Exploring Memorable Tourism Experiences: Antecedents and Behavioural Outcomes

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Abstract—This paper presents the findings of an exploratory research which examines the antecedents and behavioural outcomes of memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) from Australian travellers' perspectives. 35 in-depth interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of frequent Australian travellers. Inductive content analysis of the transcripts revealed 9 antecedents of MTEs of which eight represent the cognitive domain-perceived meaningfulness of the experience, perceived opportunities to encounter authentic local experiences, perceived significance of the experience, perceived novelty of the experience, perceived opportunities for social interactions, perceived serendipity and surprises encountered during the experience, perceived local hospitality and perceived professionalism of local guides-and the last theme represent the affective domain i.e. various emotions such happiness and excitement associated with MTEs. Analysis also revealed that novelty seeking travellers do not intend to re-visit the same destination despite they have had a memorable experience but they tend to recommend MTEs to others. These findings provide important managerial implications for destination marketing organizations (DMOs).

Index Terms—Memorable tourism experiences (MTEs), intention to re-visit, destination marketing organizations.

I. INTRODUCTION

With the recognition of tourism destinations as amalgams of tourism products offering an integrated experience to consumers [1], the emphasis is now to deliver unique, extraordinary and memorable tourism experiences (MTE) to target tourists in order to maintain a sustainable competitive advantage [2], [3]. However, academic literature and research on MTE remains sparse since it is an emerging research interest with only a few academic studies available, for example, [2]-[7]. More research could lead to a better understanding of what it means for travellers to have a MTE and also to uncover specific elements of such experiences [7]. The purpose of this paper is to report the findings of an exploratory research which examines the antecedents and behavioural outcomes of MTEs from Australian leisure travellers' perspectives.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The significance of the theory of memorable tourism experiences stems from the influencing power of past memory on consumer decision-making. Numerous scholars, for example, [8]-[11], have highlighted the importance of

past memory because it is the single most important source of information when a traveller makes a decision to re-visit a particular destination. Hoch and Deighton demonstrate three reasons behind the significance of past experiences stored in the memory [12]. Firstly, the product involvement and motivation to purchase the product are high when the information is drawn from their past experiences, secondly, consumers tend to perceive past experiences as valuable and credible information sources and, thirdly, there is great influencing power of past experiences on future behavioural intentions. Therefore, Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick recommend tourism businesses give due attention to this by facilitating the realization of memorable tourism experiences for travellers [5]. However, Tung and Ritchie argue that destination marketers cannot directly deliver MTEs because such experiences are highly idiosyncratic [7]. Larsen also affirms this notion stating that tourism experiences are "psychological phenomena, based in and originating from the individual tourist" [13]. Thus memorable experiences are constructed by travellers on their individual assessment of subjective experiences [4]. Therefore, the central role of tourism planners is to ''facilitate the development of an environment (i.e., the destination) that enhances the likelihood that tourists can create their own memorable tourism experiences'' [7]. However, understanding of what makes a tourism experience more memorable for a traveller is pivotal for such managerial efforts. Hence this investigation aims at uncovering the antecedents of memorable tourism experiences.

III. STUDY METHODS

In order to answer the research objective, an exploratory qualitative research was conducted in order to undercover the antecedents and behavioural outcomes of memorable tourism experiences. 35 in-depth interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of frequent Australian travellers. The sample consists of the academics and administrative staff of the University of New England and various other professionals such as solicitors, accountants and school teachers. The underlying rationality of choosing the academics and professionals was that they have more potential to undertake overseas travels for leisure and thus can be ideal candidates for investigating memorable tourism experiences. An interview guide was pre-planned to address the major research questions and pre-tested before commencing the interviews. All the interviews were verbatim transcribed by the researchers and imported into MAXQDA 10 qualitative data analysing software. Inductive content analysis was employed to identify the antecedents of

MTEs and their behavioural outcomes. 7 participants agreed to be involved in the process of testing the trustworthiness of the findings and they agreed with the codes assigned by the researchers.

IV. FINDINGS

As it can be seen in Table I, 9 themes emerged as the antecedents of memorable tourism experiences of which 8 themes represent the cognitive domain and the last one represents the affective domain. The cognitive domain comprised: (A) perceived meaningfulness of the experience (B) perceived opportunities to encounter authentic local experiences (C) perceived significance of the experience (D) perceived novelty of the experience (E) perceived opportunities for social interactions (F) perceived serendipity and surprises encountered during the experience (G) perceived local hospitality and (H) perceived professionalism of local guides. In relation to the affective domain, one theme emerged, namely (I) positive emotions.

