006; Scheibehenne et al. 2010), which add to the anticipation of the trip (Decrop and Snelders 2005).

Looking for options after booking is also evident for Olivia, when going on a family holiday to Tenerife last year:

I think like on the TUI website they sort of give you suggestions on like stuff that is there, and excursions stuff and we do sort of look into that sometimes. I guess just to sort of have something in the back of your mind like, so you've got not like a solid plan, but like just so you've got something in the back of your mind that if you do feel like doing that one day, then you'd go because obviously there were the reps at the hotel that sort of inform you about stuff to do and like, they'd be like, oh we're going on an excursion tomorrow if you're interested in that sort of thing. So we wouldn't always like look at everything on the website beforehand, because a lot of it is at the destination. I mean if I'm honest I probably didn't last time, I think like as long as it's good weather and I think..... it's just different from home. So it's just like it will be like a nice break because it's just a change of scenery and that would be different anyway.

It is evident that these participants put less effort into researching and discovering the destination. This reflects their level of involvement, as tourists will put more effort into an activity when they perceive it to be significant, or important, to them (Gursoy and McCleary 2004; Prebensen et al. 2014). Involvement can be broadly defined as an “unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest toward a recreational activity or associated product” (Havitz and Dimanche 1999, p.123). Beatty et al. (1998) distinguished between two types of involvement: ego involvement and purchase involvement. It is purchase involvement which is of particular interest here, defined as “the level of concern for, or interest in, the purchase process” (Beatty et al. 1988, p.150). Further, Cai et al. (2004, p.140) proposed the idea of ‘purchase decision involvement’ within tourism, defined as “behavioural involvement in the purchase decision domain”. This reflects the amount of time and effort individuals put in to making the decision. They developed a scale ranging from a high level of purchase decision involvement, where the tourist has already selected a destination and searches for more information, to a low level of purchase decision involvement, where tourists have less interest and gather less information. Applying this scale, participants who engaged in limited research after booking displayed a low level of involvement, suggesting a lower level of interest in attractions.

Learning about the place

For others, rather than discovering what to see and do, they talked more about learning about the wider destination, in terms of its history and culture. After booking their family holiday to Kefalonia, Mark read up on the country:

I read a few books online, the Rough Guide, talked to a couple of people who have been there, friends of mine, not much research but a little bit, just to know a bit more really, a little bit about the history, yeah. I knew it had beautiful scenery and beaches, but didn't realise it had a lot of history there as well, the Venetians and other people had invaded it over the years, and it was occupied in the war, so that's what makes it more interesting.

As well as discovering things to see and do, Bill also likes to read up on the destination:

I like, just knowing a bit about the place, you know the people, the food, the history. We sort of pick up some knowledge about the place, and learning about the history, just so you've got an actual passing interest in it. So, you know, I guess it gives you a little bit more depth of knowledge, depth of feel when you go. Yeah, it educates you.

We've also bought a Lonely Planet guide, which is almost like, I almost think we don't have time to digest everything that, one we're reading, and two we're looking at, yeah, then when we get there, are we over informed, or are we a bit bias in terms of, yeah it's interesting. But I think we'll have a great time. I like to be informed. I think you know, if you are more informed about say the decade or century this became that, it gives you a little bit more understanding of, you know, the scale of the history. But also sometimes like it is beyond your comprehension, you're be like that's 2,000 years ago, it's quite a lot.

He does question the amount of research they do, wondering if you can have too much information before the visit and if this may influence how you see the destination, but reassures himself that he prefers this than to not know what is there. In a sense, as with James and others, they arrive 'primed' to see the destination, and this knowledge allows them to potentially develop a deeper understanding of the destination (Moscardo 1996). It reflects Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of cognitive needs, where individuals may search for more information, to make sense and understand.

This wider knowledge of the destination may have a role in reducing uncertainty and informing subsequent choices, but it also seems to have a broader role. This knowledge turns unfamiliar destinations into familiar ones (Yagi and Pearce 2019), and helps build their expectations (Bieger and Laesser 2004). The desire to know is also a key dimension of curiosity, labelled as epistemic curiosity (Berlyne 1960), or joyous exploration (Kashdan et al. 2020). It can result from a feeling of deprivation, when an individual feels there is a gap in their knowledge (Loewenstein 1994; Litman and Jefferson 2004), or where they feel it would be enjoyable to learn something new (Litman and Jefferson 2004; Kashdan et al. 2018). Whilst a gap in the knowledge seems to partly drive Mark's research into the history of Corfu, it appears that for these participants, gaining knowledge seems to be an enjoyable experience, adding to their interest in the destination and building expectations. This is further illustrated by Tom, who read up on the destination after booking his villa holiday in France:

I like historical things, I like them very much. I read a lot about historical buildings, history periods, so I like to match whatever I have read about in the books. Like for example, when we went to France, the Katar country, the south of France, I read about three or four books, and when I think about seeing a place, I already have some, something in my imagination, and then I just want to see if that actually is true, or I'm looking for some specific elements like, oh, yeah, they said about that. Like the goose image in the Rose,

you know glass, somewhere in the church, and I just remember what was it?

This level of knowing increases his interest and desire to explore the destination when there (Kashdan et al. 2004).

Looking for something different

As well as the main tourist sites, some participants also planned to discover something different, unique or quirky at the destination. Vogt and Fesenmaier (1998) proposed that gathering information on new or different experiences is an important part of tourists' information search. This can be for multiple needs, a desire for the unfamiliar, or for distinction (McAlister and Pessemier 1982). Lily looked for something different when visiting Australia:

And the sea lion tour, that was one thing we really wanted to do. We heard about the sealions from one of Catherine's friends and she had done the Whale shark dive, and when we were looking it up she said she thought the sea lion, she did it too, and she said it was so good, she thought it was better than the whale shark. Yeah, that was a one-off thing which you couldn't do anywhere else.

Something different also appealed to Bill when sorting their honeymoon to Sri Lanka:

So then we started organising it all, and, you know, off the coast of Marissa is apparently the best place in the world to see blue whales in the wild. So that was a big tick for me because I love nature. So that was a definite. And then they had national Safari Parks, you got to see wild elephants, and you know other animals like buffalo and whatever else, so that was great as well, the fact you can see wild elephants.

These experiences offer unusual and exciting experiences, reflecting the 'desire for the unfamiliar' (McAlister and Pessemier 1982), and more specifically the 'thrill' and 'adventure' dimensions of novelty identified by Lee and Crompton (1992).

Rather than thrills or adventures, some participants looked for something different from the usual tourist sites. Tom always looks for something different when enjoying city breaks with his friends:

With these short trips the summertime we don't try to do too much, a lot of research, because it's for a very short time. So we only want to see the highlights if we have never seen them. Highlights is like the most, the super tourist places, but always we have to pick something like quirky, something that will be fun. Like, I don't know, riding a tram for half of the day, just to see some kind of places. So

something that for other people could be, for example, a waste of valuable time, but for us these three days is actually a waste of time, because we want to waste it on being in that town, and not exactly see everything in that town.

Graham also likes to find something a bit different from the usual tourist sites:

So I look on TripAdvisor, like everyone does, and you can get some ideas there. But then I like to look at the comments people leave, and usually they also have their own websites that they link to in the comments, like for travel diaries, travel journals, travel blogs, that kind of thing. Then I read those, because they can give you much better information about what is there, and how to see places that people normally don't see because they don't know about them.

Mandy likes to find something different to see and do when researching the destination further:

Sometimes if I get bored and looking at the things, the obvious things, I'll Google 'different things to do' or like 'alternative'. I always like to do something that's a little bit off, different.

These participants look for something different from the usual tourist itinerary, to go 'off-the-beaten-track' (Seeler et al. 2022) and have 'off-the-mass-tourism' experiences (Lim and Bouchon 2017). For Tom, this is to spend time in the destination, to live like a local (Lim and Bouchon 2017), and get a deeper understanding of the place (Seeler et al. 2022). For Graham and Mandy, it is more about seeing places other tourists do not see, which may reflect a desire to see themselves as different from other tourists, a desire for social distinctiveness (McAlister and Pessemier 1982).

Jane also likes to discover something different, to 'surprise' her partner when there, adding something special to the trip. They travel every year for a summer holiday with the family, where the main purpose is just to relax. She is planning a trip to Majorca this summer:

So I will look at TripAdvisor for photos. But now I like the blogs and stuff, because it tells you a little bit more. Like I'll find someone that's got a similar family make up to us and see what it might be like and stuff. We don't like to just lay in the sun 24/7. So we like to have a day, kind of chilling out, and then a day where we do like this mystery tour, and we'll just get in the car and drive and see what we find. Although I do manipulate this, so I look up stuff that I want to get to see in advance. And then I say to Ian 'Oh, let's go down here' and he's like, 'oh my God, this is amazing'.

For Jane, she wants to ensure she discovers different things, but also wants to keep the surprise element for her partner when there, highlighting the ‘surprise’ dimension of novelty (Lee and Crompton 1992).

Searching for something different echoes the research into the importance of novelty within tourism. This can be traced back to the work of Cohen (1972; 1974), who recognised “the expectation of pleasure derived from novelty or change as the central non-instrumental purpose of the tourist trip” (Cohen 1974, p.533). More recently, it has been highlighted as a key component in creating memorable tourism experiences (Kim et al. 2021). It is seen as a catalyst for emotions and memory (Blomstervik and Olsen 2022), and can drive positive emotions of delight, interest and surprise (Skavronskaya et al. 2020). Whilst there are many studies on novelty and destination choice (e.g. Lee and Crompton 1992; Petrick 2002; Weaver et al. 2009; Assaker et al. 2011; Assaker et al. 2014), few have considered novelty within the different destination elements. Legohérel et al. (2012; 2015) focused on variety seeking and how this differed between product categories within a destination, but did not consider attractions. The above accounts suggest that novelty offered by attractions can play an important role for visitors. The desire for something different recounted above also reflects a growth in ‘experiential travel’ (Bock 2015, p.20), where visitors desire to “experience destinations viscerally” and “they want individual experiences that are entirely their own”.

Delaying discovery until the trip

Not all participants looked to discover more about the destination before travelling. For relaxing trips, usually to the sun, it was more about the accommodation or resort itself, and what the destination had to offer was of less importance. Whilst some participants talked of going to see and do things at the destination before booking, they conducted little or no research after booking. Bieger and Laesser (2004) identified a similar cluster in their research of Swiss tourists, who made limited research after committing to the destination. Indeed, Fodness and Murray (1999) contend that many visitors do not engage in in-depth research. Acknowledging Cai et al.’s (2004) scale, these participants displayed a low level of involvement, suggesting a lower level of interest in finding things to see and do after booking their trip. However, analysis of their narratives suggests there may be other reasons for not engaging in further research. For some, this was purely due to a lack of time. As Tracy lamented:

You know, I don't have the headspace to read up about it before I go. It's work, I'm always having to, you know, manage the properties and look after the other Investments. It's only when there's a bit of time carved out, and it's like going on this trip, because there's an eight hour flight, so before I go I will stock up my iPad with things I want to read on holiday. I will be checking about whether there's any spiders in Vermont!

The transactional view of information search proposes that tourists will engage in research where the benefits outweigh the costs, which include time and effort (Vogt and Fesenmaier 1998; Bieger and Laesser 2004). For Tracy, research still seems to hold value, rather it is more of a temporal issue of when to fit it in, and she intends to gather more information enroute to the destination. For others, it was more of a conscious choice, enjoying the freedom of not planning, and wanting to discover the destination when there. For Harry, attractions influenced the choice of Genoa as a city break, but they did not research the destination after booking:

We played it by ear, but we had noticed some particular palaces that were supposed to be splendid. What we did was completely unplanned really, I think it was less complicated because it was only my wife and myself, and that was far easier. Was it the freedom, was it the fact that we both, for a city break there was no planning beaches or anything like that. It was how can we occupy ourselves with things to look at when we get there, and we enjoyed that.

This provided Harry with a sense of freedom, removing the pressure to discover and plan the destination, which he must do when travelling with his extended family, to make sure everyone's needs are met. Olivia also mentioned this sense of freedom:

I do like the idea of exploring when there really, and the spontaneity. I went to Barcelona with my cousin and sort of did like a similar thing. That was when I was 18, and that was just looking on our phones when we got there and planning it like that. I think if you like, if you're too rigid about planning all your holidays, you don't feel as relaxed, sometimes you sort of want to go with the flow, it feels more natural.

For Olivia, holidays are all about the freedom to explore, and she enjoys travelling to the destination with just a general idea of what is there. This is also the case for her forthcoming trip to Croatia:

The itinerary isn't like full on at the moment. So I think that kind of excites us a little bit, because like we can make up our own mind about what we want to do when there. I think we will research a little bit, but my friend is sort of like spontaneous as well. Like she'll sort of like just walk and see where we go. We don't always have an idea, sometimes if it looks like it is busy in a certain direction we might go there and see what other people are doing.

These participants talk of enjoying a sense of freedom, been able to just relax and avoid the pressure to research and plan before the trip. Smallman and Moore (2010) recognised the importance of freedom to tourists during the decision-making process, and Smith (1994) considered freedom of choice to be a key element of the tourism product. For these participants, initial research when booking provided a general idea of what was there, suggesting there would be enough to choose from. Li et al. (2016) note that freedom is also a basic human need, and all humans have a desire for freedom. Caruana and Crane (2011, p.1497) argue that within tourism research, a 'compensator' view is often taken, "where liberation through tourism compensates for persistent negative stimuli in everyday life", reflected in the need to escape (Dann 1977; Crompton 1979; Iso-Ahola 1982). This sense of freedom mentioned by participants may also reflect this, where they want to be free from obligations. For instance, when asked why he did not research and plan in any more detail after booking, Michael countered:

Because I think that would make it too structured, I think you need to have some sort of flexibility on holiday. Because you're on holiday you don't want to plan a schedule on holiday do you.

The idea of being on holiday is to be free from, away from work and other obligations (Li et al. 2016). Caruana and Crane (2011) stress an alternative view of freedom, 'freedom as licence', where individuals are free to do as they wish. This idea of freedom is evident for Olivia, who looks forward to being free to explore as they wish.

Participants also talk of enjoying the spontaneity. Emily has an interesting take on discovering the destination before visiting. She is planning a trip to Ljubljana next summer:

Sometimes I feel if you do too much research you then spoil the surprise of what that place has got to offer. You know, sometimes when they have all the pictures and stuff, I don't necessarily want to see all that because I want to see it for my myself. I just want to see like a list of 'oh if you're going to Ljubljana do this, this and this'. So for Ljubljana, obviously I saw there was a picture of Lake Bled and a picture of you know, the Lakes but I found a site where she just listed 'oh go here, here and then click on this link here', so I probably prefer to do that because then I can see it when I get there, I can go 'Oh my God, look at that, it's amazing'. Whereas if you've already seen it, its like ' Oh, yeah. Okay'.

That will probably be a week, well if we go for a week it might be, because there's only going to be so much you can do so you're going to have to have a couple of days where you are kind of chilling,

so we have to find a hotel that either has a pool or somewhere where you can just chill.

For Emily, there needs to be enough knowledge to select the destination and to plan how long to stay, but there also needs to be the chance of discovery and surprise at the destination. For her, it is all about imagery: she wants to see it for the first time when there, so she can have that 'wow' moment. Hyde (2008) suggested that some tourists avoided detailed research as they had a strong desire for novelty and surprise whilst at the destination. It provides the opportunity for spontaneity and happy surprises (Smith 1994), and enjoyment comes from "experiencing the unknown and unexpected" (Hyde 2004, p.163). The desire for freedom, and to enjoy discovering the destination when there, also appear to be reasons why some participants do not research the destination further, rather than necessarily having a lack of interest in what else is at the destination.

Planning what to do

After discovering what was there in more detail, many participants also planned what to see and do at the destination. Tourists develop plans to guide their behaviour at the destination (March and Woodside 2005; Hyde 2008). The approaches taken varied by both the type of trip and individual, ranging from detailed planning to a more spontaneous approach, where this was left until arrival.

Planning to fit it all in

After researching the destination, many participants then planned how to see and do as much as possible at the destination. Bill undertook a lot of research into what was there when planning his trip to Croatia, and then started to plan the itinerary:

We've booked into Dubrovnik for three days, and then we go to Montenegro. First stop is a place called Kotor and we stay there for three nights, and then the last place that's four days, that's Budvar. So, yeah, now we have the itinerary sorted. So on the first day, we've got a walking tour booked in, we booked that in online, I think through TripAdvisor. We've used a company called Sandalmans before, they do lots of different European cities and they tend to be quite good I think, that's what we done. So on the first day we want to find out about the place, and I think on the second day we're doing another tour but that's related to Game of Thrones. So we wanted to do a specific tour, you almost have two different tours. So you have the Game of Thrones one and a more history one. We booked that one as well. So I think for both we are going in the morning, and The Game of Thrones one is because we had to do it before the sea kayaking, so there was like a little window. We were trying to sort of fit in as much as possible. And then I think also we couldn't do the

evening version of the tour because we're going on a boat cruise with a dinner, and that's what our friends recommended. And then on the third day, which is our final day there, we're doing a trip into Mostar in Bosnia, so we're going there for a day and that's basically 12 hours, so we will be pretty tired.

In Montenegro again we have booked a walking tour. But I know for the last place we are staying in a more sort of high-end resort style hotel. Okay, so that will mean that we'll just probably not do as much exploring. That's the relaxed time at the end. Not the start. I think it's me who's paying for it, so I know it's more than the ones that she's paying for.

Bill researches the destination in detail, and books tours and builds a full itinerary, usually including a walking tour on the first day to explore the city. Rather than leaving anything to chance, everything is pre-planned. Mandy also planned to fit in as much as possible. After booking a long weekend to Budapest, she then realised there was a lot to see and do, so she had to plan to fit it all in:

I like to know that I've seen as much as I can. I think it's in, somewhere like Budapest, I think it's a day wasted if you sort of just sit around and not even bother to see it. It's that kind of holiday. I realize this is completely going back on what I'm saying about Lanzarote, this is what I'm struggling with.

So we booked that (river cruise) and we booked the spa. I can't remember the name of the spa, it's the outdoor one. I didn't want to miss out on that one. And I think that's like probably the biggest thing, other than maybe the castle. We booked that for the Saturday morning, because we found out that it was really popular for stag and hen parties in the afternoon or the evening.

There was nothing else we prebooked, but we knew pretty much exactly what we wanted to see, we knew we wanted to see Hero Square because that was by the spa. We knew we wanted to go up to the castle and get the sort of view over the Chain Bridge, and the Parliament building. So we Googled quite a lot, we knew exactly what we wanted to do. It was just a case of fitting it all in, so we walked everywhere.

Yeah, so I have a list of things I want to see, then I plan a route, and whatever doesn't fit into the route gets dropped, unless it's something like the biggest, or best ones, you know, you must see, so unless it's something like that, if it's going to take up more time than it's worth I'll get rid of it. So like in Budapest for example, I said we didn't go and see the Parliament building. I think originally that was in our plan, but it was just a case of that one, on the other side of the river and it was further away from where we were staying, so that kind of got knocked out and also, like doing that would have taken up as much time as say two of the other things.

These participants engaged in extensive planning (Fodness and Murray 1999), and develop quite rigid plans (Hwang and Fessenmaier 2011). When planning, the final selection of what to visit is influenced by what is feasible, based upon location, highlighting the importance of the spatial layout of attractions at the destination. This detailed planning ensures efficient consumption at the destination (Vogt and Fesenmaier 1998). The influence of the spatial layout of attractions at the destination was also mentioned by Jane:

You've only got a certain amount of time in cities. So let's look, at least know where you can get things and stuff, and not to waste time. So don't go 'oh we want to go to Central Park and we want to go see the Statue of Liberty, and then we want to go to Empire State Building', that's ridiculous, do it logically. So it's all about like, being efficient with your time.

This ordering and use of maps for spatial location helps prevent visitors becoming frustrated and wasting their time (Edwards and Griffin 2013). The importance of the spatial layout of attractions was also important for Emily on a city break to Krakow:

Yes so we kinda planned it. We did the walking stuff around the centre on the first day, mainly shopping. Next day we explored a bit further, we planned to see all the Jewish stuff, so we did more walking stuff on the second day.

This planning to fit in as much as possible reflects the desire to see as much as possible, which was previously found to be important for sightseers (Ross and Iso-Ahola 1991). More recently, Bock (2015) applied the social acceleration theory proposed by Rosa and Trejo-Mathys (2013), which outlines how the pace of modern life has increased in modern times. Bock (2015) argues that tourists feel a pressure to make the most of their time at the destination, as wider technological and social changes have led to an acceleration in the pace of life and a feeling that they have a 'lack of time', and they feel the need to fit in as much as possible to make the most of this scarce resource. This also relates to the functional benefit of seeing as much as possible to ensure value for money outlined previously (Sheth et al. 1991).

Another factor that went into the planning was the type of attraction, to almost theme different days. This can be seen when Emily talks of how she planned her trip to Krakow. Marie also planned her visit to Rome this way:

There's this sense that, you know there's so much to do, and you can't do everything, so you know it's a case of what are you going to manage in the morning and afternoon. So before we went there

was that sense of okay first day's the ancient stuff, next day Vatican, next day look around and come back. So I booked a trip to the Vatican and the Sistine Chapel, the Forum and the Coliseum through Viagogo I think, so the big you know tick the box ones. And I never ever do that normally, normally I just turn up and get the tickets, I am not sure why I did it, maybe it's because I thought, you know, really hectic, you know, it would be really busy, and it really was.

Rather than planning focusing on the location of attractions, Marie grouped attractions to visit based upon the perceived 'thematic complementarity' (Weidenfeld et al. 2010) of sites, most notably those related to the ancient history of Rome. This grouping of attractions by theme is also evident for Barbara, who planned to visit different types of attractions on different days, when visiting Paris with a group of friends. They arrived with a rough schedule on what to see and when, dividing the days up by type of attractions:

We had a rough plan on what to visit and when. I kind of already knew what was in Paris, because it's what I wanted to see basically, so then I told them and they're like, oh, well, we want to do this and kind of just made an itinerary up. I was really into art in high school, art and history, so I knew like of the main museums, so I picked the museums, and I picked Disney, and then they were like, okay we want to do a bit of shopping. So then that's how we organised it. So, I just looked I guess for the easiest way, where to stay, the easiest way to get to these attractions that I wanted to visit, and I planned it out when I had time.

The first day we booked a walking tour. That was in the afternoon, morning was like resting after the flight. The next day we went to the Eiffel Tower, on Tuesday, because they wanted to see it like right away, I guess because that's one of the reasons they went there, so it's like one of the attractions, they didn't want to hesitate to go. But the rest of the day was scheduled as a 'we'll decide when we get there' kind of day. Basically, we weren't sure. We scheduled a day for Disney, and we scheduled a day for museums. Disney was Wednesday, we just wrote it down. Friday visit the Palace day.

Theming the days by type of attraction also highlights the appeal of a variety of things to see and do at the destination, especially when travelling in a group (Lue et al. 1996):

I think different things is important, I guess with us we spend so much money to get over here, we don't want to come here to see just one type of thing. We want to see, get our money's worth sightseeing I guess. For instance I probably wouldn't like all museums for like a week, because it would be a lot, so that's why I wanted to visit Disney, and the Palace, which is still a museum in my eyes but it's a different type of museum. I guess you don't want to go to Paris and be like what did you do? Museums. Like that's too

one-dimensional, like there's more to somewhere than just that one type of attraction. And if you're traveling with a group, then you might want to do different things. So I think having something different is important.

Interestingly, they did not prebook attractions, as they wanted flexibility (Hwang and Fessenmaier 2011), and left detailed planning until they were all together and 'in holiday mode'. This preference for flexibility was also evident for other participants, as discussed below.

Arriving with options

Whilst several participants planned their trips in detail, others took a more flexible approach after researching the destination. Many participants had researched the destination in more detail after booking, providing a list of things to see and do to choose from, but itineraries were not planned in detail. James researched the destination to provide a list of things to visit on a city break to Rome:

A couple of years ago we went to Rome and obviously Rome you make a list. I didn't know anything about Rome, so yeah did internet research, read the Lonely Planet before we went there, so we had a list. It included the Vatican, it included the Colosseum, it included various fountains, Trevi Fountain, the steps, whatever they're called and various other things, and in that holiday, there was a sense of ticking off places on the list.

