RESEARCH NOTE

AWAY FROM HOME: A NEW REVELATION OF YOUNG TOURIST BEHAVIOR

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Although the economic and sociocultural significance of the youth tourism market highlights the importance of conducting research on the young tourist, there is a lack of in-depth exploration and understanding of young tourists' experiences on holiday. The aim of this article is to explore young beach-oriented tourists' behavior on holiday by employing a qualitative research method. Twenty-five young tourists in Ios, Greece were observed systematically over a 3-month period and then interviewed. The findings reveal that drug consumption (including alcohol) and unprotected sex were common activities among the young tourists on Ios. More interestingly, the results show that patterns of behavior on holiday were often discussed by the young tourists in relation to patterns of behavior in the home environment. This finding has important implications because it further advances our understanding of the relationship between the tourism experience and the leisure experience in the home environment.

Key words: Youth tourism; Qualitative methods; Tourism marketing

Introduction

The word "tourist" is often employed to indicate a unitary type, but the idea of considering the tourist population as a homogeneous group has been criticized within tourism studies. Rather, it has been pointed out that the word "tourist" includes a number of different categories and subcategories of people, with heterogeneous needs, desires, motivations,

and patterns of behavior (Plog, 1974; Wickens, 2002). As a consequence, a number of authors, such as Smith (1989) and Swarbrooke and Horner (2007), have emphasized the necessity to divide the whole tourist population into specific groups or segments.

Among the various attempts to divide the tourist population into different categories, the "young tourist" has been regarded as a separate segment of

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the tourism market (Bywater, 1993; Ravon, 1991). In this respect, Chadee and Cutler (1996) point out that the young tourist needs to be regarded as a distinct market with its own specific characteristics. Moreover, Stivala (1991) claims that, from a cultural and educational point of view, there is little doubt that youth tourism should not be equated to other forms of tourism. The consideration of youth tourism as a phenomenon with its own characteristics, leads to assert that it is necessary to explore, in more detail, this specific segment of the market.

Since the first World Tourism Organization (WTO) conference on youth tourism held in 1991, the importance of exploring the youth tourism market has been emphasized by a number of authors (e.g., Bywater, 1993; Ravon, 1991; Stivala, 1991). In particular, the young tourist has been regarded as an important segment of the tourism industry due to its positive economic impact (Bywater, 1993; Richards, 2007). Moreover, youth tourism has also been regarded as a positive phenomenon from a sociocultural point of view. According to Richards and Wilson (2003), young people's tourism has the potential to "build bridges between people and cultures" (p. 9). Hence, it has been recognized that young tourists can contribute to promote ideals of peace and understanding among people from different cultures (Winter, 2004). The economic and sociocultural significance of the youth tourism market highlights the importance of conducting research on the young tourist. More specifically, it has been noted that more research is needed on the young beach-oriented tourist, considering that "up to 50% of all holidays taken by young people are located in beach-oriented resorts" (Carr, 1999, p. 223). Previous studies on young tourists in beach-oriented resorts reveal that the young tourists tend to behave in a more hedonistic manner on holiday than at home (Ford & Eiser, 1995; Sönmez et al., 2006).

A number of studies have also focused on the causes of the "disinhibiting" effect (Sönmez et al., 2006, p. 896) of beach-oriented vacations. Maticka-Tyndale, Herold, and Mewhinney (1998) explored the sexual behavior of Canadian university students on spring break. Their findings show that young tourists' increased sexual activity and substance use on holiday is influenced by a number of different components, such as previous expectations,

peer group influences, and personal attitudes. Similarly, Ford and Eiser (1995) found that social pressure from the peer group leads the young tourists to conform to more hedonistic patterns of behavior on holiday.

Previous research has also focused on young tourists in beach-oriented resorts from a gendered perspective. In this respect, some studies (Clark & Clift, 1994; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998) underlined the differences between male and female patterns of behavior on holiday. More specifically, it has been found that men tend to participate in hedonistic activities, such as drinking alcohol and casual sex, more than women (Mattila, Apostolopoulos, Sönmez, Yu, & Sasidharan, 2001). However, the effect of gender on young tourists' behavior seems to be unclear. Pruitt and LaFont (1995), for example, found that women too, participate in hedonistic activities on holiday, such as casual sex. In addition, Carr's (1999) study on young British on holiday reveals that men and women are becoming indistinguishable in terms of patterns of behavior on beach-oriented vacations.