TABLE I: ANTECEDENTS OF MEMORABLE TOURISM EXPERIENCES

THEMES		In-depth Interviews	
		Number of text segments	Number of interviews
(a) Themes belong to Cognitive Domain			
(A)	Perceived Meaningfulness	235	33
(B)	Perceived Opportunities for Encounter Authentic Local Experiences	167	30
(C)	Perceived Significance	156	28
(D)	Perceived novelty	187	24
(E)	Perceived Opportunities for Social Interactions	96	26
(F)	Local Hospitality	82	26
(G)	Serendipity & Surprises	76	23
(H)	Perceived Professionalism of Local Guides	25	10
(b) Themes belong to Affective Domain			
(I)	Positive Emotions	242	33

A. Perceived Meaningfulness

Most of participants (33) referred their memories to certain tourism experiences by which they had gained personally significant outcomes i.e. 'self-development' 'relationship development', and 'enhanced family wellbeing'. 'Relationship development' was the primarily important aspect of travelling which includes strengthening the existing bonds with the travel companions (e.g. friends) and developing new friendships with people (with other travellers and locals). "There is usually a higher probability of an event becoming memorable because of the people, the social events more so than just the place by itself" (Interview 29). The 'self-development' subtheme refers to various personally beneficial outcomes of the trip i.e. been able to enhance their intellectual capacity, to broaden perspectives about life and the world, to change the self-identity, to make sell- renewals, and to acquire new skills etc. Family wellbeing" was the third sub dimension of 'the meaningful experiences' which may include the positive outcomes of the trip such as 'enhanced family togetherness', 'family happiness' and improvement of children's knowledge about the world; "that will always be up the top of our memory list because we had such a lovely close time as a family doing such good fun things really" (Interview 2).

B. Perceived Opportunities to Encounter Authentic Local Experiences

This refers to participants' memories of real local experiences during the trip i.e. experiencing actual local life, cultures and foods of toured destinations. Participants remembered memorable moments such as visits to real local villages, sharing locals' actual life experiences, and exploring remote lifestyles, markets, farming and industries etc. "...in terms of what would make it truly memorable, the locals, the way they embrace you and the way that they allow you to enjoy the way they live, and their day to day things" (Interview 23). Participants further referred their memorable trips to experiencing authentic local cultures i.e. participating in local cultural festivals, visiting culturally significant places, and being moved by seeing strange cultural rituals and behaviours. Participants' memories were also be strongly related with local food and culinary experiences at foreign destinations. Their memories were mostly associated with the deliciousness of local foods they consumed and how strange and different such local foods were. "Local food is probably the main experience that comes to my mind and still I think about it often" (Interview 21).

C. Perceived Significance

This was reflected in responses that highlighted the perceived importance of certain experiences in terms of their exclusiveness, extremeness or reputation etc. For example, many participants (28) remembered visitation of world famous iconic tourist attractions such as great touristic cities (e.g. Paris, Moscow), iconic man-made attractions (e.g. Taj Mahal, Great Pyramids), iconic natural wonders (e.g. Iguassu Water Fall, The Mount Everest) and world famous museums and art galleries (e.g. Museum of Modern Arts in New York, British Museum in London) as some of their highly significant moments of past travel experiences. Some participants also referred their past memorable experiences to dream trips (i.e. trips that the participant was waiting for a long time to realize), trips which are perceived as once in a life time experience (i.e.

'very expensive' and 'hard to repeat' trips), and extraordinary experiences (i.e. trips that typical tourists do not like to undertake). "I think it was memorable because it had been in a dream of my mind for so long that, yes I've actually realized that dream, so that's one thing that made [it] memorable" (Interview 24).

D. Perceived Novelty

This was the fourth theme of personal autobiographical memories of past travel experiences which was reflected in many of the participants' responses (24). Novelty may include 'off-the-beaten track' travel experiences, 'first time' experiences such as 'first visit to Asia' or 'first trip in a cruise ship', visiting strange and alien places during the trip, staying at accommodation places which are quite different from mainstream touristic hotels, and their exposure to quite different cultures, lifestyles, foods etc. As one participant said, "Things I remember the most are like the big things that we go to see and do, particularly things we have never seen or done before," (Interview 7). "I think Egypt is an example which I didn't have very high expectations and I wasn't really sure how much I would enjoy it and even though it was. I think it's probably the most significant of the last trips because it was new and it was so different" (Interview 20).

