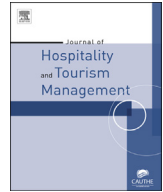




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Fly in to work; fly out to Bali: An exploration of Australian fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) workers leisure travel



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ABSTRACT

The Fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) phenomenon is of significant importance to Australia's economy. A growing body of literature has focused primarily on the relationships between FIFO work and the well-being of workers and their family, and the economic and social impacts of FIFO work on host and source communities. However, there is a lack of scholarly attention paid towards the leisure and travel motivations and behaviours of these workers. The purpose of this exploratory research is to provide a deeper understanding of the travel behaviour of Australia's FIFO workers to one of the country's most popular outbound tourism destinations, Bali in Indonesia. A qualitative approach of in-depth interviews with FIFO workers and family members was used to meet the research aim. This paper is of significance to the Australian tourism industry as it provides some understanding of the factors contributing to the growing disparity between the growth of outbound travel and reduced domestic intrastate and interstate travel. It contributes to academic knowledge through providing greater insight into the complexities involved with FIFO workers' travel motivation and behaviour.

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1. Introduction

The fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) phenomenon exists in many states of Australia with the majority of workers employed in Western Australia and Queensland (Vojnović, Jacobs, Brook, Ashton, & Pulé, 2014). Approximately 276,300 workers are employed by the Australian resources sector, including 100,000 FIFOs workers (Henry, Hamilton, Watson, & Macdonald, 2013). Much of the existing FIFO related research has focused on the health of FIFO workers and their families (Blackman et al., 2014; Hoath & Haslam Mackenzie, 2013; Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2008; Pini & Myers, 2012; Rolfe & Kinnear, 2013; Taylor & Simmonds, 2009; Torkington, Larkins, & Gupta, 2011; Vojnović et al., 2014; Vojnovic, Michelson, Jackson, & Bahn, 2014) and the economic and social impacts of FIFO work on both host and source communities (Commonwealth of Tourism Research Australia, 2013; Haslam McKenzie, 2013; Markey, Storey, & Heisler, 2010; Storey, 2001, 2010; Tourism Research Australia, 2013). To date, research on the leisure activities of FIFO workers during their 'set break time' has been limited. Similarly, few academic studies have been published on tourists

holidaying in Bali with the exception of research investigating the impacts of the Bali bombings in 2002 and 2005 (Smyth, Neilson, & Mishra, 2009).

Therefore, the purpose of this research is three-fold. Firstly, it aims to explore the leisure travel behaviour of FIFO workers. Secondly, it considers why these workers are particularly drawn to using their leisure time in Bali. Thirdly, it considers why and to what extent FIFO workers are choosing international destinations such as Bali ahead of domestic tourism experiences. It was hypothesised that as mining workers, including those on FIFO rosters, receive relatively large wages and, that there must be more than just cheaper prices influencing the growing popularity of off shore destinations like Bali. This research is important as it will provide some understanding of the factors contributing to the growing disparity between the growth of outbound travel and reduced domestic intrastate and interstate travel.

Concurrent with the increase in the number of FIFO workers, there has been a significant and sustained increase in outbound travel from Australia. According to Tourism Research Australia, between 2002 and 2012 departures nearly doubled (9.9% per year) (2013 p. 33) outnumbering arrivals by 25% by 2011 (Tourism Research Australia, 2012). Indonesia is the second most popular destination for Australians and the most popular for those living in the west. By 2011 Australia had become the largest international

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market for Bali with arrivals increasing from 194,111 in 2008 to 503,617 in 2008 (Bali Discovery, 2013). This paper begins with a review of the literature related to FIFO, Australian tourists in Bali and destination choice. Then following an outline of the methods employed, it presents the results of the exploration into FIFO leisure travel and in particular their destination choice of Bali. It concludes with a discussion of the key findings and concludes with recommendations for future research.

2. Review of the literature

2.1. FIFO

The phenomenon of FIFO or long distance commuting to remote worksites can trace its origins to the off shore oil activities in the Gulf of Mexico in the 1950s (Gramling, 1995). In Australia, FIFO commenced in the resources sector in the 1980s (Houghton, 1993) and since then it has been widely embraced by mining companies as a way to facilitate the labour needs of operations in remote locations. While FIFO work is male dominated, and may have a macho culture (Vojnovic et al., 2014), the often stereotypical portrayal of FIFO workers as single, young, male cashed up bogans, is not necessarily accurate. Hoath and Haslam Mackenzie (2013) note that many individuals enter FIFO work because of experiencing diverse financial pressures such as through contractions in the local economy or the loss of their previous job, recovery from a financial setback (such as divorce), or to supplement income from the development of an agricultural enterprise, or as an older worker seeking to bolster superannuation or savings. FIFO workers are predominantly 25–44 years old; 88% of workers are male. They are likely to hold a trade qualification and less likely to hold a university qualification than the general population (Department of Employment, 2014). Most FIFO workers are in personal relationships and have children (Henry et al., 2013).