I think it's fair to say there is a list of attractions we must see, well I will definitely see, but as long as I see them by the end of the time I'm there, there is no priority in terms of which day I see it or anything like that. I think when we're there it's kind of just take it as it comes, but it will always be in the back of my mind that that is still to be visited and that has still to be visited, but the order that we do it in really doesn't matter.

James arrives with a list of things to see and do, but decisions on when to visit are "tentative and remain flexible" (Park and Fesenmaier, 2014, p.38). Olivia also talked about arriving with options to choose from:

You sort of have something in the back of your mind like, so you've got not like a solid plan, but like just so you've got something in the back of your mind that if you do feel like doing that one day, then you'd go. We sort of, it's like half and half I would say, like we sort of look at what there is to do, but we don't plan exactly what we will do.

This flexible approach was also evident for Lily:

Well whenever we go anywhere, so there might be ten things you're meant to see, and you think which two or three do you really want to go to, and then there might be four or five that if you get time when

we're there, it looks good, but we don't really fancy going to those ones at the end. So you just go by what you feel like doing.

This highlights the tentative nature of these plans, which are open to change once at the destination (Becken and Wilson 2007; Park and Roehl 2016). Having options allows for decisions to be deferred until at the destination, depending on how they feel at the time (McAlister and Pessemier 1982; Kahn 1995). This flexibility also allows participants to gather more knowledge of what is on offer when there. This was apparent for Lily on her long-haul trip to Australia, where prior research provided her with options to select from when there:

What I tend to do is not plan things too much in advance. What I was on the whole doing, as we go around, it's the day before you travel to the next place, you spend really a bit more time in detail looking at things, because you've forgotten, really, where you want to go. And then you actually have an image roughly in your mind the things you really want to go to when you get there, and then you do those when you get there.

She added to her prior knowledge by gathering more information at the destination, to inform her final decisions (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002; March and Woodside 2005).

Having flexible plans also allows participants to have time to discover more when there. Jane planned most of her trip to New York in detail, but left some freedom to explore:

We tend to plan to see one thing or a couple of things, and you tick them off as you go, and then just leave a little bit of time to just look up, like when you're in the cities you've always just go look up and see 'so pretty'.

So we'll have all the big things that we want to do, and then we'll just spend a day like just wandering around and finding coffee shops and stuff. Yeah, so we discover things when we're there but to discover them, what we often do is get on the Hop on Hop off bus. so we'll go around the whole entire lot and then go 'where do we want to go back to, what looked interesting?' And then we'll go and discover things that way.

This approach allows for them to enjoy the sense of discovery once at the destination (Smith 1995; Hyde 2008). Tom told a similar story:

I do plan it, at least with some like boxes. I make a list and it's like boxes to tick to be honest, but it's not that I have to tick all the boxes, because I don't consider my holidays to be like another shopping list that everything has to be ticked. I just cannot imagine it because it has to be relaxing. I wait until I get there, because sometimes you

feel sick after the trip. My partner has got some problems with sinuses when flying on the plane. So sometimes we need a day to cool off, then we just go by the list, but it's not like, this is Monday, this is Tuesday, this is Wednesday. No, that would be too much, crazy. I don't want this to be something super organized, or uber organised. I must have that possibility of saying I don't feel like going there today, let's leave it for some time in the future, or we'll just never see this. Usually when I decided to skip something, it's because we either have some stomach problems, or we've been hanging a little bit after the night before, and that's usually when you just want to just skip something. Then we usually stay somewhere in the hotel, or just go and visit the town that we are staying in, so just walk around, that's the thing, because you wanted to rest. Once, I don't remember exactly what it was, but I remember that we once skipped something because somebody told us in the place that it was shit, but I don't remember exactly what it was. So we crossed it out. You just ask the people, sometimes when you are in like a little hotel or like a guesthouse, people go usually to the same places that you are going to, so we can always ask them, is it worth it or not.

For Tom, flexibility not only allows him to change plans depending on how they feel when there, and gather more information locally, but also provides him with the sense of freedom he desires on holiday (Li et al. 2016). This was also echoed by Katrine, who wanted flexibility when travelling to Iceland with her friends and family:

I was like okay I want to go to Iceland, I just want to see Iceland. obviously like when we were planning on where to go, I googled Iceland things to do, but I did very little research, just knew there were beautiful things to see. After that, we stayed with Jane's uncle who's half Icelandic, and he was saying you should do this or we should do this, but he was like telling us stuff like which would have required like two weeks. But we were not too fussed, obviously we booked the Blue Lagoon, but I do feel it's a bit like, I think it's just we're all a bit like flexible and like relaxed about it. It was nice to see what was there, well, you know, so you have options, so if you want to you can go and have a wander round. But it's obviously like the ones you hear about which you want to see, like they got volcanoes, they got geysers they've got like amazing waterfalls like, there's all these things you hear about and obviously the Blue Lagoon. I know my mom she was very persistent, she was like we are going to the Blue Lagoon.

You have to book that now, but we were a bit unsure because apparently the weather warnings were a bit extreme. And because it's such like, it's not a big country but it's like long distances, so we were a bit worried about the weather and the driving, so we decided to wait till we were there to book it.

I was like I'm more of like when I go to places, I just want to like figure it out there, like what should we do, not plan like perfect. Because, then you get more, like you could like bump into somebody who's local and be like what should we do like, do you recommend

anything? Because then you get a bit more like a local point of view on it, which could be better than maybe like an Instagram point of view. I feel like you kind of can miss out on really beautiful places or spots, if you like, just going to the main ones.

I'm also like, happy to just like I don't know, go with the flow. If I've already like gone through what I like feel like I have to do, I'm just like wake up and like, what kind of weather is it today, what should we do?

Attractions play a key role in providing this flexibility and free choice. Having 'loose plans' (Becken and Wilson 2007) allows them to be flexible, depending on how they feel, information they gather at the destination, and offers the chance for discovery when there. This mirrors research in assortment planning, where having options adds to freedom of choice when choosing an assortment (Broniarczyk 2006; Scheibehenne et al. 2010; Chernev et al. 2015).

Making the unknown known

As well as helping to fit in what they wanted to see, this planning also had another function, to help orientate themselves at the destination. The need to plan to familiarise themselves is illustrated by Marie. Marie researched Rome further after booking:

It may be a personal thing, other people might like this feeling, but I hate feeling erm disorientated and I don't know where I am. So it's a mental thing, to make me feel more in control I guess. It is partly to locate myself so I have an idea of where things are so I don't feel overwhelmed and it's partly so I know what to fit in each day. You tend to have an image in your mind of what the place is like, it is things to do as well as the map, so I've got an internal map.

This uncertainty associated with visiting an unfamiliar destination may cause fear and anxiety for some visitors, and research and planning can help reduce this (Yagi and Pearce 2019). Specifically, Chang (2013) talks of wayfinding anxiety. This was evident for Mandy too, when planning her long-haul trip to South America:

One thing about traveling, it makes you really paranoid of people. I was fine to start with, but everyone's perception of it when you say 'oh I'm going to South America for three months' everyone goes 'ooh, I wouldn't do that'. So it was a lot of excitement, but then it became just nerves, I was like 'what the hell am I doing!' But that's where the research and the planning comes in. Yeah, it gets rid of that element of stress. Yeah, we had a list and then it became a map, so we knew exactly what we wanted to do.

Planning attractions helped her orientate herself in a new environment. These participants arrived with a representation in their mind of the destination, termed a cognitive, or virtual map (Xia et al. 2008; Chang 2013). This map provides a knowledge base of the destination, helping reducing uncertainty (Allen 1999).

The importance of building a mental map to orientate themselves at the destination was also evident for other participants, booking tours for when they arrived. Bill booked on to a walking tour on the first day when visiting Rome, to add to their knowledge of what was there:

Again, we booked our walking tour, booked in advance as well. We wanted to find out a little bit more, you know, in terms of, especially if you have a local who's telling you. So if we go abroad in Europe, that's one of the first things we'll do, book onto a walking tour, that will sort of give us the lay of the city, a bit of the history, a bit of the flavour.

Barbara also talked of the walking tour they booked for the first day in Paris:

The first day we did a walking tour, with a local, it was like three hours, just to show us around, or give us recommendations, that kind of thing, where to eat, where to go, things we didn't have on our itinerary, anything. That was prebooked, we just searched for tours, like walking tours.

Likewise, Mandy booked a river cruise for when they arrived in Budapest:

So when we first arrived, obviously we didn't know Budapest at all. So we booked a river cruise, and like went up and down and saw all the places that we knew, then we went back to visit them.

As Correia et al. (2014, p.299) note, visiting a new destination brings risk and uncertainty, and “far from their own domestic environment, the tourist becomes emotionally fragile and to alleviate this they search for more information about destination features”. For these participants, attractions help alleviate this anxiety by allowing visitors to orientate themselves prior to arrival. In a sense, it helps give them a feeling of control over their environment (Karamustafa and Gullu 2018).

Building anticipation

These activities not only set expectations, but also help build anticipation for the forthcoming trip (Aho 2001; Cutler and Carmichael 2010; Kirchberg and Trondle 2012; Frochot and Batat 2013; Park and Santos 2016, Soltani-Nejad et al. 2024). Building anticipation is about the excitement participants shared as they prepared for the trip. As well as finding out more about the destination, and planning what to see and do, participants also talked excitedly about the enjoyment the planning stage brought them. For Jane, the planning stage is a key part of the trip:

So the whole holiday experience was, it wasn't just about the holiday. It was that fun of booking it and organising it. I love that bit. That's all about the holiday to me as well, because the holiday's so short you got to enjoy the build-up. Yeah, and it was like building in intensity. So like for Christmas we got the kids like all their Disney stuff and they got like a countdown to Disney. So again, it made it more for them by the time they got there, and they got like Mickey Mouse ears and stuff and we showed them all the different rides on the internet, so they could say which ones they wanted to go on and stuff like that.

Jane illustrates how planning itself can be enjoyable, providing anticipatory enjoyment (Vogt and Fesenmaier 1998; Yagi and Pearce 2019). Bill continues to research what the destination offers once it is all planned and booked, not only to reaffirm their plans, but also the enjoyment it brings:

We do a bit of easy, put your brain at the door type of thing, we will watch like a vlog on YouTube, so like just to see what other people are doing when they go to these places. I've only got started to do that recently, and I don't know why, so like last week or maybe last weekend. I went on to YouTube, when we were having a cup of coffee or eating dinner. I put on the vlog, I put in Dubrovnik vlog, check how many views it has, look at maybe the title like if it says 10 must do things, and for the most part we would probably be aware of those things anyway, but it just sort of maybe consolidates why we would want to do those things. It does make me feel excited, I think that's partly why I do it because, you can also visualize when you go there, the things that you are doing. I remember like the scenery, you are getting a sense of what that might feel like, so you're looking at what the food is like, they're telling you it's amazing, and it looks good, so things like that. Yeah just general excitement, laughter happiness, things like that. It's probably not that sort of vibrant, but I definitely have that sort of excitement about going there.

I think it's just something to look forward to. Magda openly says that for her, maybe more so than for me, to have another holiday to look forward is a really nice feeling, because you work so hard being a teacher she's like I can't wait to get to that holiday. I think her job, the work never stops.

This also adds to the anticipation of the forthcoming trip, and provides something to look forward to. Yagi and Pearce (2011) highlight the importance of mentally preparing for the trip, labelling this the 'anticipation' phase. Experiments conducted by Kumar et al. (2014, 1929) found that "the utility people derive from a purchase, or any event, is not only in the here and now, but also in anticipation". This is an important element to consider for attractions, as they provide something to look forward to. They may add to what Loewenstein (1987, p.666) labelled anticipatory utility, where the "anticipation of the future has an impact on immediate well-being". This is supported by empirical studies which report higher levels of happiness during the pre-visit stage (Nawijn et al. 2010; Wei et al. 2019). More generally, stimulation and enjoyment are also recognised as benefits experienced when choosing from an assortment (Broniarczyk 2006; Scheibehenne et al. 2010; Chernev et al. 2015).

This sense of anticipation can be more general, just the excitement of being on holiday. Emily talked about how holidays are something to look forward to:

I know I love it going on holiday, that's why I work, to pay for my holidays. We tend to, whenever we come back from holiday I'm straight on there (mimics tapping keyboard) 'right where are we going next'. So I was talking to my friend Caroline, and we always go to the same type of places. We were both talking about Poland because we've both been to Krakow saying how great it was, and she said that Ljubljana was amazing, so I said ok I'll have a look. So I did a bit of research, looked it up online, looks beautiful you have Lake Bled nearby, Zagreb she said was a great trip on a train, she said that was worth doing so yeah looking to do that. That will be fun.

For Emily, the general image of Ljubljana was enough to build anticipation. As previously mentioned, this may be related to construal level, where at an abstract level, the focus is more on the purpose (to have fun, to see, etc), and the experience becomes more pleasurable (Kumar et al. 2014).

Tracy also talked about the sense of excitement for her forthcoming riding holiday:

Oh, it's gonna be lovely. I suppose the usual thing of getting up in the morning, and knowing we're going out to do something different, on different horses. Because it's nice riding other horses, you know, because they're different, they all have different characters. Yeah, and it's like getting to know people, it's always that little bit of excitement, what's this going to be like, what's it going to ask of me, which is always quite exciting when you first go out, because you think you know, it's just pushing your riding ability really. And obviously I'm really looking forward to spending some time with the

little ones, Anastasia who's three now, and hopefully she'll want to go out on a little Ned, go for little walkies. There's a swimming pool there and there's a lake, so I can do stuff with them. And having food, the food looks nice. And having somebody tack up and not having to do it myself, so essentially being waited on and doing stuff.

For Tracy, the anticipation extends to dreaming about her holiday, and imagining the benefits (Pearce 2019; Eletxigerra et al. 2021). Wei et al. (2019, p.23) stress the importance of this anticipation prior to the trip, calling it a “catalyst for happiness”. This may indeed be the case, as the feeling of anticipation builds as the holiday approaches, in fact Michael mentioned that the journey itself also adds to the anticipation:

Well we have lots of planning ideas and have planning meetings before we go. We discuss where we are going to walk, what we will do on each day, but then we never really do it and start doing something new. It all goes out the window then we decide when we get there. It's just nice talking about it I think.....

It is the perfect distance away. It is effectively an hour's flight from Luton then we hire a car then it is a two hour car ride through the countryside. It is just right because the journey to the destination is just as important. That's when the anticipation really builds up, if it was really short it would be horrible and not too far when you think oh my God a four hour flight.

However, this anticipation can lead to a state of overstimulation inducing anxiety or panic (Mayo and Jarvis, 1981). This appears to be widely recognised in some countries. Tom shared the German word for it:

Reisefieber!!!! In German, it is quite a popular term, portrays the fever you get before the trip, it's a lot of excitement that actually gets you completely restless and you cannot sleep at night, it's a very popular term in Germany, Poland. Everybody knows this one, I think it's funny because even if you go to the pharmacy and you ask for reisefieber medicines, they will give you some Melissa tea you know, any kind of things that will make you calm down and sleep well.

This expression captures both the excitement and anxiety some people experience prior to a trip.

Summary

This chapter has explored the role of attractions as participants prepared for their forthcoming trips, after selecting the destination. Two main themes emerged: discovering more about the destination, through further information search, and planning what to do when there. It became evident that participants adopted

different approaches to researching the destination and planning what to see and do. For some trips, participants gathered more information about the destination, firstly to discover what more there was to see and do, including unusual or novel attractions. Some conducted more general research into the destination, reading up on the history and culture, so they arrived primed to learn about the place. Others waited until they were at the destination to discover more. This could be for practical reasons, such as time constraints, or to gather more information locally, but also for the freedom and sense of discovery this approach provides. This is also reflected in how they planned what to do when there, with some trying to fit in as much as possible, whilst others wanted options to provide them with this freedom of choice. Further, some participants wanted to enjoy the sense of discovery when they arrived.

These findings suggest that attractions play a varying role when planning and preparing for the forthcoming trip. Participants gathered more information on what the destination offered, to make the most of the trip and to make sure they got to see as much as possible. Attractions also provide options to select from when there, suggesting an appeal of an assortment, not only to meet different needs, but also provide freedom of choice. Moreover, attractions contribute to the enjoyment of this stage, and help build anticipation for the trip.

This chapter highlights the role attractions play after choosing the destination, which has not been explicitly considered within previous destination attractiveness research, nor the existing frameworks proposed by Leiper (1990) and McKercher (2017). The following chapters take this further, exploring the role attractions played at the destination.

CHAPTER 9: ROLE OF ATTRACTIONS AT THE DESTINATION - PART I

Introduction

This chapter sets out the role attractions played whilst at the destination for trips where attractions were of secondary importance. Building on Leiper's (1990) classification of attractions, and Jeng and Fesenmaier's (2002) hierarchical structure to tourists' decisions, this chapter explores trips where attractions were secondary to other factors, primarily the choice of accommodation, cost and convenience. The analysis is conducted by trip rather than by participant, as all participants talked of trips where attractions were a key consideration when booking, as well as trips where they were less of a concern at this stage. These trips were mainly made to sun destinations, or getaway escapes either at home or abroad, to escape and relax. Here, push factors dominate (Dann 1977), although for some trips, attractions did sway the balance when choosing the destination, influencing the choice of accommodation, and confirming the final choice. Some participants researched the destination further after booking, in a sense arriving 'primed' to explore the wider destination.

A key theme emerging from participants' narratives of these trips is the role attractions provide in offering a change, or diversion, from the main purpose or environment (in terms of the accommodation) of the holiday. Attractions also provided an opportunity to discover the destination, even though this was not the main reason to visit. Where attractions were researched before visiting or at the destination, there was also an element of desire to visit these attractions, adding to the appeal of the destination.

The key themes and sub-themes are shown below:

- Spending time in the nest
- Attractions providing a diversion
 - Avoiding boredom
 - Punctuating the holiday
 - Feeling pressure to visit attractions
 - Providing an alternative
- Attractions encouraging discovery
 - Providing a purpose

- Offering opportunities for unexpected discoveries
- Fulfilling a desire
 - Extending the nest
 - Visiting known attractions

These themes are also apparent for trips where attractions were a key consideration when selecting the destination. As such, these themes will be developed further in the following chapter. This approach allows for a richer context to be provided, illustrating how the key roles of attractions vary across different types of trips.

Spending time in the nest

Whilst participants did visit attractions, it is important to not overplay their role for these trips. Participants travelled to relax, to be with their family or friends, spend time in the sun, or just to enjoy their leisure time. For these relaxing trips, many participants recounted time spent together in the accommodation. For Olivia, it was time spent together as a family:

The hotel was all-inclusive, just a bit easier. Yeah. It was really good. Like you enjoyed being like together as a family, and you enjoyed like the happiness that it brought you and stuff.

Whilst for Mandy, it was time together with her friend:

I went with a friend and we just sat in the sun. It was hot. It was nice, that's all just to get away. It was a relaxing one, we were sat around the pool.

This highlights the benefits of spending time together, enhancing relationships (Agate et al. 2009). This allows them quite simply to “share time” to maintain and strengthen these relationships (Heimtun and Abelsen 2012, p.425). For Tom, it was about the chance to foster new relationships, spending time with like-minded people in a boutique gay hotel in Gran Canaria:

It's all about I think this feeling of being in good company. That's great. I really like it. These hotels are usually for small groups of people, so it's maximum 20 people there. So it's all about sharing experience, having fun together, but not exactly in the town but rather in that little hotel, and sometimes these places get very, very quiet because people just relax, that's what I do. So it's like a boutique spa little thingy, also surrounded by people who really become your friends after two, three days. I still have contacts with I would say 70% of the people that I've met there. I'll definitely be going again.

This time spent in the accommodation provides the opportunity not just to relax, but to spend time with like-minded people, and this intimacy helps foster new friendships (Matteucci et al. 2019). It also provides a chance for shared leisure activities. This was most noticeable for participants travelling with children:

We liked the whole villa thing, the kids all playing together in the swimming pool (Jane).

Spending time in the pool with Jo, he had such a great time. Like he's two and a half. He's got so much energy...he was just jumping in from the side and just finding it, the whole thing, hilarious. I had a really good time...(Max).

This time also allowed participants to spend time enjoying leisure activities they do not have time for at home, such as reading, or playing games on their devices:

So that's it, basically eating and just sitting reading my book (Tracy).

Because like obviously on holiday, I'm there to relax, so I'm quite happy to go with the flow a little bit more. I like to sit by the pool, do a sudoku on the beach, yeah reading sometimes as well, taking a good book and yeah just swimming (Olivia).

Our domestic holidays are very much orientated around relaxation. And what tends to happen is we sleep late, read a whole lot of books (James).

They felt they could spend time as they pleased, engaging in simple pleasures and pastimes (Farkic et al. 2022). The bounded space of the accommodation allows them to spend time at a slower pace, free to choose what they wish to do, without imposed deadlines (Fludernik 2021). This encourages them to enter what Farkic et al. (2022, p.16) term a state of 'otium': "time for leisure, inactivity, quietness, and recuperation from hard work".

For those staying in resorts and hotels, the facilities provided them with a wider range of pleasures and pastimes to choose from. For Emily on an all-inclusive holiday in Turkey, it was the range of activities at the resort which stood out:

We enjoyed the entertainment, it was really good, grounds were lovely. They had different entertainment every night which was really good. We had a Russian night, a trapeze show, acrobats and stuff, it was really really entertaining, I must say it was top notch. The food was pretty good but the only downside was the restaurant was massive and really noisy and didn't feel like you could stay and enjoy, you just wanted to get in and out kind of thing, but saying that the food was brilliant and they had special nights where they had different food, for instance a Turkish night with traditional dishes.

This time spent in the accommodation also reflects a need for 'nesting', to feel at home in a new environment (Caru and Cova 2006; Frochot et al. 2019). It is the establishment of daily habits and routines which helps visitors ground themselves in the new environment and make it feel 'homely' (Edensor 2007). As Cohen (1972) concluded, many tourists are only able to enjoy the experience of change and novelty from a strong base of familiarity, and this enables them to feel secure enough to begin to explore the wider, unfamiliar environment. The need for nesting and the appeal of a secure environment was also important for those participants visiting familiar destinations. Emily mentioned the appeal of returning to Gran Canaria for a relaxing break:

it is a bit like home from home but it is not home because you are away, you have the heat and it's very relaxed.

Jane also acknowledged that returning to a familiar destination can become a home from home:

We usually go to Majorca, fast to get there, like easy to get there. We know, it's like a second home, my mum grew up there so I've been going since I was a baby so it's just second home, easy. We know where everything is, we know the culture and all those kind of things, Yeah we do look at other places, but then we just go back to our safety blanket, really.

It is this feeling of security and comfort, provided by the familiar, which can lead to destination loyalty (Hong et al. 2009; Toyama and Yamada 2012).

Attractions providing a diversion

For these trips, although relaxing and spending time with friends and family was the main focus of the holiday, attractions did still play a role. Whilst the accommodation and nearby facilities were important to these participants, a clear pattern emerged, where attractions were visited to provide a welcome (or unwelcome) diversion from the established nest.

Avoiding boredom

Some participants mentioned the need to avoid boredom, and visiting attractions provided them with a way to seek stimulation. This was most noticeable where there was a need to meet group needs, especially for families travelling with young children. For Olivia, the main reason to visit attractions was to stop her younger brother getting bored:

I think my brother would get really bored, he would be like we've done this for a few days now, just need a bit of like, break it up and do something different. Like we did bring his like Game Boy and stuff to help him like be entertained in the hotel. But like I don't know, he's 16. I think I'm a little bit more tolerant like.

The potential of becoming bored was also a reason to visit attractions for Max on a family holiday to a villa in France:

I suppose if we stayed in the house all day, every day, like Max would just be climbing, climbing the walls a bit, so it was sort of to break up his routine, give him a change of scenery as much as to give us a change of scenery.

..I can get bored quite easily and then you're sort of like I could be doing stuff if I was at home, you don't really think that but you kind of want to prevent thinking that.

James reflected upon the need to avoid boredom when on a relaxing holiday with his partner. There was an acceptance that staying in the cottage reading would lead to boredom:

Now, I guess I've got to add to that, that if we just stayed in the cottage and if it rained a week and we didn't go out, actually I'd get bored and frustrated. There's only so much time you can spend inside reading, so I would want to be going out and seeing things. I mean, it's great going to a holiday cottage and just slobbering out, but actually after a couple of days, three days maybe, you want to get out and see the destination.