E. Perceived Opportunities for Social Interactions

This can be another important antecedent for memorable tourism experiences and many participants (26) of this study spontaneously remembered this element when talking about their previous memorable trips and revealed that such social moments can take place with locals, fellow travellers and other randomly met people while travelling. For example, one participant highlighted that social interactions is the major aspect of his travelling: "I do remember just the feeling of being relaxed and having a good time with the people around me more than anything". (Interview7). Another percipient expressed: "Definitely the social interactions and bonds. I have never kept in touch with other tourists and I tend not to keep in touch with but when I'm there, I enjoy those interactions" (Interview 35). According to their responses, 'social interactions' does not refer to creating any long-term friendships or bonds with others; instead it's mostly related to happy interactions with various people they had met during their trips.

F. Perceived Local Hospitality

'Local hospitality' was highlighted by an overwhelming number of participants (26) and they commented very positively about friendliness, helpfulness and generosity of locals that they have encountered during the trip. "…the Japanese are always bowing and always very friendly to [visitors] and always very helpful so that was something that I remember [they] always come to help you to find your places, find do something, they were always there to help a lot" (Interview 21). Another participant remembered: "actually when we went into Holland I remember a one particular memorable experience with a gentleman one day who invited us to stay in his house…in the morning he went to work and he just left us in his house and told us to close the door when we left so that was how much he trusted us. We have never met him before" (Interview 3).

G. Serendipity and Surprises

Serendipitous incidents are unplanned but positive and memorable experiences that happened during tours. Participants claimed that generally, independent tourism trips tend to provide more serendipitous experiences than organized tours since independent trips provide more freedom to encounter unexpected experiences. "...it's associated with that personal kind of serendipity of the associations you make, the people you meet, the places you go, and that kind of freedom about independent travelling where you don't really know what is going to happen" (Interview 4). Participants also remembered surprising experiences where they had encountered much better experiences than what they expected or imagined. "…when we were slipping our Cocktail in the swimming pool I said to my husband, I never thought we would stay a place like this. That was memorable because it was just well above what I expected" (Interview 23).

H. Perceived Professionalism of Local Guides

The significant role played by the local guides to make a trip memorable was also emphasised by a number of participants (10). They highlighted certain good qualities of those professional guides who had impressed them during the trip such as guides' knowledge about the local attractions, ability communicate well, ability to be friendly with tourists and their willingness to do extra things to delight tourists, for example, one participant commented: "…the things how they prepared to do for you, information that they give to you, the friendliness, and their willingness to be a part of your trip…"(Interview 28). "Some guides well, they just go off to their room and you don't see them when you get to a hotel but other guides who join you and participate" (Interview 18). Another participant claimed "A good guide is certainly extremely beneficial…The company provided a New Zealand national as our guide. And I could talk to him at length [for] hours of time as we were walking, so I could ask him about anything...and his patience, been able to asking questions...sort of every opportunity, he was happy to answer" (Interview 22).

I. Positive Emotions

Participants referred their past MTEs to a number of emotions such as happiness, enjoyment and excitement etc. As one participant highlighted; "the memorable experiences will be the times that you felt very emotional, like very emotional, very excited or very happy, very surprised, and very curious. I remember things more when I had a very strong emotional experience" (Interview 18). It is rational to argue that the cognitive antecedents discussed above can cause subsequent affective emotions such as pleasure and arousal. Findings further revealed that post trip emotions (e.g. post trip happiness and satisfaction) may also have an effect on the autobiographical memory- "you tend to remember it more and therefore you talk about it more so it stays alive in your memory and it's quite vivid and you can continue to experience that good feeling" (Interview 23)- which suggests that people may recollect their past good travel experiences over time in order to replicate the same good emotions which help them to rehearse their memory.

J. MTEs and Future Behavioural Outcomes

With reference to the impact of these memorable tourism experiences on future travel decisions, majority of the participants (27) expressed that they neither revisited those destinations nor they will revisit them again in the near future. The major reason they brought into the discussion was that they want to experience something new from every leisure travel. They expressed various opinions such as 'there are many new places to visit before re-visiting places', 'the world is a big place', 'better to see as many as places during the limited lifespan', may decide to revisit places when the list of "must see' comes to an end and 're-visiting places is wasting money' etc. Nevertheless, majority of the participants (30) affirmed that they usually recommend such memorable trips and destinations to others. "My thought on travel is never going back to the same place twice because you would be disappointed, because if it was that good and if you go back and it is not that good it would break your dream from the first time you went. If you leave that memory as it was and just try somewhere else and plus the world is a big place, no need to go back to the same place twice" (Interview 1).