There is a small but growing body of literature that investigates various aspects of resources sector and the FIFO phenomenon including special editions of the journals, *Rural Society* 22(2) 2013, *Australian Geographer* 44(3), 2013 and *Australian Bulletin of Labour* 40(2) 2014 (Rainnie, Michelson, Goods, & Burgess, 2014). The impacts on workers and their families has been a theme for much of the recent research on the FIFO phenomenon. Despite the challenges such as missing significant family events, emasculation arising from at-home role loss, limited communication, connecting with children and marital issues (Liddell, 2014), it is reported that FIFO workers and their families are likely to be healthy and functioning (Meredith, Rush, & Robinson, 2014). In one of the most recent studies, Blackman et al. (2014) explored the psychosocial and emotional well-being of 485 FIFO workers. In response to questions regarding the best and worst aspects about being a FIFO, most commonly, the workers mentioned the significant pay package (41%) and sustained periods of time off (39%) as the main advantages. Conversely, being away from home (54%) and not being around for special events and emergencies (10%) were considered the leading disadvantages. They concluded that FIFO workers live in two different, separated, worlds. This creates a clear work-life balance but causes significant drawbacks such as disruption to family and social life (Blackman et al., 2014) Balance also emerged as a theme in Brown, Susomrith, Sitlington, and Scott's (2014) research that measured 170 FIFO employees' intentions to stay with or quit their jobs. The vast majority wished for shorter periods away from home with only 6% reporting their current rosters were an ideal length. Furthermore, whilst 39% of respondents expressed that once they had achieved certain financial goals, they would leave the FIFO lifestyles, others noted the 'golden handcuffs'

syndrome, in which the money earned results in lifestyles that workers and their families accept as normal and cannot 'afford' to give up.

Family studies have included Kaczmarek and Sibbel's (2008) work exploring the psychological well-being of children as part of a study on children from FIFO, military and general community families that found no significant differences on all measures of well-being between FIFO and non FIFO children. Likewise, Taylor and Simmonds (2009) reported that FIFO families function effectively and have strong communication. They further noted that increased independence for the partner at home was a positive outcome of the FIFO lifestyle. The psychosocial impacts of FIFO work was investigated by Torkington et al. (2011) who found that miners reported both positive (high work satisfaction and financial benefits) as well as negative (interference with social and domestic activities, family relationships and maintaining relationships) impacts. Similarly Pini and Myers (2012) reported both positive and negative impacts in their analysis of postings made by FIFO partners on an online chat forum for mining families. Most recently Meredith et al. (2014) in a report for Child Family Community Australia, concurred that there are positive and negative aspects associated with FIFO work and that 'Impacts vary according to a range of contextual factors, such as workplace culture, types of rosters and recruitment practices as well as community, home and personal factors' (p.2).

FIFO has also been the subject of inquiries and investigations by various levels of government and government agencies in Australia. Currently (2015) the Western Australian legislative assembly Health and Education Standing committee is inquiring into mental illness in fly-in, fly-out workers (Vojnović et al., 2014). In 2013, a report by the Commonwealth House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia on FIFO/DIDO work practices including the positive and negative impacts on both the fly-in (regional communities) and the fly-out (workers and their source communities) was released. This investigation was sparked by concerns regarding the continued use of FIFO after the construction phase of mining operations especially where operations are relatively close to established population centres (Commonwealth of Tourism Research Australia, 2013 p. 27). Information specific to FIFO's leisure travel included a note from the Western Australian Medical Association on the increase in Asian diseases being brought home by young cashed up FIFO workers visiting South East Asia, and anecdotal evidence that some FIFO children were missing schooling due to extra holidays with their family. A specific study on the economic impact of the mining boom on the Australian tourism industry was conducted by Tourism Research Australia (2013). It reports mixed results. Some positives for the domestic aviation and accommodation sectors were identified, whilst negative impacts included the displacement of leisure travellers and difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. Their modelling indicates that whilst the positive income effect from the mining boom will result in a long-run benefit for domestic tourism, in the long run outbound tourism will increase at double the rate of domestic tourism (Tourism Research Australia, 2013).

2.2. Australian tourists in Bali

There is anecdotal evidence of some FIFO workers basing themselves in Bali (Rainnie et al., 2014), however, little is known about this or the trend of FIFO workers selecting Bali as their preferred holiday destination during their 'set breaks'. There have been numerous newspaper articles (Bannister, 2012; Bearup, 2012; Spooner, 2011) referencing FIFO in the context of its impact on domestic tourism and the issue of children being taken out of school to holiday with their family in Bali, however, the broader

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