This need to avoid boredom leads to a general desire to seek out new experiences (Kashdan et al. 2009), suggesting that after a few days the accommodation and associated facilities provide less stimulation, resulting in diversive exploratory behaviour (Litman et al. 2005). This has been recognised in tourism (Bello and Etzel 1985; Crompton 2024), and boredom is one of the dimensions identified by Lee and Crompton (1992) in their novelty construct.

This is also apparent when the timing of these visits is considered. For many participants, the first couple of days were spent in the 'nest', and after this, attractions were usually visited on the third or fourth day. For Max, trips were taken after a few days:

We visited the towns on Wednesday and Thursday, we were there Saturday to Saturday.

For Tom, on a relaxing trip to Bali with his partner, it was on the third day:

I was happy to just sit on the beach by the hotel for two days then a day of snorkelling. First day we explored the hotel, different bars and restaurants in the hotel which had four restaurants. So we went just for the beach and the hotel but when we were there we saw a poster for snorkelling which we did.

Similarly for James:

So the first couple of days are slobbing around and then after that it would be slobbing around in the morning and going out in the afternoon. It would have been three or four half days out, after the first couple of days.

These trips, taken after a few days, reinforce the idea of a need for increased stimulation after spending time in the nest.

Punctuating the holiday

The need to avoid boredom also overlaps with a desire for change. Participants mentioned attractions providing a break from the new routine, almost as if they help punctuate the week. Olivia recounted a family holiday to Fuerteventura, where they also visited attractions to break up the routine:

We went to a water park one day. It's just a family thing. I can't remember the name of it but we went to another zoo or something. It's very like family-oriented things. We like a few days by the pool, a few days by the beach, and then we try and break it up. So we do like one day in the first week, the waterpark, and then like one day in the second week. We kind of try to mix it up a little bit. I think we do the pool first just because we want to get to know the hotel and the facilities that are available and stuff. I mean to be fair the beach wasn't far from it, like it was only like a two-minute walk away. We sound really lazy don't we!

Nearby places and attractions also provided a change for Jane and her family on a relaxing holiday to Menorca:

So with the villa, there was a little village that we walked to every night, just to keep the kids occupied really - there's nothing worse than kind of trying to entertain the kids in the evening! And next door to us there was a water park which we visited during the week, but the rest of the time it was just chill. That's enough.

Graham mentioned how a break from the routine helped punctuate the week:

We kind of have a daily routine: beach, cafe, beach, lunch, siesta, beach, cafe, which we love but after a few days it all kind of blends into one and you forget what day it is! When we hired a car for a day it was great, it kind of energised you again seeing these places even

though it was tiring being out all day in the heat, and then you appreciate your time more and getting back to your routine again.

Research suggests that humans have a need for change (Petrick 2002), and change in itself is intrinsically satisfying (McAlister and Pessemier 1992). Whilst taking a holiday can be seen as an essential break from routine (Crompton 1979; Decrop and Snelders 2004), this need to break the routine is also apparent whilst on holiday. Lee and Crompton (1992) stressed that humans desire change, and included 'change in routine' as one of their dimensions in their novelty construct. They did note that these dimensions overlapped, and as previously discussed, the scale is based primarily on the optimum stimulation level. This would indicate that when participants mentioned that they wanted a change of routine, this could also be a need for stimulation, as noted above. However, Chang et al. (2006) did find that 'change in routine' was the most important dimension when applying Lee and Crompton's (1992) scale in their study of visitors to aboriginal attractions.

On closer inspection, the need for change encompassed another element, the marking of time. When settled into a daily routine, time almost seemed to pass quickly, and the trip punctuates the week, almost helping slow down the passage of time. Emily and her partner enjoyed spending time in their resort in Turkey, but commented how time passed quickly:

Yeah everyday same sun loungers, we are such animals of routine aren't we! We did go on a long walk like I said, because it is easy, the days just fly by and before you know it you've been there and you've not done anything and I feel like I have to do something....

And for Graham, a trip during the week helped punctuate the rest of the holiday:

We do like to change where we are staying as otherwise the days all merge into one. That's why we also try to do a day trip, it helps punctuate the week I guess.

The perception of time passing adds to the need for change. The idea that time is passing hints at the importance of tourists' perceptions of time (Pearce 2020). Wittman (2016, p.vi) talks of 'felt time', "our subjective feeling of the passage of time and our sense of duration". The sense of duration is influenced by how much cognitive and emotional effort is required: novel events are felt to last longer because they make greater claims on the faculties of perception, thinking, and emotional assessment (Wittman 2016). A change to routine requires more effort and more memories are recorded, which makes time seem to slow down.

There are two further examples to illustrate. Wittman (2016) supports his theory using Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*, where the main character stays in a sanatorium in the Swiss Alps. He recounts how the different experiences of an unfamiliar place expand time, whereas time passes more quickly once a routine is established, and "toward the end of the vacation, the days fly by as one realizes that the holiday is rushing to a close" (Wittman 2016, p.87). This is also evidenced by research conducted on tourists in Israel. Avni-Babad and Ritov (2003) investigated the time perceptions of guests at a Club-Med Resort, where a new routine can develop over a short period of time. Asked to mentally divide their holiday time into three equal parts (start, middle and end), they found that the majority remembered the first part of their holiday being longer than those that followed. This was due to the processing of new information at the start before a new routine was developed, when time seemed to pass faster.

This suggests that a change of routine helps punctuate the holiday, slowing down the perception of time. Trips out and visits to attractions offer experiences that are exciting and new and allow tourists to almost expand their holiday time.

Feeling pressure to visit attractions

Several participants mentioned there almost being a pressure to see things, as if they had to visit attractions whilst there. This pressure to do things develops as a result of the need to make the most of the trip, to at least get to know the destination and 'have seen the place'. This could be for personal reasons but also social pressures: the need to have something to share with others when you return, otherwise your reputation worsens.

James mentioned that not visiting the local area would be a disappointment to him, even though he did not look for things to do at the destination:

Yeah, first couple of days, you know, probably just read all day and maybe go out to the pub in the evening, something like that. After that we are more likely to kind of, you know, start ranging further afield, otherwise you think you've wasted your time by not seeing the wider area, I do anyway. I would feel as if I'd wasted the money because I won't have seen the surrounding area and that would be a source of disappointment, and you know I'd just be kicking myself.

This was also echoed by Emily:

Well I can't just justify staying in the resort for 10 days or two weeks and not doing anything. I wanna go out and adventure and see what's going on, and see what else is on offer really, just to get a feel and get to know the place.

This pressure results from evaluating the functional benefit of the trip in terms of value for money (Sheth et al. 1991), but also extends to almost a personal sense of guilt just doing nothing, almost an obligation to at least see the place they are visiting. Stebbins (2000) notes that individuals can frequently feel obligated to engage in certain leisure activities, and whether the individual sees this as an obligation or leisure activity depends primarily on their attitude to the activity. Crompton (2024) frames this moral obligation as a trigger to engage in exploratory behaviour, to pursue cultural activities that should not be missed. LaSusa (2013) also mentions the obligation to visit must-see sites, but stresses by doing this they deny themselves the freedom associated with leisure time. Lepp (2009) also suggests that this feeling of obligation impedes visitors' perceptions of freedom. However, Maguire (2008) argues that, in modern society, individuals become accustomed to feeling obligated to be productive in their leisure time. Further, as they had a degree of freedom when choosing what to visit, they may be considered as a "flexible obligation" (Stebbins 2000, p.154), or even an "agreeable obligation" (p.154) where they were associated with positive memories. For James and Emily, there appears to be an obligation to visit the destination to see what is there and to know about the destination. It is difficult to understand why this obligation exists, but the views of philosophers on moral obligations may shed some light. Johnson (2011) argues that individuals have a moral obligation to improve themselves, and maybe this is what compels them to learn about the destination, to make sense of the world and feel knowledgeable (Kashdan et al. 2004).

When questioned about this, it became apparent that James felt an obligation to know the place:

I think it's quite purposeful, these visits. It's a bit more active in the sense of actively walking around the place. I mean again, I think it's forming some sort of connection or understanding of the place, rather than just aimlessly meandering, walking around it. For these one week holidays in the UK the idea is to yeah, I don't think anybody staying there for a week can put down roots or really connect, but at least you try and form some sort of understanding or connection with the destination. So you walk around it a number of times, you kind of, you know the layout of what roads to walk around and things like that, and where things are. So I mean in a sense, I'm

probably trying to glamourise what is basically sightseeing, but I'm talking about something that is slightly more purposeful than sightseeing, but ultimately it's sightseeing.

This suggests that James wants to learn more, forming a connection with the place. James may represent the new moral tourist (Butcher 2003), interested in places they visit, and the people and cultures they encounter. They are characterised as 'thinking tourists' who search for the 'backstage regions'. Rather than just sightseeing, it is about knowing the place, a sense of 'place-knowing'. This also reflects Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of cognitive needs, where knowledge leads to a desire to search for more information, to make sense and understand.

What is more clear is how this sense of obligation arises from a social pressure to see places. For Tom, although they enjoyed the luxury of the boutique hotel in France, they did visit local attractions not just to avoid boredom, but also to avoid being considered ignorant:

When I get bored it's like, okay, so now let's see what's actually interesting to look around, because when I come back to my home people will start asking me questions, and I would say I haven't seen anything, they would just probably kind of say what are you stupid, or are you like a complete ignorant? And I also wanted to avoid this kind of situation. Because you know what, you feel like people will ask you questions and then you need to say something interesting.

This was also evident for Mandy, who reflected upon her trip to Lanzarote, where they spent the week lazing by the pool:

As you can probably tell from my holidays, I like to do, it ranges from doing nothing, to fun things to, like more cultural, well try to do cultural things. Lanzarote was a relaxing one. I was hoping you wouldn't ask me about Lanzarote it doesn't fit with me!

Mandy shares her embarrassment of not doing anything, which suggests the social pressure mentioned by other participants. This reflects the importance of norms, which provide individuals with an expected idea of how to behave (Wasaya et al. 2022). The above passages highlight the influence of subjective norms, which are the beliefs individuals hold about what their peers and significant others may think of their behaviour (Ajzen 1991).

The idea of participants feeling a certain obligation to visit places is reinforced by participants recounting trips where there was little to see and do. For Tom, the fact that there was little to see and do in Gran Canaria removed this sense of obligation, allowing him to just relax:

Gran Canaria is really one of the most boring places to spend time in because nothing is there, but with books and good company, you can live a whole week in that hotel, not even go outside and you won't even notice..... That is all we did, lying by the swimming pool with my Kindle, and just going book after book, for a whole week. Well, we did go out for like one hour maybe two, saw something, but for a whole week, I know that it sounds really weird but this is for me the relaxing time.

I really cannot say anything interesting about Gran Canaria because it's really not interesting. It's for me, it's only relax....it's more comfortable for me, so if I want to relax I can fully relax. Probably people think it is a little bit boring, but for me passive is really very passive.

For Jane too, less is more on a relaxing holiday:

You don't want too much stuff to do because then again you end up trying to cram it all in, and it becomes a tick list holiday.....Otherwise it's not a holiday then, it's a go go go.

Tracy reflected on a cruise holiday she went on, and she was surprised how she enjoyed having nothing to do:

I went on a cruise and I don't like to sit about, I mean I will sit and read a bit, but I was surprised how relaxing that was. Yeah, and so I got up, went to the gym every morning, and then did my laps of the deck, and sat around reading and eating, and reading and dancing. I thought I would go bonkers, but I didn't, I found it really, really relaxing and wrote. It's so peaceful, and it's just so peaceful sitting, being on a boat in the sea.

The fact there were few distractions and less obligation to visit attractions meant they felt less pressure to visit these, and they could focus on the main reason for the trip: spending time relaxing.

Providing an alternative

Attractions also provided options when conditions at the destination changed. This was primarily related to changes in the weather. For Harry on a family holiday to Menorca, the chance to visit attractions was important given the change in the weather:

This last year unfortunately the weather wasn't brilliant. This year we had I think three and a half days of the week that were pretty good, but then it turned and that was...it was still warm, it didn't rain but the big globe wasn't up in the sky uninterrupted. So then we we'd go town in the afternoon or whatever. We did go on a noddy train as well by the beach.

For Graham, having places to visit when it rained also provided something else to do:

One day it just poured down, so we couldn't really go out. It was nice at first, after non-stop sun it was quite a thrill to see all the rain, but then it just kept on, then everything gets wet, you can't go on the terrace, it's like you go a bit stir crazy. Luckily there was an umbrella in the apartment, so we went out and spent the afternoon in the local museum, not much there but it was in like an old building with a courtyard, so it was nice to go in there.

For Tom, whilst they booked a holiday in France because of the villa, having things nearby also provided options when the weather was inclement:

So over there it depended a lot on the weather. If the weather was super sunny and hot, we decided to stay in the villa, by the pool, just to have some suntan and just have a chat with the guys over there, because most of them actually stayed there, so we can just have a chat and some drinks. Of course there was Kindle stuff and all this kind of relaxing things for me. But when the weather was going into a little bit more windy, or darker, cloudier, that was the time when we actually chose to actually go and see something. So it was, okay, it's a little chillier today, so let's go to Carcassonne maybe, and we went to Carcassonne.

Having other things to do allows visitors to adapt to changes in the external environment which are out of their control, offering potential contingency options (Kahn 1995; Decrop 1999).

Although not always planned, attractions visited to provide a change do provide stand out moments, which can become treasured memories. For Olivia, these days out were their favourite family memories:

We remembered the fun that we had like at the water park and the memories we made there. I guess again it was like the whole novelty of it, like we've never been before and I guess it was like the thrill of

the rides and stuff. I don't know, we just kind of enjoy the feelings that you got from it. Like you enjoyed being like together as a family, and you enjoyed like the happiness that it brought you and stuff. I guess it like stood out as a thing to the destination in particular if you know what I mean. To be fair the beach was like quite good as well, like the, I just remember how close it was and that was quite convenient. I think personally for me like the water park was better because like it was hot. So like it was just nice to go, to go swimming and go on the water rides and stuff, because like you can go to the zoo in the UK and stuff. I guess we went there because the excursions they were selling didn't appeal and we just thought like why not. Like I said about breaking it up and stuff, maybe it's my brother, he just gets fed up. There wasn't too much to do in the hotel, like I remember actually they did like activities like in the pool and stuff, like they do like pool Bingo. We probably did do it on one day!

These trips helped them have special moments and encourage bonding. This is what they shared, reflecting the meaning they attached to their holiday, suggesting a form of appropriation labelled 'togetherness' by Frochot et al. (2019).

Attractions as a diversion highlights the importance of change within tourism, which can be traced back to the work of Cohen (1972; 1974). Cohen (1974) adopted a sociological perspective and identified a variety of travellers roles within which he aimed to isolate the common 'touristic component'. One dimension is the purpose being 'non-instrumental' – the trip is not a means to another goal. It is within this dimension that Cohen highlights the importance of change. The most common non-instrumental purposes mentioned in the literature were pleasure, recreation and culture, and these relate to what he considers to be the basic differentiating characteristic of tourism: a change from routine and a strange and novel experience. "I therefore view the expectation of pleasure derived from novelty or change as the central non-instrumental purpose of the tourist trip and the major differentiating element between this and other traveller roles" (p.533). Whilst Cohen noted that the terms novelty and change can be used interchangeably, he highlighted a slight difference in their meaning. For him, novelty is something new, and as an object can only be new once, it can only be experienced once, whereas change related to a change in routine.

Attractions encouraging discovery

The previous theme of attractions as a diversion highlighted the reasons participants wanted to leave their accommodation. This section focuses on the role attractions play in discovering the destination, when they leave their nest to explore what the wider environment offers.

Providing a purpose

Whilst for many participants the main reason to visit was to relax, this did not preclude a desire to explore and discover. This section focusses on participants who wanted to explore the destination when there, reflecting a more generalised desire to seek new experiences (Kashdan et al. 2009). Participants had their interest piqued from information gathered, from fellow guests, internet searches, social media, rep talks, brochures, guidebooks and flyers. This information stimulated their interest, highlighting the importance of information acting as a marker in the tourism attraction system (Leiper 1990). Attractions played a role here in encouraging this behaviour, providing a general purpose for these visits, and a chance for the destination to reveal itself, and offer them a sense of discovery, and the joy of surprise.

For Emily, they did not research what was in Marmaris before visiting, rather they discovered the destination when there:

The hotel was at the end of the bay, so we had the whole of that bay to explore if we wanted to. The evenings after dinner in the hotel we tend to walk along the front, or go one way then the other way just for a bit of exercise, just to get out, see what's out there really. There might be a little sign or something, or a little street or whatever, and you go and have a look and investigate. So one day we walked all around the bay in about 30 degrees heat, which is probably not a good thing to do, but there was a castle at the end and there were great viewpoints from the top which we had heard about, just from talking to people in the hotel. We then walked around the town to the bazaar, so we did that as well, that was probably half way through I suppose. It was really interesting, but it was a bit too in your face, because as soon as you walk past it's like come in here, buy this or that, so after a while you go 'I'm fed up with that', but then we could walk around the back and there was a nice sort of fountain and a big square, so like when you come across things like that you think ooh I'm glad I kind of walked that way or went that way, otherwise you wouldn't have seen it, so you can feel like you've experienced a bit of the community.

For Max, attractions were also not important when selecting their villa holiday in France, but there was a general desire to see what was there:

We went to a couple of local towns. The first place we went it was a case of well, just get out the house. It didn't really matter where we went. There wasn't much there, whereas the second one, we were going there more specifically to see it, because we knew this was a lot bigger. There's a lot there. It was a recommendation from the guy who owns the house. Yeah the guy who owns the place just said, well, you may want to go here. You may want to go there. His place is set up for letting out, so there's like a guest book in there, in terms of local things to do. It was really picturesque. It had a world heritage site church at the top, and it was like the high point of the local area. Church was at the top, it was all cobbled streets winding down with like those old buildings, and then like 360 views. It overlooks the town and you can see the whole, I mean not from the one point but you just walk around the top and it's the 360 views of the local area, which is pretty much all vineyards and farm houses. And then you just go through the streets....it was really, that was really pretty.

It is clear that attractions influenced participants spatial movements within the destination (Jovic and Popovic 2006; McKercher and Lau 2008). Attractions here provide a purpose, or destination for these exploratory visits. Attractions such as the castle can be considered as 'nodes', acting as strategic points to travel to (Lee et al. 2017), and encouraging visitors to explore the destination. They become what Walt Disney labelled a 'weenie', drawing visitors from one area to another (Sklar 2019), becoming the focus of their exploratory behaviour. Allen (1999) noted that visitors may travel in an unfamiliar environment to learn about the place, as if they are "foraging for spatial information" (p554). Bitgood (2006) also suggested that visitors employ a foraging approach when searching for information to satisfy curiosity. Attractions provide a goal for this foraging, reducing the uncertainty about the value of this behaviour as they know there is something to discover (Shen et al. 2020). Further, attractions can act as a navigation tool, helping visitors locate themselves in the destination, especially for large attractions such as the castle, which can act as symbolic landmarks. Being visible from a distance (Xia et al. 2008), they help visitors construct a spatial representation of the destination (Eilam 2014), again reducing uncertainty in an unfamiliar environment.

This exploratory behaviour plays an important part in learning about the destination. Emily mentioned this toward the end of the interview:

I like to get a feel of what's going on outside as well. Whenever I go anywhere I've always wanted to get the most of it, like experiencing it all.

Learning about the place was also important for Mark:

I like to look at different, you know the way people do different things, like we went into the city and I quite enjoyed just looking at how people lived their everyday lives, differently, just walked around for a bit. The office areas, the shops areas I just find it interesting, different cultures.

The act of exploring the destination and the experiences they had help foster a 'sense of place', where participants attach meaning to the destination (Hwang et al. 2005). This turns a space into a place (Rickly-Boyd 2011), and it can be considered as a form of place appropriation (Barkat et al. 2022). Caru and Cova (2006) suggest that exploring is an important part of the appropriation process, where people attach personal meaning to the experience. The first stage is nesting, whereby the consumer finds anchoring points and isolates a part of a new experience to feel at ease in it. This was evident in earlier discussions, about time spent in the accommodation facilities. This is followed by investigating, moving out of their comfort zone to explore aspects of the new environment (Frochot et al. 2019). Finally, the consumer establishes his or her own meanings of the new experience in the third stage, termed 'stamping' (Caru and Cova 2006). It is through these stages of nesting and investigation that a place progressively acquires meaning (Barkat et al. 2022).

Jovic and Popovic (2006) developed a typology to explain how tourists appropriate space and use it to satisfy their own needs. This ranges from sensual, psychological, and symbolic appropriation. In its simplest form, this can be sensual appropriation, where the visitor observes and perceives the destination. For some participants, they talked about 'seeing the place', visiting the main sites. For others, they wanted 'to know' the place, a form of verbal appropriation, gathering facts about the destination. This appropriation is important in developing a sense of place, or place attachment, where a positive affective attitude develops between the visitor and the destination (Dwyer et al. 2019). Studies highlight how this can lead to tourists' satisfaction with, and loyalty toward, the destination (Hwang et al. 2005; Dwyer et al. 2019; Barkat et al. 2022).

This connection is illustrated by Tom on a trip to France:

The place where the villa is, which is a super little small town in France, is completely not attractive, there is nothing to see there, and we couldn't even understand the place, meaning how can you open a shop at 8 o'clock in the morning and close one hour later. So it was full of this kind of crazy French things, it was like a really small

village with that lovely feeling. So everyone of course is just like constantly talking about the wine experience all around you, only vineyards of course and that was amazing. We visited the vineyards, we had a lot of this tasting of the wine. Yeah, great, I've never had it before in my life. Meaning of course this experience of going to the vineyard and you have like what eight around you, and that was something new for me. The closest one was like 700 meters from the villa, so we just walked there. They had them in the villa fridges in the corners of some rooms or places, and all the wine that they had cooled in those freezers were only from local vineyards. So they were literally able to stand on the balcony with us and show us the bottle of wine saying, it's here, it's there, pointing at the places that you could see from the terrace, and that was really great.

Tom initially talks of not understanding the place, but soon develops a positive feeling towards it, after visiting the vineyards and tasting the local wines.

Offering opportunities for unexpected discoveries

This exploratory behaviour also provides a chance for unexpected discoveries.

This is further illustrated by Tom, on his trip to France:

The towns were great, so like Montpellier, like Carcassonne. We just went to the town, but in the town I was trying not to actually look, as these towns they seem large but they are not large. So I was trying to not to ask my partner, for example, who's kind of addicted to Google and checking everything on it, as like let's just do it by ourselves, to just walk behind our own nose and see what's around. Let's just do the walking. Of course, we knew that for example in Carcassonne you need to see the whole castle, or for example in Montpellier you need to see the Market Square because it's lovely, and etc etc. But I wasn't exactly checking what's in these towns, I just go there and walk around the city centre, the old markets, something around it, but rather not knowing exactly what I can find on my way. So I'm not prepared. I'm prepared to go and see the town but I'm not prepared what's in the town to be honest. It's rather discovering. It's surprise, the element of surprise.

Sometimes the surprise is good and sometimes the surprise is bad. Like Narbonne, that was meant to be something like Carcassonne but it was a complete disappointment. There was only one cathedral and there was nothing around. It was really, I don't even remember exactly now how did it look like, because it was so uninteresting. It's also probably because I saw so many places in my life very similar to this one, and that area has a lot of very similar places around so it's just not interesting anymore. It's not appealing, it's not attractive anymore.

Also sometimes the possibility that you can make completely unplanned decisions can also make a place interesting. When we got there, we found out from the owners of the villa that you can drive to Barcelona, because it's only three hours away. So we also

went to Barcelona, it was like, okay, I've never been to Barcelona, my partner had been there. So we decided that we are going to book one night hotel in there, and we just got our car, we asked people from the hotel if somebody would like to go and one person said yeah, I've never been, I want to go with you. So we kind of agreed that we are going to share the cost of the petrol, basically it cost us nothing because the hotel was also very cheap in Barcelona, and we went there for a weekend. So from Saturday to Sunday, staying over in a hotel, and it was great because I had not expected that in a trip to South France I would actually see Barcelona. My partner showed me the places because he remembered them from the past. It was tiring because the whole Saturday, we were there already by 10 o'clock and we were really like walking around Barcelona up to 8 p.m, but it was great. It was beautiful. I really loved it. Although I was dead tired, and Sunday was actually just spending times in little cafes, just in the city centre. I was surprised that my partner actually agreed so quickly to buy a night's hotel in Barcelona and just go there, because sometimes you have that feeling that well, we've paid for one hotel for two weeks, why would I now leave that room. I sometimes have that feeling, but it was really worth it. That really stood out for me, it was unexpected and that's what makes um, what, what made it like a surprise, and it's absolutely positive.