The above hedonistic activities of young tourists have been referred to in the leisure literature as "purple recreation" (Curtis, 1988), "leisure's other side" (Kelly & Freysinger, 2000), and "marginal" or "deviant" leisure (Shinew & Parry, 2005). In particular, it has been claimed that these hedonistic activities may play a detrimental role for society since they contrast with socially accepted values and norms (Russell, 2002). However, it needs to be noted that these studies were conducted in the home environment hence the applicability of their findings to a tourism context is rather indefinite. Indeed, the lack of agreement concerning whether and how the tourism and leisure environments are related (Hall & Page, 2006; Ryan & Kinder, 1996) do emphasize the need of more research on patterns of behavior in the tourism context.

The literature reviewed, thus far, indicates that although numerous studies have been conducted on the young beach-oriented tourist, much research has mainly focus on the holiday experiences of British (Carr, 2002; Ford & Eiser, 1995) and North American (Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006) tourists. Furthermore, much research on North American young tourists has primarily focused on the holiday experiences of students on

spring break. It needs to be emphasized that “the student population cannot be automatically equated with the young persons’ population” (Carr, 1998, p. 314). This is because not all the young population has access to the education system (Vandycke, 2001). In addition, most of the studies on the beach-oriented tourists (Carr, 2002; Maticka-Tyndale et al. 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006) employ quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. Although they have provided a valuable insight into young tourists’ behavior on holiday, they also have limitations in terms of providing an in-depth exploration and understanding of young tourists’ experiences on holiday. Patton (1990) confirms the value of qualitative data collection methods for “revealing respondents’ depth of emotion, the ways they have organized the world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions” (p. 24). This study is in support of Patton’s (1990) views hence the aim of this article is to explore young beach-oriented tourists’ behavior on holiday by employing a qualitative method.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this study were collected during a 3-month period (May–August 2007) on the island of Ios, Greece. Ios was selected as study site based on the fact that it is promoted as the “party island of Greece” and, thus, attracts many young mass tourists during the summer season (Stylidis, Terzidou, & Terzidis, 2008). Age was the main criterion employed to identify a young tourist. More specifically, all the tourists aged between 16 and 35 were regarded as potential participants of the study. The choice of this age range, although somewhat arbitrary, has been already employed in previous studies on young tourists (Carr, 1999).

This study combines participant observation and in-depth interview as its data collection methods. Participant observation was chosen because it requires direct involvement in the social world object of study. The possibility of firsthand contact with the population was of value to “hear, see, and begin to experience reality as participants do” (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 79). Twenty-five in-depth interviews were conducted among the young tourists in Ios. All the interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

Following transcription, the transcripts and observational notes were read several times in order to identify emergent themes and significant facts (Patton, 1990).

Results and Discussions

Sun, Sand, Sex, and Substance Abuse

There are two main findings from this study. The first finding is consistent with past studies on young tourists’ patterns of behavior (Carr, 2002; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006; Wickens, 2002). In this respect, the excerpts from the interviews and observations showed that the holiday experience on Ios was perceived by many as an occasion to “let oneself go.” Typical patterns of behavior included sleeping, relaxing, sex, and substance abuse. Unregulated alcohol consumption is not uncommon as illustrated below:

I wake up around 2pm . . . this is the earliest . . . I could sleep till 5pm. Then I go to Mylopotas Beach to relax. I need to relax because it is likely that I have to deal with a hangover. I may have a couple of beers anyway on the beach or even a couple of cocktails. Then I go back to my hotel at around 9 p.m., I have dinner and I go back to sleep till 12 a.m. At 12 a.m. I wake up again and at 1 a.m. I go out. And I spend the whole night partying and drinking from bar to bar till 7 a.m. (Matt 21, Ireland)

I drink, I eat, sometimes I sleep, I drink again, I eat again and I never sleep! This is my holiday on Ios pretty much. I go out and I let myself go, without any constraint, no control, nobody who tells you what to do. . . . (Jenny 25, Scotland)

The findings also revealed other forms of substance abuse such as ecstasy. The following participants confessed:

I tried something new this time, it made me feel good, light, happy. . . At home I avoid drugs but here everybody seems to do it . . . I thought well, who cares? I am on holiday!” (Mark 27, Argentina)

It [ecstasy] helps me to have fun. Not that I need it, usually I don’t do these things, actually I am against drugs . . . but I went to dance to this place and the atmosphere was cool and I tried ecstasy. I thought that trying it is normal when you are on holiday. (Lisa 23, Sweden)

Although past studies have found that young tourists have sex while on holiday (Maticka-Tyndale, 1998; Wickens, 2002), we were somewhat surprised when most participants admitted to having unprotected sex during their stay on the island. For example, Giulia (23, Italy) confessed that:

I had sex on Ios . . . after all I'm on holiday! We didn't use any protection; we were too drunk to think about it . . . but I'm not too worried . . . he looked like a regular guy

Alex (24, Argentina) said:

Well . . . in that moment we didn't think about it [protection]. We were too busy.