V. Conclusion and Managerial Implications

The findings of this paper provide valuable insights for tourist destination marketing organizations (DMOs) for better provision of memorable tourism experiences for their visitors. The paper suggests DMOs to re-evaluate their current marketing strategies which are highly focused on destination attributes [14], [15] rather than experiential aspects. While destination attributes can be an important element of memorable experiences (e.g. iconic tourist attractions), many elements of MTEs are experiential aspects e.g. perceived outcomes of the trip, perceived opportunities for social interactions and feelings of pleasure and arousal etc. The paper also suggests that although most of these experiential aspects of MTEs are idiosyncratic phenomena; they can still be influenced by tourism and leisure experience providers in certain ways.

A number of managerial recommendations can be made based on the study findings. First, facilitating to obtain easy and accurate information about the destination and tourism products can enhance the probability of delivering more MTEs for potential visitors because travellers can better plan their trips based on the quality and reliable information which in turn contribute to realise more memorable experiences by themselves. Poor information may prevent such opportunities and even disappoint visitors. Upon arrival of the destination, tourist experience providers (e.g. tourist attractions and tour operators) can deliver more learning experiences for travellers rather than just facilitating 'visiting' and 'seeing' something. Travellers should also be offered more avenues and opportunities to learn about the local history, cultures, languages and local lifestyles which may further add values to their experiences. Similarly, providing more opportunities for travellers to visit authentic local villages, to stay at accommodation places which are more close to real local life, allowing travellers to experience the actual way of local living,

encouraging them to immerse themselves in real local cultural ceremonies and to enjoy more authentic local foods and cuisines can also make a good impression in travellers' minds which will help to create positive memories about the trip.

Traveller's perception about novelty may link to undertaking quite novel tours, visiting strange touristic cites, staying at quite novel accommodations, tasting quite different foods, and immersing themselves into quite different cultures and novel ways of life etc. Hence, tour operator and other tourism experience providers need to critically think how they can distinguish their products from 'typical mainstream tourism products' so that they can deliver a unique experience to travellers. In addition, continuous product developments and modifications are essential for attracting repeat visitors since many travellers tend to be novelty seekers in the context of travelling. Similarly, incorporating more avenues for travellers to engage in social interactions can also positively contribute to MTEs, for example, providing more opportunities for them to interact with locals. Encouraging family travels and group travels can also be more memorable as they tend to enhance the level of enjoyment of the trip due to the 'group mentality' i.e. experience the trip as a group. Especially, traveller's perception of a group tour is directly influenced by the degree to which the group cohesiveness is available and the level of pleasant interactions among the travellers.

Serendipitous and surprising experiences can also trigger travellers' memories about the trip. Thus, planning tourism experiential products which facilitate travellers to experience more serendipity during the travel will be more memorable for them, for example, in the context of group tours, tour operators can incorporate various unexpected and spurring events in to the tours so that travellers may perceive more serendipity during the tour. Further, these tours can offer more flexible options for travellers so that they can plan their own experiences which may also provide more opportunities for serendipity during the trip. In addition, travellers tend to remember trips where they encounter very professional local guides who can be a key determinant of the success of the tour. Both the technical quality i.e. knowledge and expertise in guiding and the functional quality i.e. interactive skills are essential for professional guiding which can impress travellers. Further, travellers tend to have random encounters with the local residents throughout the trip at various locations and their favourable perception about locals' friendliness, helpfulness and willingness to welcome tourists can create a long-lasting memories in their minds. Despite this factor is not under the direct control of tourism services and experience providers, macro level DMOs need to undertake awareness and promotion campaigns to educate local people to be more friendly and hospitable towards foreign travellers.

Finally, certain emotions such as happiness and excitement were found to be other determinants of MTEs. DMOs can gain important insides from the finding that travellers tend to recollect past memorable experiences in order to replicate the same good feelings after months and years following the trip. Hence, DMOs may attract previous visitors by clever promotions which creatively invite them to replicate previous good feelings. MTEs also can have a

positive impact of attracting new visitors to the destination through word of mouth recommendations since many travellers tend to recommend MTEs to others.

In relation to future research, more quantitative type of research is recommended in order to further validate the findings of this investigation.

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