These passages highlight the benefit of surprise. Surprise refers to the difference between stimuli perceived and expectations (Berlyne 1954), and is included as a dimension of Lee and Crompton's (1992) novelty construct, referring to feelings caused by unexpected features. Crompton (2024) also talks of 'surprise-exploration' as a trigger for exploratory behaviour, where tourists search for novel stimuli. Participants did not plan to make these visits, and this unplanned behaviour allows for an element of spontaneity (Becken and Wilson 2007). Indeed, some visitors seem to enjoy a certain level of risk associated with not having exact plans, and they purposely delay decision making (Decrop 1999). Hyde (2004, p.163) argues that this allows them to take "advantage of serendipitous opportunities" to experience activities and attractions they had not considered.

Kim et al. (2021) also highlight the importance of these serendipitous experiences, defined as a positive and unexpected discovery. Here, surprise is not the only dimension of serendipity: visitors also need to perceive that these experiences resulted by chance or luck. The narratives above highlight this important element of serendipity. By not researching what was there but exploring the destination, what they discover is not only surprising, but includes an element of luck that they stumbled across these sites. And these moments are shared by travellers when they recount stories of their travels.

As Krantz (1998) mentions, narratives highlight the unusual and unexpected to make them more interesting. The elements of surprise and discovery provide stand out moments, and these become the currency of travel, shared with their friends. Tracy provides an illustration of this, recounting a trip out to discover a cave when in an all-inclusive resort in Croatia. She went on a relaxing holiday with her partner, and she found out about local trips when there:

The biking was great. We went exploring on the mountain bikes outside the resort. I had a look at what there was in the area to cycle to, historic places, and caves and that sort of stuff, so what you could get to essentially. At the resort, someone sells attractions, that's where we got our leaflet, we picked it up on the first day. I didn't know about that before I went....They had quite a few sort of organized bike trips, but we didn't get up in time for that. So it became, the whole week became this mission. So there was this cave advertised. Yeah, and I thought I've never been in a cave I wonder where that is. So on the first day we set off with this little flyer saying about this cave to this place it was supposed to be. So anyway we got there and no cave, no nothing. So then we had to come back because it had taken us that long because we'd gone up this hill and God knows where else. So next day we thought right, so we did some more research on where this bloody cave was. So it was supposed to be there, so we found a blog that said about a meeting place where people met with the cave guide, which was some cafe. So we got to this cafe with this leaflet and said 'where's this cave?', so this very strange gentleman, he whipped this bit of paper out of our hands and said 'you have to speak to me, you can't go there'. I said you don't own it, so he got a bit tetchy then and said you can only go in the cave with me. I said I don't believe you, your just fleecing tourists. So, he wouldn't tell us where it was. So then next day I found the Caving Association and emailed them and asked them about this cave and you know, could you go in and see it. And it was graded because it apparently had some issues with the amount of batshit guava, whatever it was. So he did email me back but I couldn't read it. So then we went out again, and using the photos that were on the web page, we cycled up to this point to identify the place the cave was. So we figured out that it must be somewhere like that. So then we routed around and we found this broken down bit of signage that said the blah blah blah cave, and then sort of skirted out and then eventually came to this hole in the ground. Well, so we're standing in this hole in the ground with this sort of archway thing, with this dark bit at the back, and out of there comes this person with the lights on, followed by three other people with lights on, giant people from Finland. This is the caveman from the cafe. So he's doing illegal caving visits. He was very cross, but the stink coming out of there was just awful. So that was the story of the cave. We didn't go in, I mean they were wearing hats and suitable gear, but we found it.

Some of the best moments were the ridiculous cycle rides, yeah, it was really those, that was a real sense of achievement going up there to the cave.

Tracy provided a detailed account of her quest to find the cave, and her story contains many elements of what may be considered a 'good' story (Woodside et al. 2010). Finding the cave provides a clear goal, the cave guide becomes the protagonist preventing them from visiting, and she outlines the actions they took to overcome these barriers and eventually visit the cave (Woodside et al. 2008). The attraction itself is central to this story, which she has undoubtedly shared before.

Fulfilling a desire

The above section highlights the role of attractions in encouraging participants to explore and discover the destination. This was more of a general exploratory behaviour. Some participants did want to visit particular attractions, reflecting a more specific form of exploratory behaviour. These attractions became part of the holiday routine, or specific points of interest to visit during the holiday.

Extending the nest

For some participants, attractions were considered when booking the accommodation, mostly to be near a beach or local town. At the destination, these attractions became part of the holiday routine, offering additional things to see and do. For Harry, the location of nearby attractions swayed the balance when selecting the accommodation in Menorca for a family holiday. This provided them with a variety of things to do on holiday:

Most days, we were trying to get down to the beach because we had more little ones than we had last year. Then we try and have lunch in a beachside restaurant, there are two or three of those. When I say lunch, it's a snack. Then the afternoon would be probably a trip, depending on what people feel like doing, we tend to plan them in the morning. This last year unfortunately the weather wasn't brilliant. We found that, you know, it's obviously going to stop blowing this afternoon, we'll go to town in the afternoon or whatever, and the ladies like their fashion shopping and all this other stuff, I'd go for walks around the town or whatever then meet up. There's not much to do in Menorca, that's probably why it's so lovely. It is beaches primarily, and then the town, there's nothing much more than shopping because Mahone is one of these places that attract the big cruise ships as well.

The location of a beach nearby offers variety, becoming part of the daily routine, as mentioned by other participants earlier:

I like to sit by the pool, do a sudoku on the beach (Olivia).

We like a few days by the pool, a few days by the beach (Mandy).

Here, the nearby beaches almost become an extension of the accommodation facilities, forming part of the nest.

Visiting known attractions

Known attractions further afield also offered the chance for more specific exploration and discovery. Some participants had a general idea of the main attractions at the destination before booking, others gathered information before travelling or at the destination, and these attractions became points of interest to visit.

Mark knew of the main places when choosing Kefalonia, and these became specific points of interest to visit whilst there:

We went to a couple of famous attractions made famous by that film, Captain Mandolin, that was filmed in a town in the north which was affected by the earthquake so that was quite interesting, we just walked around. I knew about them as I talked to a couple of people who have been there, friends of mine. I knew about the beach obviously with the boat, so we went there of course.

These attractions can be considered to be iconic, recognised symbols of the place (Weidenfeld 2010). Mark also recounted discovering other attractions when there, showing both specific and general discovery and the appeal of surprise:

But we also visited local castles and a vineyard. We went to a couple of limestone caves, the kids loved them as so eery underground and they had never been in one before. We found out about them when we were there when having a meal in the local town, we just saw some posters up about it, so that's why we went to them. I think it is quite nice to find things when you are there.

After booking the accommodation, Tom was inspired to visit places from the guidebook he received:

We hired a car for the whole two weeks and we were just traveling here and there, meaning let's go and see Carcassonne today, let's go and see Montpellier. Let's go and see Benzance etc etc. So we visited most of the places from the guidebook, but not all of them, and some of them actually I didn't like to be honest.

James was also inspired to visit specific places after reading up on the destination after booking their cottage in Northumbria:

Yeah, so this is interesting because having said I don't tend to look at the guidebook before we go, I did have a quick look this time, and it turns out there is loads of stuff to do. So we ended up, we spent half a day walking around the town itself, Newbiggin. We spent a

day in Newcastle, walked around and visited Tyne Bridge, the Baltic Art Gallery which wasn't planned, that was relatively spontaneous, we just found ourselves there and thought let's go and have a look at it. I'm just thinking did we go in for a special exhibition? I can't remember, it can't be that special because I don't remember it! Yeah, it was interesting because there's an observation deck really high up, and there's Britain's only inland community of kittiwakes nesting on the side of this building, and there's the Millennium Bridge which raised while we were there. We paid a visit to Whitley Bay.

So I like to just look at strange things on a map. So there's a place called North Blithe which is just a little village, tiny little village at the end of nowhere, at the end of a long road by the sea, with a railway line and aluminium works next to it. That looks unusual, why's it there, and then later I found out that that's the site where they filmed quite a lot of Get Carter, you know with Michael Caine, but I found that out afterwards. So things like that. We drove down the coast specifically to Tynemouth, the mouth of the Tyne, which is a really quite genteel upmarket seaside resort, which was quite surprising, but that again seen it on a map so I thought well, we'll drive through it. And then we did make a visit to Alnwick Castle because of its Harry Potter connections mostly, and then we went up the coast to Bamburgh Castle, didn't go in but just sat on the beach. What's interesting is there's that castle, there's Dunston, Birr Castle and various other castles around there that we kind of clock for future visits. Yeah, so I think you know if we go back there, right those are places I would like to go.

Information plays a key role in generating interest and inspiring participants to visit places and attractions (Kashdan et al. 2004; Silvia 2006; Kashdan and Silvia 2009). Interest is considered by psychologists to be an emotion, as it shares many components with other emotions (Silvia 2008), and these emotional components result from an appraisal of stimuli (Moors et al. 2013). Appraisal theories of emotion stress that emotions are a result of a process which includes a subjective evaluation of an event, and it is this appraisal which generates emotions (Hosany 2013). Silvia (2008) suggests that interest results from two appraisals: an evaluation of an event's novelty-complexity, and an evaluation of its comprehensibility. For an event or object to be interesting, it needs to not only be appraised as novel, but also understandable. For Tom, different and unusual places and attractions piqued his interest, and his narrative suggests that he developed understanding of these sites. This theory overlaps with the work of Berlyne (1960), previously considered in the literature review. Berlyne considered the importance of 'collative variables' in arousing exploratory behaviour, namely novelty, complexity, uncertainty and conflict. What Silvia's theory adds to this is the importance of comprehensibility. This builds on the work of Csikszentmihalyi

(1990) and flow experiences. Here, individuals feel immersed and are intrinsically motivated by the task where their skills match the task's level of challenge. Silvia (2008, p.58) suggests that "if people appraise an event as new and as comprehensible, then they will find it interesting". Gathering information at the destination allows individuals to gain sufficient knowledge to be able to understand what is there, and this can generate interest to visit.

This is congruous with Lowenstein's integrated theory of curiosity (2004), where curiosity is driven by a gap in an individual's knowledge. Curiosity is aroused when there is a gap between what they know, and what they want to know. Information gathered at the destination may act as a reference point, and lead to individuals wanting to know more to fill this gap. Indeed, Loewenstein also suggested that the more individuals know, the more motivated they may be, as they will focus more on what they do not know rather than what they already know. Here, information gathered before or during the trip adds to this knowledge base. However, this gap must be manageable, if it is too large they will perceive it as not being possible to close this gap, so they will not be motivated to visit. This is similar to the appraisal process suggested by Silvia (2008), where interest is only piqued where the event or object is judged to be comprehensible.

Summary

This chapter has discussed the role of attractions for trips where they were of less importance when booking the holiday. A common theme emerged where attractions provided a change, or diversion, from the main purpose of the holiday, primarily to relax and spend time with friends and family. Visiting attractions provides a break from the established nest. They prevent participants becoming bored, providing a break from the new routine, and help punctuate the week, offering new experiences which help expand felt time. However, they can also be seen as an unwanted diversion, with participants feeling a certain pressure to visit attractions at the destination. These factors point to the importance of push factors (Crompton 1979), not just when choosing a holiday, but also when at the destination.

As well as offering a diversion, attractions also play a role in encouraging participants to discover the destination. Attractions can act as markers, or nodes, providing a purpose for these excursions, and the opportunity for chance

discoveries. The importance of this is highlighted in the moments participants shared in their narratives, encouraging them to connect with the destination in some form, developing personal meaning as they appropriate the place. For some participants, nearby attractions were important, becoming part of the holiday routine, providing further variety beyond the accommodation itself. These attractions soon became incorporated as part of their familiar environment, forming part of their established nest. Specific attractions were also visited during these trips, where interest had been piqued from information gathered.

This chapter has added to existing knowledge by emphasising the role attractions play at the destination where they were of less importance when booking the trip. Themes presented underpin a new way to categorise attractions, which is further developed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 10: ROLE OF ATTRACTIONS AT THE DESTINATION - PART II

Introduction

This chapter focusses on trips where attractions played an important role when choosing and preparing for the trip. These were trips taken to see specific attractions, city breaks, tours, and to engage in preferred activities. Whilst these trips were mainly about visiting attractions participants wanted to see, attractions also played a wider role, providing a chance for further discovery and diversion.

This chapter progresses the main themes introduced in the previous chapter:

- Attraction as objects of desire
 - Visiting the main attractions
 - Connecting with the attraction
 - The desire for something different
 - Engaging in activities
- Attractions encouraging discovery
 - Discovering after arrival
 - Providing a purpose
 - Getting a feel for the place
- Attractions providing a diversion
 - Offering a break
 - Providing a backup

Attraction as objects of desire

Many participants shared experiences of trips where attractions played a key role during the visit. Pearce (2019) talks of desire to be somewhere else as being at the heart of tourist behaviour. In this section, desire is considered as being more specific. Attractions or activities are viewed here as objects of desire, defined as “a psychological state of motivation for a specific stimulus or experience that is anticipated to be rewarding” (Papies and Barsalou 2015, p.37). It is a “conscious wanting” (Andrade et al. 2008, p.86), focused on a specific object or experience (Belk et al. 2003). MacCannell (2001, p.27) talked of attractions as “objects of tourist desire”, and this approach is adopted here. This theme incorporates visiting the main attractions, connecting with the attraction, the desire for something different, and engaging in activities.

Visiting the main attractions

Several participants talked of visiting the main sites at the destination, which they had researched before visiting. For Katrine on a short break to Iceland, it was all about visiting the famous natural wonders:

So obviously we went to the ones, like things you hear about, which is like they got volcanoes, they got geysers, they've got like amazing waterfalls like, there's all these things you hear about and obviously the Blue Lagoon.

So the first one was the Blue Lagoon, which is probably a very big tourist place in Iceland where everybody else went as well. I believe we went around 10 and we were there to like four or five. It's just like you hear about it, it was very nice, was really good, it was amazing to get the warm water when you were really cold as well. Mum was enjoying her day, was just perfect, I think. She didn't have to drive because both of her kids could drive her which I think she enjoyed. So she was just like, was very relaxed and enjoying her day and just playing in the water.

Next day we decided to explore the most famous waterfall as well as the geyser. My goodness, what is it called again. it's called Gulfoss, which is like the gold falls. It was all iced over but it was so very obviously magnificent to look at it. It was really nice, it was beautiful because it goes kind of in steps. And then obviously the geyser everybody goes to, we just stand around and wait for the geyser to erupt, it's more like 'oh wow, okay', and then it's done. You have to stand there until it actually erupts. It's a bit like, because it's not something you see every day, so it's a bit like oh that's kind of cool actually, because you're not used to it.

Natural attractions were also must-see attractions for Mandy, on a touring holiday to South America:

We flew into Buenos Aires. Macchu Picchu was closed in February, so we ended up going to Argentina first, we went round the glacier. I've never seen a glacier before in real life, so yeah I've seen pictures of it, but it's completely different when you're there. The scale of it, like especially once you got down to the bottom of it and you're sort of looking up, and then I remember at one point in the day, this huge chunk of ice fell off and honestly, it was like a gunshot going off. The noise that it made was just incredible, and like obviously everyone around you is reacting to it and, yeah it is the scale of it. I think it's the scale thing, it was a little bit scary, it was so big, I don't know.

And the salt flats in Bolivia. It was rainy season, so you had like a mirror effect. So it's never-ending, like you look and it's just nothingness for miles. The only reason we went to Bolivia was to see the salt flats. You see images online but it doesn't compare. I'm sorry but a picture on Google does not compare. I think you can't get, from a picture, how like, this scale of it. So like, it's certainly with

the salt flats, you can stand in the middle and look one way and there's just nothing, and even though in a picture you can see the mirror effect I do think, and also there's something about the like, the way the guides like talk about a place like that. It's literally, they're like they spend their whole life going to and from it, and years later they're still so passionate about conserving it. Yeah, it was like breath-taking. It was, and like everyone just went silent. Like, you know no-one says anything you just sort of get out and you're like, wow, I think it's that moment of, 'that is really incredible' as opposed to a picture.

So I have a top 5 which I tell people when they ask. Okay, so it's the Galapagos Islands, Machu Picchu, the glacier, the salt flats and the Amazon. Yeah, that was my order as well. Based on those top five things, I would say, it's something that is naturally impressive, they're all natural things and I think that's what's so impressive and so incredible about it. That these things exist, outside of the UK, outside your small little village in Somerset.

It is clear that seeing these natural attractions had an emotional impact on the participants. They talk of the scale, and how different they are to what they had experienced before. Todd (2009) notes that feelings of wonder and awe can occur when encountering the new and the strange. This hints at the concept of sublime, which refers to places that arouse these overpowering sensations (Martini and Sharma 2022), where “the sublime in nature stimulates a 'momassarvement' of or 'agitation' in the mind” (Budd 1999, p.233). This can result from an awareness of its scale, or vastness, which exceeds our ability to perceive, or understand them (Budd 1999; Martini and Sharma 2022).

Emily talked about the famous sites she wanted to see on a tour of America:

We did a big trip to the States a few years ago, you have to plan it but I think we did it quite well, I don't know if I would say it was a holiday because it is more of a trip probably. We flew into Vegas for a couple of days, we did the Canyon while we were there, because obviously you have to do that. We went in and did Yosemite for a couple of days, we went in one end and then the other end driving, looking for bears, but we didn't see any and then from there we drove across to San Francisco.

I think we had four nights in San Francisco. Yeah we prebooked Alcatraz only because people said to book it as you might not be able to get it when you are there. Yes, and then we ended up in San Diego and three nights in San Diego.

For Barbara, her trip to Paris focussed on ticking off the main sites:

The next day I think we went to the Eiffel Tower, on Tuesday, because they wanted to see it like right away, I guess because that's

one of the reasons they went there, so it's like one of the attractions, they didn't want to hesitate to go. We just got the metro and went to take pictures and hang around. We were like, do you want to go up, but we kind of didn't. Then we also did a bus tour. We got on the bus at the Eiffel Tower and then we drove around the city seeing other stuff like the Arc and Notre Dame, basically we went there in mind to see certain things, which we did.

For these participants, it was about seeing the main sites the destinations are famous for. MacCannell (1976) contends that sightseeing has become a modern ritual, with a “collective sense that certain sights must be seen” (42). Within tourism literature, they may be considered as ‘iconic’ attractions (Becken 2005; Tang et al. 2009; Weidenfeld 2010; Xu et al. 2020), flagship attractions (Dybedal 1998; Hayes 2009; Weidenfeld 2010, Xu et al. 2020), or even ‘wonder attractions’ (Wanhill 2008). Whilst there is some interchangeability in the use of these terms (Weidenfeld et al. 2016), there is some differences between flagships and iconic attractions. Dybedal (1998) notes that ‘flagship’ is not a scientific term, rather it suggests attractions are of a certain importance. In essence this relates to the ability to attract a relatively large number of visitors (Weidenfeld 2010), due to its scale, uniqueness, reputation, media attention, and appeal to new or wider markets (Lew 1987; Wanhill 2008; Weidenfeld 2010). They become important as the primary nucleus which influence the decision to visit the destination (Dybedal 1998).

Iconic attractions provide a wider function, they are connected with the destination, acting as symbols for the destination as a whole, to commemorate and celebrate the past (Hayes 2009). They are ‘landmarks’ which are instantly recognisable (Becken 2005; Weidenfeld 2010) and come to represent the destination, having a link to the cultural heritage of the place (Tang et al. 2009; Weidenfeld 2010). In a sense, they can be considered ‘cultural flagships’ (Hayes 2009). Iconic status is achieved over time, as meaning is attached to the site (Hayes 2009), through what MacCannell (1976) called the ‘site sacralisation’ process. This process takes a site from a simple place to a sacred, or worthy attraction (Becken 2005). This process helps construct the ‘tourist gaze’ (Becken 2005), usually through marketing as well as organic channels such as film, TV, word of mouth etc (Becken 2005; Weidenfeld 2010; Xu et al. 2020). Unlike flagship attractions, iconic attractions themselves may not attract a large number of visitors, but their role as symbols for the destination means they add to the appeal of the destination as a whole (Weidenfeld 2010; Xu et al. 2020).

Viewed through the lens of curiosity, the desire to see these sites may be considered a form of specific exploratory behaviour (Berlyne 1966), where a lack of knowledge arouses curiosity, leading to specific exploration of particular sources which can supply the information needed. This may be perceptual, where visitors aim to increase perceptions of stimuli in the environment, or epistemic, where they aim to gain knowledge. Litman and Jimerson (2004) extended this in their 'interest/deprivation' model, where curiosity is a positive feeling of interest, where it would be enjoyable to discover something new.

Connecting with the attraction

Rather than visiting these iconic, or flagship attractions, several participants recounted trips where they wanted to see particular attractions or places which had more personal meaning to them. These particular sites or places had a special connection to them, from learning about them previously, or through a personal family connection with the place. Many talked of the impact of being there. For Harry, a trip to Normandy to visit the D-Day memorials had personal resonance with him and his family:

It was very thought-provoking for the elder one in particular. We stopped off on the way down from Cherbourg at the American cemetery over Omaha Beach and she was absolutely taken aback as everybody is, when they see all these crosses going to the horizon, 5,000 Americans, 1,200 Germans at least identified, and she'd seen Saving Private Ryan and she was suddenly putting the two together, and I think she was quite shocked. And knowing that her granddad had been involved in D-Day really hit home for her. I was quite shaky too, not as bad as Angela Merkel shaking.

For Harry, it was a family connection with the site which was important. McCain and Ray (2003) label those who visit places linked to their personal heritage as 'legacy tourists'. It is this link between the heritage and the visitor that underpins their experience and creates value to them (Poria et al. 2006; Dunkley et al. 2011; Massara and Severino 2013). Pete talked passionately about seeing the Northern Lights. He went on a photographic tour specifically to see these in Iceland:

On the first five days we didn't see anything. It was just like the weather, the weather was terrible and stuff. You start getting worried about what's gonna happen. I mean we'd seen stuff which was just like a light green hue in the distance and I said 'is that it', and the guy said 'no that's not it'. But on the fifth day it was absolutely spectacular. It was amazing. We were near the witches hat kind of place. It's a hill that kind of goes up and spirals around. So we drove up, we were trying to photograph the hill, and it was just kind of like,

well the tour guide ran back to the car to get his camera and he said, 'this is gonna be a really good one'.

And it was spectacular, absolutely amazing. But the funny thing is that when you're actually stood there watching it, you almost forget to take pictures. I'm just watching it. It's the most spectacular thing. And once you start concentrating on the camera and what to do, you forget, so you have to try to have the experience of that.

I did feel quite emotional being there at the time. It's kind of, since a child you'd wanted to see it and you never thought maybe that would happen but then, then it did happen. You were there, it was actually happening when you were there. I wasn't in tears but it's just like 'oh wow, it happened'. Yeah, I was more crying at the price of the wine after!

I think that the, the most amazing thing was there wasn't any light pollution, it's like almost the sky is twinkling stars. There're so many stars. It's unbelievable. That's absolutely unbelievable. And what we see here is just a tiny, tiny, tiny bit, makes you wonder.

For Pete, a personal interest was apparent from childhood, and the Northern Lights were something he had always wanted to experience, and his narrative highlights the powerful impact this experience had on him. This interest, or connectivity, underpinned the whole trip, influencing how he engaged with the phenomenon, highlighting how deeper engagement can lead to higher levels of satisfaction (Beesley 2005; Du Cros and Mckercher 2015).