Interestingly, the findings highlighted that gender did not play a major role in influencing young tourists' patterns of behavior on Ios. Indeed, the results show that both male and female respondents "let themselves go" during their holiday. In particular, female tourists' patterns of behavior seemed to contradict Mattila et al. (2001), who found that young females' attitudes in the spring break environment tend to be not supportive of drinking and casual sex. Rather, the results agree with Pruitt and LaFont (1995) that women too, may indulge in activities perceived as risky, such as casual sex. This finding is also in accord with Carr (1999), who suggests that men and women are identical in terms of patterns of behavior on beach-oriented vacations.

The fact that young tourists in Ios indulged in alcohol and substance abuse as well as sex (often times unprotected) might be explained by the way the mass media promote Greece and the Greek islands. Movies like *Shirley Valentine*, for example, create expectations and, subsequently, encourage certain patterns of behavior, such as sexual intercourse with strangers while on holiday. Similarly, the Italian movie *Ginger and Cinnamon* (*Dillo con Parole Mie*) may have played a role in promoting the party environment of Ios among young Italian tourists. In fact, many Italians interviewed in this study mentioned this movie in relation to their patterns of behavior on Ios. A film distribution company describes the movie as "A comedy-of-errors filled with small talk, sun, sea and music, broken diets, antihistamines, camping stoves, tents, sleeping bags and nervous girls, multiple orgasms,

condoms, beers, teenage love making, ex-girlfriends, homework, octopuses, secret ingredients" (Film Movement, n.d., p. 7). This image of Ios is further created and promoted by several websites and blogs that describe a typical holiday on Ios as "the ultimate party island, this is the paradise for youngsters from all over, eager to party all night and sleep half the day" (www.in2greece.com); where "times of lucidity were few and far between" (About.com).

Freedom From Home

Perhaps one of the more interesting findings is that majority of the young tourists revealed that their vacation is an opportunity to feel less restrained and undertake risks. Many interviewed perceived Ios as a context in which they felt free from the constraints of everyday life and without anybody's control, and described "holiday" as an experience different from "home." Table 1 provides some illustrative comments supporting this finding. In this respect, young tourists' responses agreed with Graburn (2004) that "tourism is best understood as a kind of ritual, one in which the special occasions of leisure and travel stand in opposition to everyday life at home and work" (p. 23). Our respondents referred to "holiday" as a context in which they felt like having a "different state of mind" than the one at home, a mindset similar to Langer's (1993) "mindfulness," namely "a state of mind that results from drawing novel distinctions, examining information from new perspectives, and being sensitive to context" (p. 44). Conversely, "home" was often described as a boring and predictable context, one in which young tourists felt trapped in a "mindless" mindset, namely a state of mind in which "the individual gets locked into one predetermined version of information, even though alternative versions may better meet her or his needs in the future" (Langer, 1993, p. 45). Furthermore, young tourists' high levels of perceived freedom on holiday could also be related to the notion of liminality (Ryan & Kinder, 1996; Shields, 1990; Turner, 1986) a dimension in which "people feel able to do things they really want to do freed from the constraints of responsibilities to employers and social roles they normally occupy" (Ryan & Kinder, 1996, p. 510).

Expectations of "experiencing a liberating holi-

Table 1

Sample Statement Illustrating the Dichotomy Between Tourism and Leisure

Respondent	Sample Statements
Matt, 21, Ireland	Getting drunk on Ios is a different experience than at home, because back home you get drunk and you have to behave, here you can let yourself go.
Leonardo, 19, Italy	... it's not something new. ... I mean I can do this even at home if I want, I don't need to come to Ios to have this kind of experiences. ... I mean having sex ... anyway I have to admit that on Ios it's different, it's more intense ... yes I can feel a different intensity, a higher intensity. ... I'm looking for this kind of intensity.
Johanna, 27, South Africa	Well ... here on Ios I am definitely more active, I mean, I am more active from a sexual point of view. Sure I have more sex here than at home ... it's easier to find someone here, I guess everybody is looking for the same thing, I mean you meet someone and it's pretty much sure you end up doing it. I don't have a boyfriend and I think I am allowed to have occasional partners. ... Maybe at home I wouldn't have so many opportunities.
Carmen, 23, Sweden	Let's be honest, that's the main reason why people are here. And why not? I bought the ticket to Ios and I thought: 'I will have plenty of opportunities to have sex'. At home you can do it of course but when I'm on holiday in a place like this I think it's easier. ... everybody is more into that.
Mario, 21, Italy	I think that on holiday you are in a different dimension ... a dimension in which I have a different state of mind ... for me it's different from all the things I do when I'm home. ... I feel like I have a different state of mind ... on holiday you have more freedom to do what you like ... at home I have to work and do always the same boring stuff.
Mina, 22, Greece	Being on holiday is different ... a different mindset anyway ... you don't do the things you usually have to do in everyday life. ... Personally, I feel freer than at home and I let myself go ... I do things I usually don't do at home.