The importance of this personal interest was also clear for Tracy. Her interest in art developed at school, and this led her to visiting Florence to see a particular artist:

So we just looked at the artworks, fascinating. Yeah, and we had time to actually just look at it and really take time to look at it, because I don't like rushing through. I went with my friend Jenny who is also into art. I found that with my former husband, he just wanted to travel and look at things out the car window, where I'm going bonkers and wanting to get out. So I would rather know more about something in some depth, or experience it more in some depth. You know, I never see the point in going to galleries and museums where you just go boom boom. I mean, sometimes you can only see maybe four or five pieces, because otherwise you're just, you're just flicking, like through a book, that's what it reminds me of, getting an artbook and flicking through it. So you're not really looking at the painting. You're not looking, you know I did art history at A level and never really did anything else much of it, but I suppose that's why, I still am interested in the stories behind the works, and to do that it takes time.

It was important for her to have time to view the art, reflecting a desire for a deep engagement. McKercher and Du Cros (McKercher 2002; McKercher and Du Cros 2003; Du Cros and McKercher 2015) developed a typology of cultural tourists based upon the depth of their experience, as well as the role culture played in their trip decision. Depth of experience is on a continuum, ranging from 'shallow' or 'superficial', to 'deep' or 'meaningful' where they have a chance to learn and develop an understanding of the culture and heritage at the destination (McKercher 2002). This typology acknowledges that not all visitors want or are able to have a deep and meaningful experience. This could be due to external constraints, such as time and differing interests in the travel group, as well as their own personal knowledge and interest (Du Cros and McKercher 2015). For Jane, her interest and choice of travel companion allowed her to have this deep experience.

For Barbara, the main appeal was to visit the museums in Paris, and she scheduled a day for this when visiting with her friends:

Thursday was museums day, but they like, they decided they didn't want to do museums. So I was like, you guys can go by yourself and I'll go by myself. So they just went walking. I think they went to like a park or something. But I went to, I went to the Musee D'Orsay first, then I like hung out in the park for a bit, and then I bought a timed ticket, the ones where you go at a specific time, for the Louvre, and did the Louvre for the rest of the day. I wanted to see the Impressionist Wing in the Musee D'Orsay, and then in the Louvre I had like a plan of what to see, but I didn't because I got lost like six times.

I knew I wanted to spend most of the day in the Louvre because I knew it was big, I just didn't think it was that big. And then I wanted to see the other museum honestly more than the Louvre, but I knew it would take less time. So like Louvre I spent like five hours, and then two hours in the other one.

I kind of listed the important to less important things. So like the Phoenix was like my top one. I guess as a kid, I was really into like Egyptian mythology, kind of ancient Egypt, so I was like, okay, well I have to see this. So I went there and saw that. And then the Mona Lisa was like midway, because I had another family member who went there and he was like, you're not going to get close. It's in a pretty big room and it's the only picture in there, but there is a crowd around it. So I looked a lot at what was there, but I just didn't know which Wings they were in. When I got there and I like compared my list to the map, I was like oh, well, I can't do all of these!

Well in the Louvre some things were like, oh my gosh, and then other things were like, oh. I guess I had high expectations for like the Mona Lisa, until I got told like don't, you're not getting close, and

then other things I was just blown away by I guess. One was like the mummy in the Egyptian wing and the Winged Victory. I don't know, just the going up the stairs to that statue. I was like, oh my gosh, that's great. And then I've always wanted to see a mummy. For the statue it was walking towards it, it's like going upstairs and then there's this statue. It seems like it was like on a pedestal kind of. And then with the mummy it was just because of my interest in Egyptian stuff. I was kind of like in awe I guess, like this is great. I guess it's seeing things that you learned about, like you heard about so much. Yeah. It's like with the Musee D'Orsay, in high school we focused on like different types of art, and like my favourite was impressionist. So like I went straight to the Impressionist Wing, and I spent like 45 minutes in there. They had some popular ones that we like did sketches of for classes.

For Barbara, the museums provided the standout moments for her, seeing something she had a connection with providing a rich experience. As MacCannell (2001, p.31) states, tourists “who focused on the markers, that is on the unseen, expressed much greater satisfaction with their experiences than sight-involved tourists”. Information strengthens the connection and the depth of experience they have. This is also evident for Marie, where her personal interest in ancient history enriched her experience in Rome:

Yeah like being in the forum and you know with old things you try to transport yourself back, but for me it was seeing a statue of Julius Caesar, erm, and it was like oh my God, this is where I am, this is that history and then I became like really tearful. I mean, you're walking along a place where, you know where an emperor walked or something, that's what did it for me. And I felt close to tears so many times and I was there and I felt like you know...You know where the Coliseum is and the Roman Forum which are obviously ancient and I'd been reading a trilogy about the life of Cicero by Roger Harris and it's written as if Cicero is writing it. He says I woke up this morning and wandered down to the Forum and so it's just like oh my God and not just walking where you know Mark Anthony walked, you know Julius Caesar and all that, actually this writer I'd just been reading about, it is just incredible.

When asked about this at the end of the interview, Marie reflected on this experience:

It makes me feel alive, it makes me feel reconnected to things that have always been important to me so, I think it is taking you back to your values and also taking you away from the everyday. I know holidays can be quite expensive but quite cheap to get those feelings which can be quite enriching. They take you away from everyday mundane things and they can sort of keep you going, so like I could come back from Rome with those feelings and they will stay with me for weeks. I guess it's that thing of, you know, it reminds me of who I am I think that's it. It's identity yeah.

Arriving at the destination with this pre-existing knowledge means they also arrived with a 'spatial story', which guides their attention and added meaning to the place (Li et al. 2023c). This is also something Jane wanted to instil for her children, before visiting New York:

So, with Fred, we know that we're going to do the movie tour so we know what films to watch in advance, and then we'll go and take him to all of those sites, so that we can go to him 'what film's that from?' Yeah, it's just what we've always done, like it's what my parents did with us and stuff. So, yeah, we just kind of, do it so we'll go to Grand Central Station. Jack would be like, oh, this is in du de du de du. It's like yeah.

This sense of connecting also extends to a personal connection for the family:

There's a little park, and it's just a little park but it's really pretty and you do ice skating there in the winter, but my, my mother-in-law's maiden name is So it's just this little, because we lost her like ten years ago, so it's just a funny little kind of connection and because it's not well known you just go there and it's very, there's not many tourists or anything. So it's quite, kind of like, just quiet, you can just go there.

This connection can also extend beyond the visit itself:

And so we took them to DC and I thought it was really important for Fred to see the White House, and he was like 'why am I looking at a big white house' and he was really grumpy. And at one point I had to turn his head around and say look at that big white building, suck it up and absorb everything, and now every time he sees the white House on TV, he's like 'mummy mummy, that's the big white house where we went'. And now he knows it's um, and although it was really hard, that was like probably the best and worst bit of the trip because it was like hard work. Yeah, but it's the bit that Fred kind of actually remembers because he sees it most often on the TV.

These narratives highlight the importance of involvement and engagement with the attractions. Within tourism, research has been conducted into involvement (Prentice 2004; Hwang et al. 2005; Sheng and Chen 2012; Mathis et al. 2016; Rather et al. 2022), which can be defined as a visitor's level of interest in an object or activity (Mathis et al. 2016). Involvement has cognitive and affective dimensions, and the level of involvement influences a visitors' level of satisfaction (Vivek et al. 2012; Mathis et al. 2016). Caru and Cova (2006) note that this involvement can be passive or active, but it is the more active involvement which leads to higher levels of satisfaction. More recently, the term 'engagement' has gained in popularity, and its use can be found across many disciplines (Brodie et al. 2013; Taheri et al. 2014). This has resulted in different uses of the term, but at its core engagement reflects interaction between a person and an object (Brodie et al. 2013; Hollebeek

2011). As with involvement, engagement is also considered to be multidimensional, consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural elements (Brodie et al. 2011; Hollebeek 2011). There is obvious overlap between these terms. Taheri et al. (2014), for instance, conceptualise engagement as a state of being involved and committed, whilst Higgins and Scholer (2009, p.102) define engagement as “a state of being involved, occupied, fully absorbed, or engrossed in something- sustained attention”. However, some argue that engagement is more than involvement, as it encompasses an active relationship between a tourist and an object (Taheri et al. 2014), and indeed involvement can be considered as an antecedent to engagement (Vivek et al. 2012): unless a visitor has an interest, they will not engage with the attraction.

Studies have shown that higher engagement enhances the visitor (or consumer) experience and leads to higher perceived benefits, or satisfaction (Higgins and Scholer 2009; Hollebeek 2011; Brodie et al. 2011; Taheri et al. 2014; Voase 2007; Poria et al. 2006). Of interest here is what leads to higher levels of engagement. According to Sheth et al. (1991), the level of engagement individuals have toward an object will depend on the consumption values they expect to receive from consuming, or experiencing, the object (Vivek et al. 2012). In their study within the museum sector, Taheri et al. (2014) identified three main drivers of engagement in the existing literature: prior knowledge, an individual's levels of motivation, and their cultural capital.

From the interviews, it is clear that these participants had a level of interest, or involvement, in the attractions they wanted to experience. Within visitor attraction studies, researchers talk of visitors having an ‘entrance narrative’ based upon their own experiences, knowledge and memories (Tsybulskaya and Camhi 2009). Voase (2007, p.50) notes in a study of cathedral visitors that they arrive with their own personal narratives, which they expect to be “augmented” when they encounter the attraction. Herbert (2001) stressed that in literary tourism, interest and involvement is generated by the connection with the story or author. Chronis (2005, p.218) states that for heritage attractions, “connection with the past is a state where the visitor is personally involved and engaged with the objects, information, people, and other material presented in a certain heritage site”. Prentice and Anderson (2003) also noted that what visitors bring with them is important for their consumption: in a sense, heritage for these visitors can be considered ‘the consumption of the familiar’.

Chronis (2005) also indicates that this deeper, or immersive, experience requires visitors to use their own imagination, and this is what helps visitors transport themselves and have a deeper connection with the heritage. They can also be considered 'mindful' visitors, who develop greater understanding and higher levels of satisfaction (Moscardo 1996). Further, Massara and Severino (2013) consider how this connection reduces the psychological distance between the visitor and the heritage attraction. They applied construal level theory, in particular psychological distance, to explain the strength of the connection between the visitor and the heritage attraction. Here, a stronger connection, reflected in more interest and knowledge, suggests a closer psychological distance, resulting in a more concrete construal of reality. The visitor will engage more and focus on particular details, providing a richer experience, which can lead to increased satisfaction. On the contrary, visitors with less interest and knowledge will have a higher, more abstract level of construal, and will focus more on the general qualities of the attraction, such as aesthetics or its history. In a sense, the latter could be said to come to 'gaze' (Poria 2013).

The desire for something different

As well as the main tourist sites, some participants also wanted to discover something different, unique or quirky at the destination. This adds to the variety of attractions consumed at the destination, and this can be for multiple needs, a desire for the unfamiliar, to gather more information, or for distinction (McAlister and Pessemier 1982). A standout memory for Lily on a long-haul trip to Australia was a sea lion tour:

And then we went up to Durian Bay, just to do the sea lion tour. That was amazing! Just swimming with these wild animals that are playing with you. That was just so incredible. What was really weird, Harry was diving under the water, one other person was and all these other people, because he's playing with them underwater they're following him, and these people kept getting in my way, he's my husband! I'm trying to take the picture! That was good. That was probably the thing that was most, yeah, that was just so good, and they can't take that away from you can they, playing with them. They were amazing.

Something different also stood out for Jane, who booked a day at Discovery Cove as a break from Disney:

So yeah, we had a rest stop because everyone says to build a rest stop in, so on our rest stop we did Discovery Cove. I don't know how to describe it have you heard of it? Discovery Cove is where you can go and swim with the dolphins and stuff, and then you can

also go into this, like it's called the grand reef and you literally walk in and all the fish are just there, and you walk in and you just start swimming and you're swimming with like parrotfish, angelfish. There was a massive guitar shark or whatever it's called. Yeah, it's like swimming in an actual reef, and then there's a bit where the glass is on a slant so you actually swim over the top of the sharks, so it feels like you're swimming with sharks. And then there's this lazy rapid where you can put your little life vest on and you just float around. And as you go around you go into the aviary, so all the birds are just flying around you and everything.

Jim was like why are we spending a thousand pounds on a one-day experience? And I was like no no. No, this is going to be epic. And yeah, Jim's like oh it better be all-inclusive and I was like, yes, so we got there and Jim is like 'I'm gonna eat as much as I can' and I'm like 'hurry up, we gotta go to the dolphins' and he's like 'grrr' eating like. And then yeah, so he was making sure he was like eating and drinking enough to get his money's worth, and then like he did the dolphins and was like, 'yeah, that's nice but really a thousand pounds', and then he got in this grand reef and he was like, 'this is amazing'. It totally made the holiday and he said if we ever go back to Florida, he's doing that again, he'd pay it again, but he wouldn't pay for the dolphins. So that would cut it down.

Yeah, yeah, he preferred it to Disney because, it's very natural. It's very, they limit how many people can go in. So you'll never kind of sat on top of everybody and everyone's kind of cramming through, so you can be sat somewhere and see absolutely no one else around you, there's no kind of screaming kids, because people don't pay that amount of money. Yeah and because you've got the water, it's a really nice relief from the heat and everything. The fish were just amazing.

Well, I like to plan as you can like, you can find the stuff that's slightly different. So like Discovery Cove, you know, you go and do Disney but then going and doing Discovery Cove, not everybody would do it. And so that was the bit that made it more special now, everyone's got pictures of Disney.

For others, it was the appeal of a different way to experience the sights. For Emily, a novel way to see the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco appealed:

So, we did cycle across the bridge which was great fun. So you go all the way around, a long way but it's great though. Oh God and you circle around to the next kind of village and then you can get a ferry from there back. So my friend, she was telling me that she'd been to San Francisco. So when I said to her I was going she said, 'oh my gosh you must do this this and this' and its like, so she recommended doing the cycling across the bridge.

For Jane, it was a different way to see the sights in New York:

We got off the beaten path as well. We try and get a little bit of balance. But yeah. So like with New York, we go to New York and then we do like this pizza tour. So, yes, so we know that we want to go see Brooklyn, but if we just go and see Brooklyn, we won't know what we're looking at. So we found this pizza tour. It takes you all around the best pizza joints in Brooklyn but shows you all the sights at the same time. So, you know, you get to like, eat your pizza, like, so you get fed on the tour, one less thing to worry about, and you see all the sights and everything. You get on the coach, you like have a chat with people whilst you're on the coach, and have a little bit of a giggle about who's where and stuff.

These participants evidently wanted a more active way to see the main sites. This has obvious links with Pine and Gilmore's (1999) experience economy, where the degree of involvement is a key dimension underpinning the four realms, ranging from passive to active participation. According to this model, visitors who actively participate in an aesthetic environment will be in the escapist realm. As they are actively involved, there is also an element of co-creation, with the visitors having input to the experience creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). De Bruin and Jelincic (2016, p.60) take this further, suggesting "PET" as a concept, defined as "tourism involving a process of adding value to an experience through active participation by the tourist".

This desire for something different also reflects a desire for the unfamiliar (McAlister and Pessemier, 1982), where individuals such as Jane, who want more social distinctiveness, will seek scarce (and expensive) items. The desire for something different recounted above also reflects a growth in 'experiential travel' (Bock 2015, p.20), where visitors desire to "experience destinations viscerally" and "they want individual experiences that are entirely their own".

Engaging in activities

As discussed previously, activities were the main inspiration for some participants when choosing the destination. All talked about the enjoyment they get from these activities. Pete shared the thrill and sense of achievement cycling holidays provide him:

Yeah cycling holidays, they were great. I mean that's something I'm really into, the cycling, anyway. We done a couple of trips. So we did the coast to coast, from the west coast to the east coast, quite a famous route. It was quite a challenge, some of the hills were quite steep, very big. But that's part of the adventure again, and the countryside was beautiful, like going into the wilderness, took your mind off the pain! We did the South Downs trail, that was hard too, and the Camel Trail in Cornwall. We went to the Alps specifically for mountain biking, for a down hilling holiday. Yeah, that was fantastic. You have these special downhill bikes, it's so hard to cycle even on the flat to be honest. But you just get your bicycle, put it on the ski lift, and it takes it up to the top and then you cycle back, it's just purely you go downhill.

This sense of achievement was echoed by Michael, who travels every year to Skye for a week's holiday with family, with the main intention to go hill walking. For him, the process itself is enjoyable:

You enjoy it, the process of it, walking up the hill. They are lovely to walk up, they make you feel better about yourself, with little pressure, even if it is hard it's enjoyable cos the moment you get to the top it is a brilliant feeling, a sense of achievement and the view is normally better as well.

This reflects the serious leisure perspective developed by Stebbins (2000), which highlights how leisure can range in intensity, from casual leisure to more serious leisure. Serious leisure involves a regular pursuit of an activity requiring skills, knowledge and experience, and participants find it sufficiently fulfilling to build a leisure career in this activity (Stebbins 2013). Serious leisure is defined by six distinctive qualities, which include perseverance and effort to acquire the necessary skills and experience (Stebbins 2000). This commitment results in a number of personal benefits, including self-development, a sense of accomplishment, and self-image and social recognition, which all help provide a sense of self-fulfilment (Stebbins 2013).

These benefits can also include thrills, referring to the exciting high points of the activity, and these stand out for participants when recounting their experiences. These thrills come from achieving a certain level of skill in their chosen activity,

highlighting the importance of balancing challenges and their skills. Stebbins (2007) equates this to an example of a flow experience. People enter a flow state when the balance between their capabilities and opportunities presented provides a feeling of being immersed in the moment (Csikszentmihalyi et al. 2018). Michael talks of the 'process' of climbing, reflecting one of the key characteristics of a flow experience, autotelic motivation, where the desire to undertake the activity comes from the joy of doing it rather than just the outcome.

For this thrill, or flow, to be sustained, individuals must take on harder challenges as they develop their skills (Csikszentmihalyi et al. 2018). This is evident for Lily:

We always wanted to go to Hawaii just to ride the big waves. We actually did a surf tour there, where we visited different surf spots with an instructor. It was amazing, after a couple of days we were able to go out on some big waves, wow what a buzz, still look at the photos they look massive!

Travelling to these destinations also highlights a hierarchy of destinations recognized within sport tourism literature, with the pinnacle being 'sport meccas' (Higham 2005; Weed and Bull 2012; Moularde and Weaver 2016). This was also evident for Graham, on a golfing holiday to Scotland:

Yeah so we went Scotland to play the famous golf courses. We went in the autumn otherwise it would be too busy, but it meant when we played the Old Course we had to carry around our own little mat to play off! It was great though, you've seen it so many times on the TV so when you get to a certain hole you just remember when they were playing on TV, it was amazing when you see where their balls usually landed, took me three shots just to get there. And the bunkers in Carnoustie were unbelievable.

This desire to balance skills with the challenge meant that participants enjoyed the chance to try different challenges. Pete talked about the different rides available in the Alps:

They had about seven or eight different routes down the mountain, and you got some trails with jumps on and things like that. So you start with the easier ones, and once you've got used to that one, then you try another one. You need the thrill of the excitement of another one, don't you?

Variety was also important to provide a change in this activity level. For Michael, they enjoyed the variety of walks at the destination, varying by the amount of effort required:

So normally we do a medium-ish walk, because you don't want to get too tired and you don't want it to be too stressful. You don't want

to have a horrible walk on the first day because then you will be in a terrible place the following day all stiff and everything. Second day you have your hard walk which is one from about three or four which we would have looked at and it depends on the weather or how we are feeling, so if you found the first day easier you will pick a harder one, if it was a bit tough a bit windy choose an easy one.

For participants who travelled to engage in activities, the environment was also an important element of their experience. For these visitors, the environment provided the backdrop for them, adding to their experience, and also provided markers for them to visit. Pete previously mentioned that “*the countryside was beautiful, like going into the wilderness, took your mind off the pain!*” Lily reflected on the importance of the environment when waiting for waves:

It can be a bit frustrating but at the same time what you're looking at? you're looking at absolutely beautiful beach, and you can always have a nice walk around and have a look. So there again we went round, we spent an awful amount of time looking at surfing beaches to see if there's any surf there, and walking around, and we did a couple of nice walks there. Just walking on the beaches, doing long walks around, trying to do circular walks around somewhere along the coast.

The importance of the setting for these activities is highlighted within adventure tourism research. Adventure tourism focusses on activities primarily undertaken in natural environments, and this backdrop can become an important element of their experiences (Williams and Soutar 2000; Giddy and Webb 2016). Pine and Gilmore (2019) stress the importance of the environment within the experience economy. They argue that two of the most important dimensions to engage a visitor are the level of guest participation, and the type of relationship, or connection, they have with the environment. From these dimensions, four realms are created: entertainment, educational, escapist, and aesthetic. Within the aesthetic realm, visitors “just want to be” (p.46), and can become immersed in the experience of being there. These participants took this a stage further, actively participating in activities, entering the escapist realm, becoming “completely immersed in them as actively involved participants” (p.43). This has obvious overlaps with the theory of flow, and indeed they do equate this to the ‘total involvement’ referred to by Csikszentmihalyi in his theory of flow, but suggest it more broadly relates to meeting all four realms, creating a ‘sweetspot’.

Todd (2009, p.154) notes that “the aesthetic appreciation of nature and tourism are closely intertwined”, and forms of tourism which provide time to appreciate the

natural environment as well as physical engagement with it provide an opportunity for a more serious appreciation of nature. Indeed, such activities may heighten our senses to external stimuli, leading to a deeper impact upon the experience (Kirillova et al. 2014). Of interest is how particular features stood out. Tracy recounted previous riding trips, where local features stood out:

So in Spain, we had a point to point, so you haven't got to come back to the same place, you go from spot to spot. Some of it's a bit basic, but once we got out onto the trails, the castles are beautiful and you ride right into them. They're lovely, really really nice, and the fact that they're different, you tend to get much, I mean, I've never been on a riding holiday that's been anything other than really exciting, you know, and really interesting, and you stop off at places because they have to stop for the horses, and you see stuff that you've not seen before.

Tracy talked about these features being different, adding to the excitement and interest generated by these stimuli. Difference was also important for Michael, reflecting on why they chose a certain walking route:

They have to have something positive about them, they either have to have a nice route up them or a good view point, or somewhere to have your lunch, or somewhere which is just a bit different, or just something which is pleasant, or some sort of historical aspect, they can have some ruins on them. If they didn't have any of that I don't think it would be enjoyable.

These features add to the stimuli and response, and difference plays a key role here. Kirillova and Lehto (2015) in their research found that how tourists perceive the aesthetic quality of a destination depended upon the difference between the home and destination environments. As noted previously, Kaplan and Kaplan's landscape preference model (1989) suggests that people prefer environments where they can function effectively. For this, people look for environments which meet their needs for understanding and exploration. Features in the environment add to complexity, encouraging visitors to explore, and glimpses of these features add further to this, providing an element of mystery, inviting them to enter the scene and learn more, meeting the need to understand.

Attractions encouraging discovery

The above theme highlights the desire participants had to see and do things when they arrived at the destination. They had already planned what to see and do before arriving at the destination. Others preferred to wait until they were there, offering more freedom to explore and discover. Whilst many arrived with a list of

the main attractions at the destination, they arrived with a loose plan on what to do. Others gathered more information at the destination, which provided further inspiration for unplanned visits to attractions. Attractions provided a purpose for their exploring, and enhanced their perceptions of the destination. As the following narratives highlight, there is evident interplay between these aspects, but they are approached separately here to shine further light on how attractions encourage discovery at the destination.

Discovering after arrival

Some participants arrived with a general knowledge of what there was to do at the destination, but waited until they arrived to discover what the destination offered in more detail. Fodness and Murray (1998) highlighted the temporal nature of information search, which can be pre-purchase or ongoing, and information is gathered to make better consumption choices. Information gathered at the destination expands their knowledge of the different attractions at the destination (Ortega and Rodríguez 2007).

Whilst some wanted to gather local insights, it also reflected a desire to enjoy the freedom to discover the destination when there. Emily picked up more information at the destination when visiting Shrewsbury on a short break:

Three nights we were there. We knew we wanted to see the main sites, but didn't really know that much more about the place. So we picked up a map when we were there, I think it was from the hotel, and it's got all the main highlights. So there's the cathedral, there's the old Abbey, there's a river walk. So that kind of gives you an idea of what's there, and there was a museum that Chris wanted to go to which is in the old castle, so we did that one morning, so you can just kind of pick, so we sit down and go, you know over a few drinks. 'Oh, right, okay, let's go there, there, and there' and that's it. We enjoy doing that, it's part of the trip.

So the first day we just kind of walked around the town just to get a feel for it and see what is going on and then in the afternoon we went to the Castle. So we wanted to do that, well we hadn't planned to do that on the first day, but we did, I think because we got fed up with walking around Shrewsbury, so Clive said come on let's go somewhere else, so we did that.

Shrewsbury was very nice too, there were Tudor buildings, cobbled streets, lots of little independent shops, just so it's like a bit different, yeah different to the norm.

Emily sourced published information at the destination. This can be considered a more formal, or explicit, form of information (Edwards et al. 2017). Others wanted information, or knowledge, from locals, who can provide advice from their perspective. Henry travelled to Genoa with a general idea of what was there, but picked up further advice when there:

Hotel was ultra comfortable. It was one of those places that had a nice concierge, and the concierge was very happy to give advice as to where to get the cheap tickets, where you could travel and where you could go. It's a fairly compact city, so you can walk most of it. So that worked really nicely.

The Portofino one we just got on the train down to whatever the larger town is, where there was a ferry to Portofino and we just did that all on speck. What we did was completely unplanned really. So that worked actually very nicely. It was an awful lot to do with the fact it was a compact city, and my wife's not a great walker, but she loved it.

It was 'how can we occupy ourselves with things to look at', and Genoa was just an interesting city as well. Even the modern bits of it. So we did plan to see the palaces, on the edge of the Old Town there is a whole road with palace after palace after palace from all these merchants who had basically been shipping the stuff out of Turin to the rest of the world and it was actually quite fascinating. There's a single line Metro that goes backwards and forwards through the city. We played it by ear when we were there, but we had noticed some particular palaces that were supposed to be splendid, and they were. It was a good quality hotel, a good quality concierge gave us all the tips we needed, so that worked very well. And I had forgotten that about that one really, but we will do a few more of those trips.

This local knowledge helped guide them on what to see and do, and it is evident they enjoyed the flexibility and spontaneity this provided, as well as a sense of exploring and discovery when there. For Henry, the concierge acted as a local ambassador, guiding them through their stay (Edwards et al. 2017).

Tom also relies on local knowledge to find different places and recommendations:

For me, it's something from the ground, and also the local people will tell you the most about what's nice to see. You just need to go in the evening to the pub or, that's what we usually do. We just go to the local pub, or like local place where people actually talk and drink, and we just start kind of chatting. And they literally can for example offer that the next day they will take you there, we will take you there, pop in the car and we will take you there, or you have to go and see this, I'll show you on Google Maps because you will not probably find it by yourself, etc.

For Tom, the local viewpoint is important when deciding what to see and do. He talks of information 'from the ground'. This highlights the importance of tacit knowledge, rather than just explicit knowledge available in written and visual materials (Edwards et al. 2017). Tacit knowledge refers to personal knowledge gathered by individuals, in this case people who live in and experience the destination themselves. They act as 'mediators' between the tourist and the destination, providing local information and tips to offer richer experiences (Ooi 2005). For Olivia, rather than local knowledge, she turned to social media and Google to find places when there:

Second day, I think that's when we went to the islands, we did sort of plan that like in the evening, like when we're having our meal we were like, okay, what do we want to do tomorrow? We would look on our phones and just use the hotel Wi-Fi. We sort of, like we sort of looked at what there was to do, but then looked when we were there, just be like 'things to do in Venice' or whatever. So like the islands, like obviously when we were looking on our phones and stuff, that is something that was coming up and stuff and we were like well, why not? Why not just see it and I guess like, we went to the water bus station as it were, to sort of see like what times they go and how much it was and that sort of thing.

Yeah, the glassblowing was really interesting for us, because I guess, I know it's more touristy and like obviously loads of people were going for it, but I don't know, it was just something different to see. And then Barano was the other Island, I think that was like where they make the lace. That's just something else to see, I think that is part of it, like it's something that I wouldn't normally do. like I haven't done that before. It's just another thing to tick off the list. I did buy a glass in Murano, it's just so pretty it's just the memories as well, bringing it back, it's another souvenir.

It was quite tiring, to be fair, we probably should have like spread across a few more days, but then they were just so close together, and there wasn't masses to do on each one, but it just made sense at the time. So next day we did the river cruise. So we got it like from the top all the way to the bottom. We decided that in the morning, we were tired from the day before! So we woke up, had breakfast, kind of looked at our phones over breakfast, but yeah we'd always like wanted to see all the sights, and boat tours came up online when we were searching on our phones that morning. I think we just went to the quay and just jumped on. It was amazing. Less tiring than the islands because you're just sat there. We were a bit tired but we were still keen to sort of make the most of it and see. Actually that was the fourth day. On the third day we went to the Lido. I think we found out about the Lido when we were there actually, because when we got the water bus from the airport, we were dropping off other people. So like obviously we did sort of stop there and we were like, oh, okay. I love it.

Barbara also relied on Google when exploring Rome:

Saturday we left and went to Rome. Rome was more, it was a go-with-the-flow kind of thing, we didn't have anything planned. We were very central, so we were like we'll just walk around the place, so we still got to see a lot of what's there. I guess like we knew what was in Paris, but in Rome, we only knew like two things, the Coliseum, and like the Vatican. But we didn't go to the Vatican, we, we just stayed in like a 30 minute walking distance from where we stayed.

So first day we went to the Spanish Steps, it was about 10 minutes from our hotel. We just said at breakfast, what are we doing today. We just searched like what's near, we searched Google for attractions near me kind of, like your street comes up and then like over here is the Trevi fountains, over here's this.

This use of ICT allows visitors to more easily gather information at the destination, providing a wider range of options to select from (Bock 2015; Briandana and Dwityas 2017). This can be to confirm previous options, or discover unknown attractions. This adds to the sense of freedom, important when in-destination decision-making is considered to be more simplistic and hedonistic (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002). Social media may be seen to provide more authentic, current and enjoyable information, although it may not always be considered to be more trustworthy (Liu et al. 2020). For these participants, the role of social media echoes those highlighted by Liu et al. (2020). Firstly, as with local information sources outlined above, social media acts as a 'guide', where it is used to gather more information on what to see and do at the destination. Further, social media can also take on the role of 'approver'. Here, visitors have preliminary ideas, but these are then double-checked on social media, primarily through the use of ratings features, before final decisions are made (Liu et al. 2020).

The appeal of finding things locally is illustrated by Katrine. When visiting Iceland, a sign at the destination piqued their interest to visit a museum, which became a standout memory for her:

That was very fascinating with the family, my brother ended up choosing a museum, a penis museum! The museum just sort of caught my brother's attention and all. And well this was kind of fascinating, it's not something you're used to seeing every day. We saw a huge poster for it on one of the days and we said like ok we got it, so on the way back to Reykjavik when we saw the big poster we decided to go. We stopped and went in, then walked around a bit, there was another museum, about the history of Iceland which was quite new, we were like we should just go there and like see what it is about. So we went to that one as well. That was completely

random that we saw it. It was quite good, but I think it's more aimed at families with young children. Funny the people I know who have been to Iceland, no one mentioned the museum, so that is always fun to mention.

Michael also recalled a chance discovery at the destination, on a walking holiday to Skye:

We went on a boat trip last year because of advertising, we just saw it advertised in one of the pubs to go on a boat trip. We thought why not give it a go, we gave them a call to see if they were free, they were free. It was brilliant. We saw eagles.

Discovering the destination when there allowed these participants to enjoy the freedom of choice, allowing for chance discoveries (Smith 1994), which added to their experience.

Providing a purpose

Attractions also played a role in encouraging participants to explore and discover the wider destination when there. Attractions they had researched before or during the trip acted as markers to explore the destination. These were mainly the must-see attractions, which encouraged participants to explore nearby areas at the destination, as well as discover more en-route. On a trip to Krakow, Jacki headed straight to the main square:

So the first day we got there late afternoon, just went straight to the square and sat down and it's beautiful, they've got horse drawn carriages and you can sit outside but with heaters and blankets so we did that Friday afternoon. We decided to stay in the centre and do things within walking distance, so we just took it easy, and then the next day was dedicated to things a bit further afield, which was the salt mines.

Similarly for Olivia, when visiting Venice:

First day we just sort of walked around. I think we sort of like headed to the main square bit, sort of taking in our surroundings. I think it's because like I didn't realize that like all the different places were connected with these little bridges. I don't know I was so naive and then yeah, I don't know.

Previous research highlights how visitors enjoy walking in cities, as it provides an opportunity to feel connected (Edwards and Griffin 2013). Sites they have researched become points of anchorage (Caru and Cova 2006). These help them orientate themselves to feel more comfortable in the destination (Frochot et al.

2019). En-route to these attractions, there is a chance to discover more of what the destination offers. This is evident for Marie, on a trip to Rome:

So the first day we got a taxi to the hotel, thought well we're a bit knackered, but let's have a little walk and if we go down there we will get to the Spanish Steps, that was kind of ticking off a list, but we came to this square which I now know really well, and it has got an obelisk and straightaway it was like 'oh my God there's an obelisk, it's from Egypt, 2000 years old can you believe it like', it was so amazing. And then we walked to the Spanish Steps, and then to the Trevi Fountain, but I didn't enjoy them, partly I don't think they are that amazing, they're quite recent structures and there's just too many people. We were ticking off those two attractions.

Yeah, so just walking and seeing, you know beautiful buildings and stuff, cos you have the architecture, the feel of the place, the weather was mild, and there's that thing we cross a bridge, a famous bridge or something, and then you look it up, and Bernini designed it and he's an amazing architect, and there's angels on the bridge, and I felt completely overwhelmed by the attractions. I didn't know Rome would be littered with ancient ruins, I found that absolutely overwhelming, but by the third day we were going oh there's another obelisk, taking it completely for granted.

Rome was like you know loads of nice little crooked streets all around and just finding like a 2000 year old temple and again like that awe, here you are in the place where Galileo was buried, it is just incredible. So I did read up on the main attractions, but the other thing we did was as we wandered around the streets and then like seeing the bridge, and the angels we come back and check the thing and aah that's Bellini and then it means something more after, you know.

Attractions played a part in tourists visiting certain areas in destinations. In a sense, the existence of these known attractions act as a signal and set their expectations of the surrounding area (Chung and Kalnins 2001), considered to be 'tourist areas' (Maitland and Newman 2004). For Barbara, the Fountain of Trevi acted as a marker to visit the area when in Rome:

The first night we got in, we drove to the hotel and then we just went walking, we got dinner and we went walking to the Fountain of Trevi. It's like seven minutes away from where we were. They had like a street where people are selling stuff, like books, and people playing music, it was really nice. We got gelato and we just strolled to the fountain. It was nice, we just kind of walked around that area, just again strolling.

This wandering gives them a chance to experience the wider destination environment (Murphy et al. 2000). Barbara reflected on this more relaxed approach to exploring the destination, being different from the scheduling in Paris:

Yeah different, more kind of relaxed. It was, it was good. Yeah, I think it was better. I think it was also the nature of the place. Because I guess with Paris we wanted to experience certain things in Paris, whereas in Rome you wanted to experience Rome, like the entire Rome experience I guess, whereas in Paris it was like the Eiffel Tower, museums. I guess for me there is no Parisian experience, it's more of sightseeing. Rome was, taking in Rome.

For Jane, whilst she planned the daily itinerary in detail, she still left time to explore areas near to the main attractions:

Oh, yeah, we look to discover things beforehand, but we'll go, so like with New York, we wanted to go to Ground Zero obviously. But then we just like to have a little explore kinda thing. So we'll have all the big things that we want to do, and then we'll just spend a bit of time like just wandering around and finding coffee shops and stuff, like we found a little milkshake bar last time. Yeah, depending on where it is, it's like one thing or a couple of things, and you tick them off as you go, and then just leave a little bit of time to just look up, like when you're in the cities you'll always just go look up and see 'so pretty'. I like to know what's there and what's going on.

Spending time in the area also provides a buffer between the main sites. Hayllar and Griffin (2009) considered these areas to be places of respite or refuge, citing a café as an example of a refuge point. They act as “places of refuge, typically from the cacophony of the city or the dissonance of the tourist experience itself” (p.8). For others, rather than specific attractions, it was the clustering of attractions which added to the appeal of the area to explore. These areas with a number of attractions are recognised as ‘tourist bubbles’ (Maitland and Newman 2004), or ‘tourist precincts’ (Hayllar and Griffin 2009), or more specifically cultural quarters where a number of cultural attractions exist (Montgomery 2003). Visitors tend to stay in the confines of these areas, and may spend most of their time here (Hayllar and Griffin 2009). For Emily, on a stay in San Diego, it was the waterfront where they spent their time:

Yes, and then we ended up in San Diego and three nights in San Diego. I loved San Diego actually would go back to San Diego. So we just thought we'd rock up, see what was their kind of thing. In the hotel they had some information and stuff, and there's a nice little bit down by the water, water front or something, so we walked around there. We do quite a lot of walking when we're away, you know, if you've got the time. We saw the naval ship, and right we said 'we're going to do it', because Chris wanted to do that. So we did that.

Yeah, and I love San Diego, just walking round, it's really very nice. One of the cheapest places we stayed as well, which was a bonus.

For Lily, the centre of the villages near Madrid provided a range of attractions to visit in an area:

But like I said the towns were amazing, the villages were amazing. They're just really old, they haven't changed for a long long time, just beautiful. You know, Spanish towns are really interesting especially when they all start walking around at night and it's just really nice, like a different place. We spent the time really just walking around, going down our list, going to the different cathedrals, castles, whatever they were. We went to one place and just walked around the castle walls going to the cathedral, to the museum, that sort of thing, just really touristy stuff. They're quite small places, so you kind of know where you're aiming for, a particular sight, you're in a relatively small town, so you're just going to walk around and find what you're going to do.

Sometimes the history around it is actually the more interesting thing. So yeah, you know somethings might surprise you, we went in this amazing monastery which, and you can really touch everything that they had. You could just touch things which are so old and they didn't really care what you're doing and that was amazing, and just wandering around. Don't like going when it's really busy. It's nice when you can just potter around and get a feel for what it must mean, like, to live there. History is fascinating because you can come back and read up about the history, and learn about things, I like doing that, trying to know how it all fits together.

I enjoyed the exploration. I think it's just nice to see different types of, things. You go on a holiday, and whenever you go on holiday, something about the holiday changes, changes your perception about things, forever. Doesn't it? Each holiday gives you a different experience and makes you think of something in a slightly different way.

Lily also talked about getting a feel for the place, in fact she talked more about the place than individual attractions. As Ooi (2005) stressed, attractions are embedded in a wider social setting, including social and cultural contexts. Murphy et al. (2000) labelled this the destination macro-environment, which contributes to the 'atmosphere' of the destination. This suggests that as well as markers to visit, attractions also act as markers of the destination itself. MacCannell argued that tourist sights are linked to the society, or destination, within which they are found: "modern society makes of itself its principal attraction in which the other attractions are embedded" (1976, p.48). Here, attractions represent the society in which they are located, suggesting a semiotic approach where attractions are significant as

“markers of meaning” (Richards 2002, p.1049). Tourist areas or districts provide the template for visitors to discover the destination in its wider form:

More important is the way the tourist attractions appear on a regional base as a model of social structure, beginning with ‘suggested’ or ‘recommended’ communities, regions, and neighbourhoods, and extending to matters of detail, setting the tourist up with a matrix he can fill in (if he wishes) with his own discoveries of his own typical little markets, towns, restaurants and people” (MacCannell 1976, p.50).

Getting a feel for the place

In the above section, attractions acted as markers for discovering the destination. They tended to explore the tourist areas or precincts. In their study in Sydney Australia, Hayllar and Griffin (2009) labelled these as browsers, who are happy to stay within these tourist areas and follow the main tourist routes. Another group, labelled the explorers, want to explore beyond these areas and discover more about the destination (Hayllar and Griffin 2009). Here, it was not about particular attractions, but a desire to see more than the tourist sights, to get a feel for the place, to know what it is like to live there. As MacCannell (2001, p.29) put it, a “desire of tourists to avoid the superficiality of environments made specifically for tourists, to get off the beaten track, or ‘behind the scenes’”. The role of attractions is less clear here, participants talk of sites which are not necessarily named attractions, but these features in the destination add to the general feel of the place.

Lily talked of getting a feel for cities she visited on a trip to Australia:

In Melbourne, we just wanted to get a feel for the city really, we just like pottering around and just seeing what it's like, and how people live there. We quite like seeing the way people live and just what is it like to be living there. So it's just walking around it. We have a coffee, something to eat, potter around and take some pictures of something. We just found it was a nice place to live. It felt very comfortable. It was nice. It was just, it felt a nice place to be, walking around the town was nice, walking on the river was nice, we walked down to the botanical gardens.

Adelaide, we just went in, very often went round places on a Saturday or Sunday. I like watching the local people coming out to play really. It's quite nice going places Saturdays and Sundays, and seeing them all on the beach and seeing the lifestyle, and Adelaide was nice.

For James, whilst a visit to Lithuania was inspired to visit a particular attraction, it was also a chance to explore and discover the place:

We were fairly open to anything that might interest both of us. I knew it was historic town, you know there were things to see and do, I think while we were there we just wandered. You know part of being in one of these destinations I find is just walking, just taking the place in as it comes. So I remember one day, you know, we just, we walked up, up the hill and it was a Sunday, and we came across some huge church on the top of the hill and went in for a quick look in. There was a service on and nobody seemed to be bothered by the fact we were there, so just listened to the music for a bit and you could then go up on to the roof of it. So we paid to go up on the roof and just took pictures and stuff from the top. The rest of the time we were just kind of wandering around, taking the place as it comes. So yeah, just kind of wander around the back streets in the residential areas as well, just an interesting-looking road that goes somewhere that looks interesting.

This reflects a desire for more authentic and local experiences, exploring the more ordinary yet lively areas (Bock 2015). Tom also talked about the feel of the city:

We walk because we want to walk through as much of the city as it was possible. That is what we usually do to see the most. See, meaning not like see the site, but to see what's around you, and what's the general atmosphere of the city. Just to kind of feel and breathe the city and how you feel in it, and what's the architecture around. It's never tiring for us because we wanted to have it, it's not relaxing as well because it's just like we spent all the time in the city.

Edwards and Griffin (2013) stress that urban areas have a number of roles in providing satisfying experiences for visitors, including being a place that can easily be explored, with places of interest, as well as aspects which are different and contribute to its overall sense of place, and provide an opportunity to see how the local people live. This allows visitors to feel connected with the city (Edwards and Griffin 2013; Wearing and Foley 2017).

Aspects which were different from home stood out for several participants. Barbara hails from the Cayman Islands, and the different streetscape in Rome added to the experience:

Well Rome is, like the buildings were so different from what we know. Like we've seen the buildings in Paris like in London, some of the buildings are nice but like the vibe, I guess, was similar to what we've seen before, whereas Rome, it's like walking in a theme park, where the streets were like, people walking in the middle of the road because the streets are made of bricks, I guess, so you couldn't tell the sidewalk from the road, and it was small streets and tall buildings, and then like you have this modern building and then right there is like a ruin. I didn't expect the ruins. I expected like the ruins

to be an attraction, we were surprised that it was just like a part of the city, an old part of the city and not an attraction per se.

Different features also added to the experience of the destination for Olivia:

Like it just felt very surreal like we were there, and it was just, it was very like cutesy to me as well like, how you'd get around and you just go on like the little bridges to get around and stuff. It was just good to sort of like travel around as well. But yeah, it's just weird how different it was, because obviously like you travel around by water bus all the time and it's just like...

It is the difference that makes these features stand out. Attention is limited, and people will pay attention to different things (Ooi 2005), something that is considered to be 'extraordinary' by the visitor (MacCannell 2001). Urry (1990) also talks of the tourist gaze being directed to features which they consider to be out of the ordinary. Recent research highlights the importance of sensory experiences in tourism, using the perspective of embodied cognition (Pan and Ryan 2009; Agapito et al. 2013; Lv et al. 2020; Li et al. 2023c). This perspective highlights the role our subconscious plays in influencing our behaviour (Li et al. 2023). It is through the senses that people explore and understand the world (Agapito et al. 2013), and it is the selection and interpretation of these stimuli which generate sensory experiences (Li et al. 2023c). Pan and Ryan (2009) stress that the tourist experience involves sensory stimulation through all of the senses, and higher levels of stimulation provide a more rewarding experience, leading to stronger attachment to the destination (Agapito et al. 2013).

It is objects and certain features embedded within them that provide these sensory experiences (Li et al. 2023c). In his seminal research into curiosity, Berlyne (1966) identified several elements which lead to more stimulation and arousal, including novelty. For participants above, it was the difference to their previous experiences that stood out for them and added to their arousal. For Tom, these stimuli encouraged his exploring in Lisbon:

I like, for example, the small little streets, uphill, down here, something like a little bit mystery about the place, and that will probably catch my attention as well. So things like castles, cathedrals, also squares, if something looks a little bit medieval, or renaissance buildings, that is what catches my attention as well.

Further, these stimuli also add to the atmosphere, or 'buzz' of the destination (Maitland and Newman 2004). Atmosphere is commonly used to describe the quality or ambience of the environment (Cheng and Chen 2021). Several participants talked of enjoying the atmosphere at the destination. James talked of enjoying the general ambience in Kaunas:

So first 3 days were in Kaunas, historic town so it's just wandering around, just walking around. There's a whole kind of walking around the historic town or city, which is kind of general ambience and all that sort of stuff, which is quite enjoyable, but they'll be any number of museums, you know, like folk lore museums or stuff like that which we won't really bother with.

Emily talked about the atmosphere in Krakow, which added to her experience:

We really immersed ourselves in Krakow, I think that's probably why we enjoyed it because we were there doing it all and experiencing everything. I loved it so much I told all my friends to go so one went in March this year on my recommendation, I tell them it's a fantastic city, lots to do, beautiful, safe and cheap. You've got the square, you've got the castle down by the river.

It's just magical, obviously Christmas time it's beautiful with all the lights but when we went in March we happened to be there the week before Easter so there was lots going on in the square. I guess there must always be things going on with the horse and carts lit up in the night time, and it's, it's just beautiful it's got a really nice atmosphere, it's really safe you feel safe.

Attractions have a more indirect role in discovering the place, and creating the atmosphere. Whilst Emily did mention specific attractions, other factors were important in creating the atmosphere. Bitner (1992) developed the concept of the servicescape which explains how the physical environment impacts upon customers. This is based upon the stimuli-organism-response (S-O-R) model used in environmental psychology (Mehrabian and Russell 1974), and can help explain how the atmosphere is created. External factors are grouped into ambient conditions, space/function, and signs and symbols, and these form the perceived servicescape. For Emily, ambient factors such as lighting were highlighted, as well as the presence of other people in the servicescape. Similarly for Tom, the attractions contributed to the servicescape, adding to the historical atmosphere of the destination in Lisbon:

So for Lisbon I remember the hustle because of the festival, and I remember the heat, and I remember I had a funny feeling that I do feel, being in that town, the colonial, that they spread the colonies all around the world. You can feel it in the atmosphere, and in this architecture of the town. You somehow kind of grasp it, that I'm

walking in the capital of a part of the world to be honest, when they had the discoveries.

You get a feel for the general atmosphere in the city, what kind of um, what culture do you breathe in. It's from everything around, it's from the many Portuguese people who are actually there also visiting the places, and they are proud of these places, and they talk about it. So you feel like you are part of history also being a European, although not a Portuguese, and then you also start thinking why is it so that you can be so rich in the past and now your economy is bad. And then it provokes a lot of different questions and conversations, which I really like.

For Marie, the general feel of Copenhagen also stood out:

And I think like Copenhagen I really loved it, someone told me it is the best place they'd been and I didn't really have any image of it, I'd bought the book as usual but I had no image of it at all apart from it being on the water. I went to all the art galleries, I went to that bridge because of the TV series. There were days I sort of ran out of things, but there were so many open spaces you could walk through, and the amazing architecture which is all modern. It was unexpected.

For these participants, it was the broader qualities of the destination which stood out (Maitland and Newman 2004), and attractions played a more indirect role in adding to the 'experiencescape' (Ooi 2005).

Attractions providing a diversion

For trips where attractions were important when booking the trip, they played a lesser role as a diversion from the main purpose of the trip. For city breaks, participants felt pressure to see as much as possible whilst there, leaving little time for other things to see and do.