day" (Demetra 20, Greece) were mainly influenced by the respondents' age and life stage. It needs to be emphasized that most of the interviewees were young tourists in their early 20s and had just completed their undergraduate studies. More interviewees confirmed Demetra's sentiments. For example, Ali (22, Israel) perceived "tourism" as a liberating experience due to the fact that they had recently terminated military service. He said:

I just completed military service. It's compulsory in Israel; three years ... three long years. ... It's common among young Israelis to go on holiday after three years of strict rules. It's kind of a liberating experience. ... I am free now ... finally out of my parent's guard.

Most of the young tourists interviewed echoed Ali's comments as they were on holiday in a foreign country for the first time without family members. Carl (23, New Zealand) for instance, observed that:

I think that sometime I'm anxious because I have been waiting for this moment all my life, finally I'm here, my first serious holiday experience, I mean without nobody's control. I can show I am

not a child anymore. I can make it without mum and dad. I just want to enjoy it.

As Ali's (22, Israel) and Carl's (23, New Zealand) interviews show, the holiday experience was conceived by many as a "rite of passage" (Van Gennep, 1960) between childhood and adulthood, namely the first experience out of their familiar environment. On the whole, the second finding in this study would seem to indicate that there is a perceptual dichotomy between being on holiday as a tourist versus leisure holiday within the home country. Indeed, most respondents emphasized that their patterns of behavior on Ios were influenced by the fact they were in a tourism context. In particular, the young tourists perceived higher levels of freedom on holiday away from home.

Implications

This study has shown that young tourists in Ios do engage in unprotected sex and substance abuse including alcohol and ecstasy. This result has implications for those involved in the development of risk-reduction initiatives that try to protect young

people on holiday. For one, health-related materials and messages covering legal consequences of drug consumption (and specifically ecstasy) should be made accessible to the young tourists visiting Ios. It has been suggested that the responsibility of doing so should partly be on the tourist companies, airlines, hotels, nightclubs, and other venues that have direct contact with their customers (Bellis, Hale, Bennett, Chaudry, & Kilfoyle, 2000). Secondly, the health departments in Ios as well as the tourists' country of origin should help to protect young holidaymakers and local residents (who also often participate in the tourists' risky activities) by distributing condoms at hotels, local bars, and nightclubs in Ios. In addition, caution about policy on drug usage and other information regarding the hazards of unprotected sex while traveling should be posted in various channels, including websites, travel agencies, and travel supply stores that attract young tourists intending to visit Ios.

The demand from young tourists for consuming a party destination, such as Ios, can have adverse effects on the lifestyles of the local residents (Cullen et al., 2007). In the same vein, residents' attitudes towards such tourism development should be considered while marketing such destinations. For instance, local residents in Fort Lauderdale have attempted to discourage the demand for the consumption of their city due to the limited economic returns and conflicts between residents and tourists (Hobson & Josiam, 1993). Similarly, Josiam, Hobson, Dietrich, and Smeaton (1998) noted that local residents of a popular Florida beach destination also suffered from hosting heavy alcohol consuming tourists. Josiam et al. (1998) thus recommended that local residents have social obligations for marketing and promoting their destination in a more responsible manner. More recently, Li, Harrill, Uysal, Burnett, and Zahn (2010) suggested that destinations should take more active role in controlling the supply side in tourism planning and development in order to avoid negative impacts of tourism.

Conclusion

Although more research is needed to verify the results obtained, the findings of this study shed light on young tourists' patterns of behavior on

holiday. The results of the in-depth interviews suggested that the specific social context of Ios played a significant role in influencing young tourists' patterns of behavior. This finding suggests that all those involved in the development of Ios, as a tourism destination, should work spend more effort on increasing the awareness of such risky behavior of both tourists and local residents. This will expectantly reduce the consequences of unprotected sex, drug use, and excessive alcohol consumption. Future research should consider getting feedback from the local residents, who represent the supply side of the industry, which will provide a more complete picture of the tourism experience. Finally, there is a need for research to explore whether other factors, such as gender and culture, influence young tourists' behavior on holiday—this will increase existing knowledge and understanding of the youth tourism phenomenon.

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