For Barbara, who travelled from Europe with a group of friends, it was important to make the most of the trip:

I guess with us we spent so much money to get over here, we don't want to come here to see just one type of thing. We want to see, get our money's worth sightseeing I guess.

This was echoed by Mandy, reflecting on her city breaks and long-haul trip:

I like to know that I've seen as much as I can. I think it's in, somewhere like Budapest, I think it's a day wasted if you sort of just sit around and not even bother to see it. It's that kind of holiday. I realize this is completely going back on what I'm saying about Lanzarote, this is what I'm struggling with. So it was a lot to cram in in one day, but I think Budapest had so much to see that we, I mean

in hindsight we probably could have booked an extra day and spread it out a bit more, but it was a case of we're probably not going to come back, let's cram it in. I like to see as much as I can.

There is pressure to see as much as possible whilst there, highlighting the functional value of the main attractions (Sheth et al. 1991). This pressure to fit in as much as possible meant they did not have time to relax. Marie reflected on this, recalling previous holidays where the main purpose was to relax:

I think I miss out doing that, there is this sense of, I remember what those holidays were like, where you just get up, you've got nothing to do, you just wander around, go to the beach, your remit is just to relax so maybe I am depriving myself. Just thinking about Rome, if I was thinking I had enough of attractions today, I couldn't just sit down by the river it wouldn't work, it wouldn't feel right.

Whilst there is pressure to see as much as they can, this is preferred to there not being enough to see and do, highlighting the importance of the quantity of attractions to the perceived functional value of destinations. Marie also reflected upon this:

When I have been to places where I have thought 'now what is there to do', it is a really horrible feeling, you're spending money to be somewhere and it feels a waste. Sometimes I get the opposite feeling like London or Paris, there's so much to do and cities make you really knackered and you have to just stop at some point. I think there's nothing worse than being bored on holiday.

James also mentioned how a lack of things to see and do impacted upon their experience after visiting the main attraction planned for:

And to be honest for me the holiday really kind of petered out, it went downhill a bit after we visited the Stalin statues. There's nothing else there, other than that park there was nothing specific we wanted to see which is a shame.

These passages reinforce the role attractions have in providing functional value at the destination.

Offering a break

For trips where the main purpose was an activity, attractions did play a role as a diversion from the main activity, providing a break and chance to recover. Michael builds in a rest day when visiting Skye to go hill walking:

Third day is normally a quiet day a rest day, it might mean going on a small walk taking the camera out and normally trying to find somewhere really posh for lunch. Normally the wildlife is the attraction, otters or eagles or a boat trip, there's a couple of places

you can go to see them, a hide for otters and cliff walks where you can see otters.

For Lily on a long-haul trip to Australia, other attractions also provided a change from the main purpose when visiting wineries, as they found that one vineyard a day was enough:

In a lot of places what we tend to try and do, like in the vineyard areas, we tried each day do a vineyard, because we found doing more than one vineyard tasting a day was too much. So one vineyard a day one something, and a walk around or a cycle, you know, it does depend, it's different when you're not somewhere with the churches and museums really to go to. We went to the Yarra valley which is vineyards. Very nice area. Just very nice place, very nice place, and we went to a big zoo there with lots of Australian animals. And that was nice, that was something that just happened to be there.

This suggests a need for variety when they become satiated with a product or experience, leading them to seek a change (McAlister and Pessemier 1982; Kahn 1995). Attractions also provided a welcome diversion from participants visiting theme parks in Florida. Here, a rest day was a planned diversion. Max has visited the theme parks on several occasions, and the need for a diversion became part of the planning before and during the trip:

I mean like a day at the park is tiring, because you're on your feet constantly and it's hot. So you need to get up early to try and avoid the crowds, and then fit in all the rides. We kind of build a break as well into the itinerary, because you don't want to just go go go.

Anton et al. (2017) talk of the 'intensiveness' of experience, which reflects the amount of exposure a tourist has had of a product category. This can lead to satiety, and visiting a different type of attraction provides a change in the level of arousal, highlighting the appeal of the destination providing a mix of stimulation and tranquillity (Yiannakis and Gibson 1992).

Providing a backup

Attractions also provided a backup in case of changes in the weather. Pete only went to Iceland to see the Northern lights, but the poor weather hampered this quest. Having something else to do helped provide options to make the most of their time there:

We had a few days of brief bad weather and it was, it was really bad. So it was like 'What can we do?'. We did suggest to the guide that we'd like to do a couple of other bits and bobs, like the geysers and the famous pool with warm water, but he wasn't into that. But we did

go round some of the famous touristy spots for our photography during the day. We went to where the glacier cracks off, and it flows down the river, then it goes into the sea, but then the sea brings it back onto the beach. So you get these huge icebergs and chunks of ice. That was quite spectacular. We did go into Reykjavik centre one afternoon and we went to see the cathedral there. Stuff like that. That was quite good. We went to the Northern Lights Museum, but that was awful. I thought it was gonna be much better. There's a few pictures which weren't that spectacular, and like some videos. But I suppose the most interesting thing is telling you about the technical side of it. Why on cameras it shows up much better than it does to the eye.

Lily also looked at fall back options when they were not able to surf:

The first priority is the surf, so every day you are thinking is there surf, then you check the surf and if there's no surf you've got to think what to do.

Next was Peter Island, again a surfing area, that was the main reason we went there. They had a penguins display which we went to as well. And then we went to Torquay, it was a centre for surfing. On the first day we couldn't surf so we went to the Surfing Museum. We just popped in, it wasn't really good, but it was fine and it was cheap. Luckily, it was good surfing the second day and we saw people really riding well, so that was nice. We managed to surf twice.

Or when it was too hot to visit vineyards:

We also popped into Adelaide. We had planned to visit a vineyard, but it was too hot. It got to 46 degrees, so that altered what we did. So you have your priorities, but then the weather will throw a ball at you and you have to do something different. We went to the museum there actually, that was kind of 'let's go to Adelaide this afternoon, what is there to see?', look it up quickly on the way. The museum did this thing, you wear goggles, it's like a virtual reality thing, it was like being with David Attenborough in the Blue Planet. So you go down, you've got these goggles and you kind of look over your shoulders and there's David Attenborough, that was good.

Max also looked for alternatives for their planned rest day after visiting Disney:

So the third day maybe is our rest day, again it's all sort of dependent on the weather, because you can get the thunderstorms and as soon as you get a thunderstorm the rides close, so you may factor in something like a shopping day. So if it's bad weather, closed, let's go shopping. Or if it's good weather we'll go to the Disney water parks, there's Typhoon Lagoon and the other one, we don't do Typhoon Lagoon, but we go to the other one, and we always get like one of the cabanas there, so you can just mosey on over and chill. We book that when we are there, just because of like on that first day we will be like, okay, what do we want to do? Well, we definitely know which parks we're going to, but we don't prebook the waterpark because again it's kind of weather dependent.

As well as a need to change the level of stimulation, these alternative options also reflect what is called 'derived' varied behaviour, where consumption varies as a result of changes in external factors (McAlister and Pessemier 1982). This further highlights the importance of having a mix of attractions to provide backup options when factors such as the weather may change (Walsh 1995; Guo 2006).

Summary

This chapter shares participants' stories about holidays where attractions were an important influence when booking their trip. Attractions had a greater role as objects of desire, and this was reflected in accounts of their time at the destination. These included must-see attractions, sites they had previously built a connection with, activities important to them, and attractions which offered something different. Several participants shared stories of visiting places with which they had a more personal connection. This was from learning about them previously, or through a personal family connection with the place. This connection was also evident when visiting destinations to undertake activities. These findings point toward the importance of involvement in underpinning the significance of attractions. Further, it became apparent that many participants had powerful experiences when visiting these attractions.

As well as being objects of desire, attractions also played a wider role, acting as markers, providing a purpose and encouraging discovery at the destination, allowing for a sense of freedom and surprise discoveries, particularly where there were clusters of attractions. Participants also talked of 'getting a feel' for the destination, and attractions may play a more indirect role here, contributing to the wider ambience of the destination. Finally, attractions also played a role as a diversion, providing a change when satiated with one type of experience, and when conditions at the destination changed. These findings add to existing knowledge by further developing the cognitive approach to categorizing attractions introduced in the previous chapter. This new approach is expanded upon in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

This chapter draws together the main findings of this study, to demonstrate how the aim and objectives have been met. The main aim of this thesis was to examine the role of attractions in influencing destination attractiveness. At its core, destination attractiveness is an evaluation made by potential or actual visitors regarding the perceived ability of a destination to meet their needs. This thesis followed a qualitative approach to examine the perspective of visitors, and findings are based upon stories shared by participants. This analysis is underpinned by the principles of storytelling theory, where individuals think narratively, information is saved as stories in their memory, and they make sense of their experiences by telling stories (Woodside 2010; Tung and Ritchie 2011). Their stories are a way for participants to share their experiences from their episodic memory (Woodside 2010; Tung and Ritchie 2011, Park and Santos 2016), and by their very nature, what is shared is a memorable tourism experience (Park and Santos 2016). The use of stories allows the researcher to analyse these memories (Woodside 2010), which “empowers researchers with a heightened sense of awareness for details in these stories” (Tung and Ritchie 2011, p.1373). The details included in these stories have allowed the role of attractions to be refined, and the main themes are summarised below. However, it should be noted that these stories are not actual events, rather memories are reconstructed when shared (Woodside 2010; Tung and Ritchie 2011).

Findings have been presented to reflect the extension of the concept of destination attractiveness, to not only consider its influence on destination choice, but also the role of attractions after booking and whilst at the destination. This chapter also presents a conceptual framework to illustrate the varied roles attractions play, based upon the findings of this research and building on existing models and frameworks. By doing so, the chapter illustrates how this study adds to existing knowledge and offers recommendations for the sector as well as for further research.

Overview of themes

Many researchers separate the tourist journey into stages, encompassing the pre-trip, the visit to the destination (or attraction) itself, and the post-visit stage (Aho 2001; Shaw and Williams 2009; Cutler and Carmichael 2010; Kirchberg and Trondle 2012; Frochot and Batat 2013; Packer and Ballantyne 2016; Park and Santos 2016; Soltani-Nejad et al. 2024). The themes are presented here to highlight the role of attractions during the pre-trip stage and whilst at the destination itself.

Role of attractions prior to visit

The role of attractions pre-visit has been separated into choosing the destination, and preparing for the trip. Aho (2001) divides the pre-visit stage into two parts: getting interested and becoming attached. Getting interested leads to the decision to visit, whilst attachment relates to the preparations made, where interest develops. Pearce (2019) talks of 'deciding and choosing' and 'packing and preparing' (Yagi and Pearce 2019). This thesis builds on this division, considering the influence of attractions firstly on destination choice, and their role as participants prepare for the trip once the main elements have been booked.

Choosing the destination

The concept of destination attractiveness was originally related to destination choice, where attitudes toward a destination informs travel preferences and intentions to visit (Mayo and Jarvis 1981). Attitudes toward a destination are based upon individual attributes toward salient attributes, and previous research has investigated the relative importance of these attributes in influencing destination choice. This study revealed the varying influence attractions have on destination choice. Attractions can play a key role when choosing a destination, providing the initial inspiration. They serve as external objects which motivate participants to travel to a destination (Trash et al. 2014; Khoi et al. 2021; Dai et al. 2022). These attractions include well known iconic or flagship attractions (Becken 2005; Weidenfeld 2010; Xu et al. 2020), sites where participants had a more personal connection (Poria et al. 2006; Du Cros and McKercher 2015), or preferred environments in which to pursue activities of importance to them (Higham 2005; Chang and Gibson 2011). Attractions provide inspiration where visitors have a level of interest which motivates them to travel (Kashdan and Silvia 2009), where their perceptions of these attractions informs their overall attitude toward the

destination and their travel preferences (Mayo and Jarvis 1981; Alahakoon et al. 2021). They may be considered as 'pull factors' which have a primary role in drawing visitors to the destination (Lee et al. 2009; 2010; Vengesai et al. 2009; Lee and Huang 2014; Medina-Munoz and Medina-Munoz 2014; Lee and Chen 2017; Wu et al. 2022; Lam and Ryan 2024).

Attractions also play a key role by adding to the general appeal of the place, enhancing the holistic impression visitors have of the destination (Tasci et al. 2007). Attractions send a 'signal' of the quality of the destination offer (Chung and Kalnins 2001), providing what Pike (2021) labels a 'halo' effect for the destination as a whole. The broader offer of a range of things to see and do also adds to the appeal, enhancing the cumulative attraction of the destination (Hunt and Crompton 2008; Weidenfeld et al. 2010; Zhou et al. 2016).

Attractions may play a less significant role when choosing the destination, where other destination elements such as access and amenities are more important (Saraniemi and Kylanen 2011; Jovicic 2016). Attractions are considered later in the selection process, influencing the choice of accommodation, or confirming the final choice. Borrowing from research on the use of decision rules, or heuristics (see Bowen 2022), attractions may be considered a 'relative preference attribute' (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002), where a destination will be chosen if it performs well in terms of attractions, or as 'satisficers' (Li et al. 2019), where only a minimal level needs to be met. Finally, attractions may not be explicitly considered at this early stage, where visitors book with an expectation that there will be things to see and do when there, or are not considered to be important to meet their general needs (Pearce 2011; McKercher 2017).

Preparing for the trip

This study also reveals the role of attractions after choosing the destination, as visitors prepare for the trip. Visitors may gather more information after choosing the destination, looking for things to see and do, including new and different experiences, as well as learning more about the destination's culture and history. This reflects a change in construal level, where individuals gather more concrete information as the trip approaches, to enable them to meet their goals (Trobe and Liberman 2010; Massara and Severino 2013). This helps reduce any potential risks, as tourists aim to ensure the benefits they seek can be realised at the

destination (Bieger and Laesser 2004; Zarezadeh et al. 2023). Searching for more things to see and do suggests that attractions play a part in providing these benefits, as they comprehend what is feasible to meet their needs. Further, looking for something different highlights the role attractions provide in offering novelty. Searching for new or different experiences is an important part of the information search process (Vogt and Fesenmaier 1998; Zarezadeh et al. 2023), to not only meet a desire for the unfamiliar, but also a need for social distinctiveness (McAlister and Pessemier 1982).

Gathering more information may also reflect a more general desire to know, a key dimension of curiosity, labelled as epistemic curiosity (Berlyne 1960), or joyous exploration (Kashdan et al 2020). It can result from a feeling of deprivation, when an individual feels there is a gap in their knowledge (Loewenstein 1994; Litman and Jefferson 2004), or more broadly where they feel it would be enjoyable to learn something new (Litman and Jefferson 2004; Kashdan et al. 2018). This level of knowing increases this interest and desire to explore the destination when there (Kashdan et al. 2004), allowing them to potentially develop a deeper understanding of the destination when there (Moscardo 1996). Viewed from the service-dominant (S-D) logic (Vargo and Lusch 2006), this knowledge gained can be considered an operant resource which tourists use to cocreate value (Prebensen et al. 2014; Elettigerra et al. 2021). Information gathered adds to the perceived value of the trip by providing the resources needed to enjoy experiences at the destination, and it is argued that the effort put in during the consumption process can lead to greater satisfaction (Prebensen et al. 2014). Attractions have a clear role here, adding to the perceived value of the forthcoming trip as they discover more about what the destination offers prior to the visit.

This study also shows that not all visitors research the destination further after booking. It is recognised that the level of research does vary by individual, and previous studies suggest that some tourists do limited research once committed to the destination (Fodness and Murray 1998; Bieger and Laesser 2004; Hyde 2008). Under the transactional view of information search, tourists engage in research where the benefits outweigh the costs, which include time and effort (Vogt and Fesenmaier 1998; Bieger and Laesser 2004). This limited research also reflects a lower level of involvement in the purchase decision (Cai et al. 2004), and together these viewpoints indicate that some visitors have a lower level of interest in finding things to see and do at the destination. However, this may not always be the case.

Rather, some visitors value the sense of freedom they gain by avoiding obligations such as planning the trip in detail (Caruana and Crane 2011; Li et al. 2018), and have a desire for novelty and surprise once at the destination (Hyde 2004; 2008). For these visitors the role of attractions is implicit at this stage, and is only revealed once they experience the destination.

The role of attractions is further evidenced as visitors plan what to do at the destination. The approach taken can vary, ranging from rigid plans, to fit in as much as possible, to more tentative plans, to provide more flexibility at the destination (Becken and Wilson 2007; Hwang and Fesenmaier 2011; Park and Fesenmaier 2014; Park and Roehl 2016). This study highlights the importance of planning to arrive with options, having a bank of knowledge of things to see and do to select from (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002; Bloch et al. 1986). This not only helps meet different needs, but also provides flexibility, allowing them to adapt as circumstances and preferences change (March and Woodside 2005; DiPietro et al. 2007; Becken and Wilson 2007). Becken and Wilson (2007) stress that uncertainty is part of the holiday planning process, and having options allows tourists to hedge against future uncertainties regarding circumstances and their preferences (McAlister and Pessemier 1982; Kahn 1995), resulting from the temporal distance when booking a holiday. Having a mix of attractions adds to this flexibility, and the importance of options points toward the appeal of the destination as an assortment, not only to meet different needs, but also provide freedom of choice.

Attractions also have a further role, helping tourists orientate themselves before they arrive at the destination, reducing uncertainty and any anxiety this may cause (Allen 1999; Yagi and Pearce 2019; Chang 2013). They develop a cognitive or virtual map of the destination (Xia et al. 2008; Chang 2013), and attractions play a central role here, helping them to orientate themselves in the new environment (Correia et al. 2013; Zarezadeh et al. 2023).

Finally, attractions also help build anticipation for the trip, as information search itself can be enjoyable, providing anticipatory enjoyment (Vogt and Fesenmaier 1998; Yagi and Pearce 2019; Wei et al. 2019). Attractions can provide something to look forward to in this 'anticipation' phase (Yagi and Pearce 2011), where tourists enjoy imagining the benefits to come (Pearce 2019; Eletxigerra et al. 2021).

Role of attractions at the destination

This study reveals attractions have a clear role at the destination, offering experiences which satisfy the needs of visitors (Hu and Ritchie 1993; Das et al. 2007; Edward and George 2008; Cracolici and Nijkamp 2009; Medina-Munoz and Medina-Munoz 2014; Wu et al. 2015). Attractions not only act as objects of desire, meeting specific needs (McKercher 2017), but also encourage discovery at the destination, and provide a diversion from the main purpose of the trip.

Attractions as objects of desire

Known attractions become “objects of tourist desire” (MacCannell 2001, p.27). Viewed through the lens of curiosity, the desire to see these sites may be considered as a form of specific exploratory behaviour (Berlyne 1966), where a lack of knowledge arouses curiosity, leading to specific exploration of particular sources which can supply the information needed. This may be perceptual, where visitors aim to increase perceptions of stimuli in the environment, or epistemic, where they aim to gain knowledge (Litman and Jimerson 2004). These include ‘must-see’ iconic or flagship attractions (Dybedal 1998; Becken 2005; Weidenfeld 2010; 2016; Xu et al. 2020), attractions with which they had a more personal connection, through their personal heritage or interest (McCain and Ray 2003), as well as novel attractions (Basala and Klenosky 2002; Pechlaner et al. 2011) and activities of importance to the individual (Stebbins 2013).

What underpins attractions becoming ‘objects of desire’ is a level of interest generated by knowledge about the attraction or activity (Kashdan et al. 2004; Silvia 2006; Kashdan and Silvia 2009). This pre-existing knowledge, from information gathered prior to arrival or at the destination, means they arrive with a ‘spatial story’, or ‘entrance narrative’, which they build on when there (Voase 2007; Tsybulskaya and Camhi 2009; Li et al. 2023). This is congruous with Lowenstein’s integrated theory of curiosity (1994), where curiosity is driven by a gap in an individual’s knowledge. Information gathered may act as a reference point, and lead to individuals wanting to know more to fill this gap. This interest reflects a higher level of involvement with these attractions or activities (Vivek et al. 2012; Mathis et al. 2016), and this can lead to them becoming more engaged with the attraction (Taheri et al 2014). Several studies show that this higher engagement enhances the visitor experience and can lead to higher perceived benefits, or satisfaction (Higgins and Scholer 2009; Hollebeek 2011; Beesley 2005; Brodie et

al. 2011; Taheri et al. 2014; Voase 2007; Poria et al. 2006; Du Cros and Mckercher 2015; 2006). Where attractions become objects of desire, reflecting higher levels of interest, they play a central role in their trip experience, providing deeper, more meaningful experiences (Du Cros and McKercher 2015; Li et al. 2024).

Attractions encouraging discovery

As well as becoming objects of desire, attractions also play a wider role in encouraging discovery at the destination. They provide a purpose for exploratory trips at the destination, encouraging visitors to learn more about the place, and offering the chance for unexpected discoveries. Rather than just a desire to visit attractions, they also act as 'markers', or 'nodes', becoming points of anchorage to encourage this exploration (Caru and Cova 2006; Lee et al. 2017). This reflects the appropriation process proposed by Caru and Cova (2006), where after establishing their nest, visitors then start to investigate the new environment (Frochot et al. 2019). Attractions encourage this by not only reducing the uncertainty of where to visit, but also act as a navigation tool, helping visitors locate themselves in the destination (Xia et al. 2008)

This theme reflects a more general dimension of curiosity, beyond the specific exploratory behaviour (Berlyne 1966), or specific knowledge search (Crompton 2024), where attractions become objects of desire. It encompasses a more general search for stimuli, labelled diversive exploratory behaviour within psychology research (Berlyne 1966). Within tourism research, Davari and Jang (2024) consider two dimensions of destination curiosity, namely depth and width. Depth reflects a desire for more detailed examination, which mirrors the theme of attractions as objects of desire above, whilst width embraces a preference for a broader range of interests, which more closely reflects the theme of attractions encouraging discovery. It has similarities with the 'interest' dimension of curiosity proposed by Litman and Jimerson (2004), which is activated when individuals feel it would be enjoyable to discover something new, and this leads to more general knowledge exploration at the destination (Crompton 2024). This more general exploration gives tourists a chance to discover more about the wider destination environment (Murphy et al. 2000), where attractions are embedded in the wider social setting (Ooi 2005). This points to a wider role for attractions, not just as markers to visit, but also acting as markers of the destination itself. They represent

the society in which they are located (MacCannell 1976), and this general exploring gives the destination meaning to participants (Hayllar and Griffin 2009).

Visitors also explore beyond the main tourist areas, visiting residential and business areas, reflecting a desire to get off the beaten track and look beyond the tourist sights (MacCannell 2001; Bock 2015). It is hard to understand the role of attractions here, as the appeal is much broader. However, attractions may have a more indirect role by adding to the atmosphere, or 'buzz' of the destination (Maitland and Newman 2004). Recent research highlights the importance of sensory experiences in tourism (Pan and Ryan 2009; Agapito et al. 2013; Lv et al. 2020; Li et al. 2023), and it is through the senses that people explore and understand the world (Agapito et al. 2013). Adopting this perspective, objects and features within the environment provide these sensory experiences (Li et al. 2023), and attractions may play a role here by adding to the 'experiencescape' (Ooi 2005).

These exploratory trips may also offer the joy of the unexpected. Crompton (2024) talks of 'surprise-exploration' as a trigger for exploratory behaviour, where tourists search for novel stimuli, and this allows them to take "advantage of serendipitous opportunities" (Hyde 2004, p.163). Kim et al. (2021) define serendipitous experiences as a positive and unexpected discovery. Surprise is not the only dimension of serendipity: visitors also need to perceive that these experiences resulted by chance or luck. By not researching in detail but rather exploring the destination, what they discover is not only surprising, but includes an element of luck that they stumbled across these sites, adding to the experience (Kim 2021).

Attractions providing a diversion

Attractions also play a role in providing a diversion from the main purpose of the trip. Attractions offer tourists a change in stimulation, to avoid boredom or relax after high intensity experiences. Boredom has been recognised as driving the desire for novelty within tourism (Bello and Etzel 1985; Lee and Crompton 1992; Crompton 2024), and attractions provide new experiences and a different level of arousal (McAlister and Pessemier 1982; Kahn 1995). It reflects the wider curiosity literature in psychology, where the need for stimuli arouses curiosity, leading to a more general search for stimuli, labelled diversive exploratory behaviour (Berlyne 1966). Different attractions can also offer a break from more intensive experiences (Anton 2017), providing the chance to relax and recover, enabling them to

reestablish a sense of equilibrium (Litman 2005; Kashdan et al. 2009; Crompton 2024). This change in stimulation reflects a need for a mix of stimulation and tranquillity at the destination (Yiannakis and Gibson 1992).

As well as providing a change in stimulation, visiting attractions also helps punctuate the holiday, providing a welcome change or break from routine (Petrick 2002; McAlister and Pessemier 1992; Crompton 1979; Decrop and Snelders 2004). Lee and Crompton (1992) included 'change in routine' as one of their dimensions in their novelty construct, but this is based upon a desire for stimulation noted above. Rather, punctuating the holiday reflects the marking of time. Perception of time is influenced by the amount of effort required to process information, and a change in routine requires more effort, which slows down the perception of time (Avni-Babad and Ritov 2003; Witman 2016). Visits to attractions can offer experiences that are exciting and new, requiring more effort, allowing tourists to almost expand their holiday time.

Attractions also offer things to do when conditions at the destination change, mainly resulting from changes in the weather. Rather than a need for a change in stimulation, these visits resulted from changes in external factors, reflecting 'derived' varied behaviour (McAlister and Pessemier 1982). Attractions add to the experience at the destination by allowing visitors to adapt to these changes, offering potential contingency options (Kahn 1995; Decrop 1999).

Finally, attractions may also be considered as an unwelcome distraction by some visitors. Tourists may feel pressure to see things at the destination, which could result from evaluating the functional benefit of the trip in terms of value for money (Sheth et al. 1991), or from a sense of obligation to at least see the place they are visiting (Stebbins 2000; LaSusa 2013; Crompton 2024).

This need for a diversion, or change, stresses the importance of variety at the destination (McAlister and Pessemier 1982; Kahn 1995; Guo et al. 2006). As noted above, Davari and Jang (2024) consider width as a key dimension of destination curiosity, where individuals have a preference for a broad range of topics and interest.

Toward an understanding of the influence of attractions on destination attractiveness

Based upon the findings summarised above, a conceptual framework is developed here, shown in Figure 11.1, to highlight the influence of attractions on destination attractiveness during the pre-visit and visit stages.

The pre-visit stage is separated into 'choosing the destination' and 'preparing for the trip stages', reflecting the approach of Aho (2001) and Pearce (2019). Choosing the destination examines the influence of attractions on destination choice, and builds on existing frameworks (Leiper 1990; McKercher 2017). Within Leiper's (1990) tourism attractions system, a three-tier hierarchy is proposed, comprising primary, secondary and tertiary attractions. A primary attraction, or nuclei, influences a tourist's choice of destination, and is "active, pre-visit, in stimulating motivation in the person to travel towards the place where the attribute can be experienced" (p.374). A secondary attraction is known about before visiting, but is not significant in choosing the destination, whilst a tertiary nucleus plays no role, and is discovered at the destination.

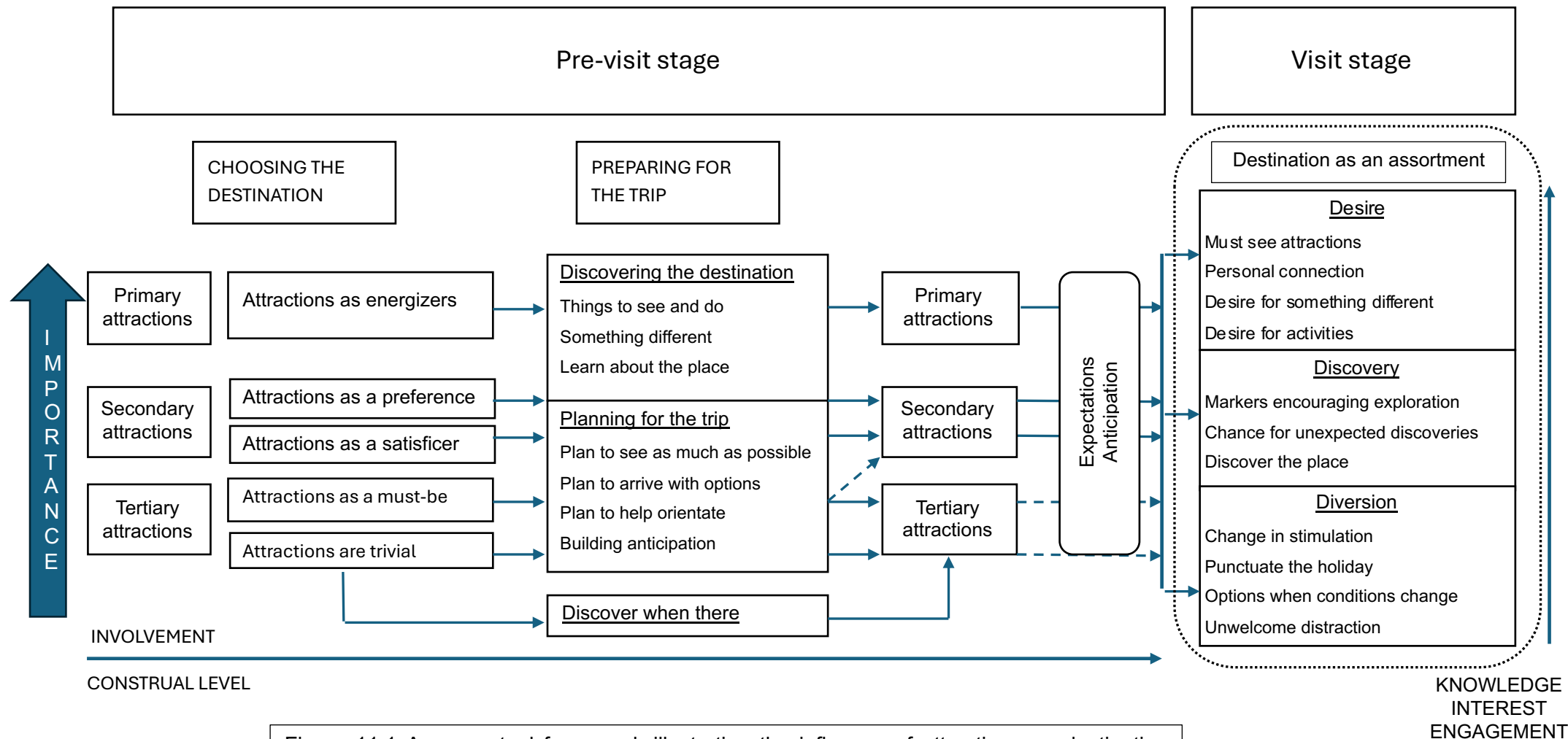


Figure 11.1 A conceptual framework illustrating the influence of attractions on destination

Within McKercher's (2017) framework, developed to assess the importance of attractions in driving demand, any attraction which influenced the decision to visit, "even a small one" (p.123), becomes important. Here, attractions are either important, or not important. McKercher (2017) applies an 'if not for' condition when considering the influence of attractions, where attractions are important when the trip would not have occurred if not for an attraction or activity. McKercher recognised the difficulty in demarking these, stating that after meeting the 'if not for' condition, "the challenge then is to delineate between those attractions that influenced visitation in whole or in part" (McKercher and Tolkach 2020, p.770). An attempt to develop a more graded approach is proposed here, where the level of importance varies, based upon the themes revealed in the analysis.

Where attractions provided the inspiration for the choice of destination, these fit within Leiper's (1990) hierarchy as primary attractions. Applying the approach from the wider marketing literature, these attractions can also be considered as 'determinant' attributes, as they "determine preference and purchase behaviour" (Alpert 1971, p.184), or potentially 'attractive quality' attributes, which lead to customers being extremely satisfied if they are provided (Kano et al. 1984; Wittel et al. 2013). Given their role in inspiring visitation, they are labelled here as 'energizer' attributes, which the consumer feels positive about and leads to a purchase (Macmillan and McGrath 1996).

Attractions which add to the appeal of the place may be considered as secondary attractions. Whilst Leiper (1990) suggested that these are not significant in destination choice, he also argued the existence of clusters of attractions can become significant. This is evident in this study, where the appeal of a range of things to see and do adds to the attractiveness of the destination. This general appeal of attractions suggests a level of abstract representation during this early stage, rather than specific knowledge of what a destination offers (Trope and Liberman 2010; Massara and Severino 2013; Scarpi and Raggiotto 2023). As McKercher and Tolkach (2020, p. 774) suggest, the appeal lies in the "general attributes of a place", where visitors travel with an expectation that the destination "offers substitutable attractions to satisfy needs" (McKercher and Koh 2017, p. 772). Here, they are considered a 'relative preference attribute' (Jeng and Fesenmaier 2002), where a destination will be chosen if it is perceived to perform well in terms of attractions offered. For trips where attractions were subordinate to other destination elements, and they swayed the balance when choosing between

destinations, they are labelled as 'satisficers' (Li et al. 2019), where only a minimal level needs to be met.

Some participants did not explicitly look for attractions, but rather booked with an expectation that there would be things to see and do at the destination. This indicates a lower level of importance, where attractions can be considered as a 'must-be' (Kano et al. 1984), or 'basic' attributes (Macmillan and McGrath 1996), which visitors expect to be available at the destination, otherwise they will be dissatisfied (Wittel et al. 2013). Following Leiper's (1990) framework, these can be classed as tertiary attractions, as they did not play an explicit role during this stage. Within the framework proposed here, they are labelled as 'must-be' attributes. Finally, it is evident that some trips are made where attractions were not important when selecting the destination. Where attractions played no role, they can be considered as 'inconsequential' (McKercher 2016), or 'irrelevant' (Goldstein and Busemeyer 1992), even 'trivial' (Miljkovic et al. 2003), as visitors do not have a preference for these attributes, and they have no influence on the decision to visit. They are labelled as 'trivial' in this framework.

Both Leiper's (1990) tourism attractions system and McKercher's (2017) framework focus on the role attractions play in choosing the destination. The framework presented here extends this to include the preparation stage, recognising that many decisions are made after choosing the destination (Payne et al. 1993; Yagi and Pearce 2019; Park and Fesenmaier 2014). It incorporates ongoing information search, as visitors gather more information on what the destination offers, and planning what to do when there. This highlights the ongoing role of attractions in influencing destination attractiveness, as they search for things to see and do which will deliver their desired benefits (Mayo and Jarvis 1981). Knowing what the destination offers also allows visitors to arrive with options, providing flexibility to cater for changing circumstances and preferences (March and Woodside 2005; DiPietro et al. 2007; Becken and Wilson 2007). They also play a wider role, helping visitors orientate themselves before arrival (Allen 1999; Yagi and Pearce 2019; Chang 2013), informing expectations and building anticipation (Aho 2001; Frochot and Batat 2013; Soltani-Nejad et al. 2024).

The framework explicitly recognises the change in construal level during the pre-visit stage, as visitors gather more concrete information to meet their goals (Troe and Liberman 2010; Massara and Severino 2013). However, not all visitors engage

in further research during the pre-visit stage, rather they wait and 'discover when there'. This may reflect a lower level of interest in attractions (Cai et al 2004), or to enjoy a sense of freedom and the opportunity for novelty and surprise once at the destination (Hyde 2004; Caruana and Crane 2011; Li et al. 2018).

Attractions have a clear influence on their experiences at the destination. The conceptual framework introduces a novel way to categorise attractions, offering a cognitive approach (Lew 1987), based upon the perspectives of participants. It is grounded in the concept of curiosity, where individuals engage in exploratory behaviour to change their stimulus field (Berlyne 1960). Berlyne (1966) identified two forms of exploratory behaviour: diversive exploratory behaviour, and specific exploratory behaviour. Diversive exploratory behaviour reflects a general search for stimulation, where individuals search for novel or challenging experiences (Kashdan et al. 2004). Specific exploratory behaviour occurs where individuals are attracted to particular sources which can provide the information needed (Berlyne 1966), reflecting a feeling of interest (Litman 2005). Based upon these levels of curiosity, attractions have been grouped into 'discovery', reflecting the general search for stimulation within the destination, and 'desire', where specific attractions are sought. Both reflect curiosity as a feeling of interest (Litman and Jimerson 2004), where visitors feel that it would be enjoyable to discover something new. Within tourism research, the need for change has long been recognised (Cohen 1972; 1974). Lee and Crompton (1992) identified a need for change, as well as boredom alleviation, resulting in a search for different stimuli. To capture this important element of the tourist experience, attractions which offer this change are labelled here as 'diversion' attractions, reflecting the need for a more general search within the curiosity concept, but driven more by a feeling of deprivation than interest (Litman and Jimerson 2004), and a need for escape (Crompton 1978; Dann 1981; Iso-Ahola 1982; Pearce and Lee 2005). This provides an 'impetus dimension' of motivation (Crompton 1979), which can create a desire to visit an attraction.

This classification has some similarities with that proposed by Cacomo and Solonandrasana (2002), who classified attractions into 'Discovery' attractions (or D-attractions) and 'Escape' attractions (or E-attractions), based upon the length of time spent at the attraction and their levels of satisfaction. At Discovery attractions, satisfaction reaches satiation after a period of time, after which they will leave. They have less interest in the attraction itself, and take on a more passive role,

visiting as sightseers (Botti et al. 2008). The example given is a tourist visiting the Louvre without a guide, who has little interest in art, but rather just wished to discover the museum itself, and after a while they soon lose interest (Cacomo and Solonandrasana 2002). An Escape attraction is where the visitor spends longer, and satisfaction does not decline so rapidly (Botti et al. 2008). Here, the visitor has a deeper interest in the attraction itself, and engages in a more active experience. Building on the example of the Louvre above, this could also be an Escape attraction where the visitor has a keen interest in art, and spends longer engaging with the contents of the museum. Cacomo and Solonandrasana (2002) talk of these visitors having a more permanent interest in the attraction, comparing them to pilgrims, rather than sightseers. This interest reflects the 'desire' category proposed here.

The conceptual framework provided suggests that attractions can play a role in providing desire, encouraging discovery, and offering a distraction regardless of how important they were at the time of booking. For trips where attractions were of primary importance, they obviously generate desire at the destination, but participants also talked of discovery and the need for a diversion. Where attractions were of less importance, they predominantly provide a diversion for participants, however attractions also encouraged discovery at the destination, and for some a desire developed when there to visit specific attractions. The framework also highlights how desire can increase, as information is gathered which generates interest, which inspires participants to visit these attractions (Kashdan et al. 2004; Silvia 2006; Kashdan and Silvia 2009).

Within this framework, the destination is considered as an assortment. Assortment research focuses on the number of products offered (Hart and Rafiq 2006; Kok et al. 2006), and an assortment can be defined simply as "the set of all products and items a particular seller offers for sale" (Kotler and Keller 2016, p.402). This conceptualisation is proposed as firstly it captures the hierarchical approach to tourists' decision making (Jeng and Feenmaier 2002). Research reveals that consumers follow a staged approach when choosing an assortment (Broniarczyk 2006; Kahn and Lehman 1991; Kahn et al. 2013), firstly choosing the assortment (the destination), and then selecting items (attractions) from this assortment at a later stage. An assortment offers a number of benefits to consumers, and these reflect the findings presented here, namely more choice allowing them to meet individual and group needs, enjoying flexibility and freedom of choice, and

anticipatory pleasure (Loewenstein 1987; Broniarczyk 2006; Scheibehenne et al. 2010; Chernev et al. 2015). Extending the conceptualisation of destinations to be considered as an assortment brings these benefits more clearly into focus. Assortments can also be considered at the macro and micro level (Hart and Rafiq 2006). The macro level refers to the store level (Kok et al. 2006), or in this case the destination level. This captures the holistic impressions individuals have of a destination, which may be informed by destination attributes such as attractions (Echtner and Ritchie 2003; Tasci et al. 2007). The micro level refers to the individual categories offered, which can reflect the destination elements, such as attractions and amenities (Saraniemi and Kylanden, 2011). This can be further extended for categories within these elements, for instance attractions can be further subdivided into different types, such as heritage, entertainment etc. Adopting the conceptualisation of destinations as an assortment, the focus can then be on the 'breadth' of attraction categories offered, such as heritage and wildlife, and the 'depth' within these categories, referring to the number of attractions within each (Hart and Rafiq 2006; Kok et al. 2006).

Contribution to knowledge

This thesis has contributed to existing knowledge in three main ways. Firstly, it extends existing research into the influence of attractions on destination choice, the initial focus of destination attractiveness research. Previous models are limited to attractions either influencing or not influencing demand to a destination (Mckercher 2017), or propose a three-tier hierarchy (Leiper 1990). This study offers a more graded approach to highlight the importance of attractions at this stage. Attractions are labelled as energizers when they inspire visitation, and either as a preference attribute or as a satisficer when they have a less significant influence on destination choice. Attractions which are not important when selecting a destination are labelled as 'trivial', as visitors do not have an explicit preference for them at this stage. Further, this study also incorporates the preparation stage where further research and decisions are made (Park and Fesenmaier 2014; Yagi and Pearce 2019), to shed further light on the role of attractions during the pre-visit stage.

Secondly, this study proposes a new cognitive approach to categorising attractions, underpinned by the theory of curiosity, which has recently gained recognition within tourism research. It distinguishes between specific exploratory

behaviour, where individuals are attracted by particular objects, and more general diversive exploratory behaviour, where individuals search for stimulation (Berlyne 1966). 'Attractions as desire' captures specific exploratory behaviour, where visitors have pre-existing knowledge and interest in an attraction (Litman 2005), and visit to gain further insight and have deep, meaningful experiences (Loewenstein 1994; Kashdan et al. 2004; Crompton 2024; Davari and Jang 2024). 'Attractions as discovery' reflects a more general search for knowledge, or perceptual stimulation, at the destination (Berlyne 1966, Crompton 2024; Davari and Jang 2024). Finally, 'attractions as a diversion' highlights the role attractions play in offering a change at the destination (Lee and Crompton 1992), providing a different level of stimulation (McAlister and Pessemier 1982; Crompton 2024), slowing the passing of time (Witman 2016), and offering options when condition change (Kahn 1994). This classification focuses on the perceptions of visitors, and highlights the different roles attractions play at the destination, fulfilling their wants and needs, encouraging exploration, and providing something different. The framework also highlights how desire can increase, as information is gathered which generates interest, and inspires participants to visit these attractions (Kashdan et al. 2004; Silvia 2006; Kashdan and Silvia 2009).

Thirdly, this study also extends existing conceptualisations to also consider destinations as an assortment. Previous researchers have considered a tourism destination as a 'bundle' of attributes, or a 'portfolio' of tourism products, which has obvious similarities to an assortment (Michael 2003; Formica and Uysal 2006; Candela and Figini 2010; Kim and Purdue 2011; Szczechowicz 2012; Yang 2012; Benur and Bramwell 2015; Reitsamer et al. 2016). However, pure bundling refers to an organisation only selling the bundle and not the individual products separately (Stremersch and Tellis 2002), where consumers make a choice between "bundles of attributes" (van Cranenburgh et al. 2014, p.106). Treating destinations as a bundle does not strictly allow for subsequent choices to be made from this bundle. Stremersch and Tellis (2002) note that "the domain of bundling is ill defined" (p.55), so for clarification purposes, it is proposed that tourism destinations are conceptualised as an assortment. This conceptualisation offers several benefits. Assortment research stresses the staged approach consumers follow when choosing an assortment (Kahn et al. 2013), which is evident within this study during the pre-visit and visit stage. Assortment research also identifies consumer benefits which are also acknowledged in this study, primarily the importance of options providing flexibility and freedom of choice (Chernev et al. 2015). Future

researchers may benefit from engaging with this body of literature further, not only regarding the factors which influence the attractiveness of assortments, but also research on choice overload and assortment planning (see Broniarczyk 2006).

Implications for practice

For destination managers, this study highlights the varied role attractions can play in influencing how visitors choose a destination and prepare for the trip, and their experiences at the destination.

Must-see attractions, notably iconic flagship attractions, are seen as a way of revitalising destinations (Leask 2022), and this study supports their role in adding to destination attractiveness, not just in inspiring visits, but also adding to the destination image. Attractions can also add to the image in a more holistic manner, where rather than specific attractions, having a range of things to do is seen as a preferential attribute. Rather than promoting individual attractions, conveying a message of a broad mix of things to do will add to the appeal at the early decision stage. Destination managers should also consider what attractions within the destination may have a personal connection with certain niche markets, and resources which could provide an environment for activities. Where attractions are less important when choosing the destination, they can still have a role, in providing a diversion, and encouraging discovery. Attractions should be promoted to these potential visitors, in order to showcase options available and provide freedom of choice when there.

These findings also highlight that visitors discover more about the destination after booking the main elements, and information should be made available after booking to strengthen the destination appeal. Information at the destination is also important, as many visitors arrive at the destination with loose plans, and delay decisions on what to visit until they gather more information locally, to inform their choices. Visitors may gather information from a range of sources, both formal and informal, and social media has a role to not only confirm provisional plans, but also reveal previously unknown attractions. It is important for destination managers to utilise various channels to provide further information whilst at the destination.

This information can build interest, creating desire to visit certain attractions. However, information needs to be measured, to ensure the gap between what they

know and what they want to know is manageable. At attraction sites, the use of interpretation tools can help bridge this gap, and lead to higher levels of engagement. However, there are times when less information is more, as visitors want to have the feeling of joyous exploration and the chance for serendipitous opportunities, which happen by luck rather than being planned. Destinations should encourage this discovery at the destination, maybe even using known attractions as markers to encourage more general exploring.

Recommendations for further research

The conceptual framework developed suggests some potential areas for future research. The framework needs further development and testing, ideally in different destinations, and with different types of visitor, to see how different contexts influence the role of attractions. The more graded approach to recognising the importance of attractions on destination choice could be applied in surveys of visitors, preferably prior to arrival at the destination to reduce any potential influence from their experiences at the destination.

Further research is also required during the different stages of the visitor journey, to investigate how the importance of attractions changes as the trip approaches, and as they experience the destination. Ideally, qualitative approaches are adopted, to capture their immediate evaluations.

The framework also does not capture specific needs and benefits, as these were rarely mentioned by participants. Further research is required to identify these, and the means-end approach offers potential here. If this is focused on individual destinations, there is also the opportunity to combine the cognitive approach proposed in this study with the more common inventory approach, to identify the benefits perceived at individual attractions. This would help limit the large number of potential relationships between push and pull factors which has limited previous research in this area.

Finally, conceptualising the destination as an assortment can provide further underpinning for tourism destination research. Research areas this could be applicable to include destination choice, the preference for depth and breadth amongst destination attributes, choice overload, and how tourists select items (such as attractions) once at the destination.

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Appendix A: Interview guide

Opening question

“Thinking about your last holiday (or one you are planning), tell me what makes a destination attractive to you. Please tell to me about the whole holiday experience, from thinking about a holiday, what you looked for at the destination (including things to see and do), why and how you selected your destination, what you did at the destination and your memories”.

Questioning stage

What makes a destination attractive to you?

Elements they look for

Attractions?

Importance of attractions

Type

Mix

Importance of variety

Importance of more choice?

Choice overload

Why

Attractions before visit

Thinking about booking a holiday, when do you consider these, (start, evaluate, or when booked)

Attraction whilst at destination

How book

When visit

How combine

why

Attractions after visit

Memories

How share

Memorabilia

Prompts

Direct elicitation

Please list the things that you look for when choosing a holiday destination (which would make a destination attractive)

Ideal type

Please describe to me your ideal or dream destination (for a particular type of holiday/destination of their choice)

They can draw if wish

Means-end chain approach

Why is (attribute)important to you?

Why is this (consequence) important to you?

Photo elicitation

Please select x photos which show your favourite holiday destinations/places you would like to visit.

Why

Card Sorting

Please place these types of attractions into different piles based upon their appeal to you, in terms of type of experience or benefit they offer to you

- For a trip of your choice, which would you find attractive?
- Which would you visit?
- Which do you feel are the same and which are different? why
- Please imagine how you would visit these attractions.

List of attraction types

1. Farms
2. Gardens
3. Country parks
4. Historic/heritage properties
5. Leisure / theme parks and water parks
6. Museums / art galleries and science centres(
7. Steam / heritage railways
8. Visitor / heritage centres
9. Wildlife attractions / zoos /safaris / aquariums
10. Places of worship
11. Workplaces
12. National parks, forests/other natural

Personal information

Age

Gender

Occupation

Social class (self-identified)

Education

Family group

Types of holiday

Main interests pursued

Level of travel experience (self –identified)

Planner vs non planner