

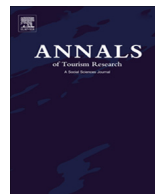


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# The role of hedonism in ethical tourism

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### ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the role of emotion in the ethical choice processes of tourists. Specifically, it explores how hedonism is experienced and the links between hedonic experiences and intentions for future ethical behaviour. It adopts an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach to examine the experience of emotion in self-defined ethical tourists' consumption of places. The findings highlight that emotionally charged experiences are powerful motivators of consumers' ethical choice. It identifies the role hedonism plays in rationalizing and reinforcing current and intended ethical behaviour. Finally, the paper discusses the importance of emotional experiences as a source of hedonic value in engaging individuals in consumption encounters.

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## Introduction

Tourism is essentially a pleasure-seeking activity (Gnoth, 1997; Goossens, 2000). Such experiences are often thought of as highly intense, subjective, salient and intrinsically rewarding. Tourists tend to be deeply involved in the process of decision-making i.e. it involves a high order of conscious cognitive processing. Previous studies have pointed to the importance of understanding the emotive aspects of tourism experiences (e.g. Arnould & Price, 1993; Celsi, Rose, & Leigh, 1993) and their impact on choice behaviour, recognising that tourism is often an emotionally charged consumer episode (e.g. Pearce, 2009). In relation to tourism destinations, Hosany and Gilbert (2010) suggest that emotions have a significant role to play in influencing consumers' behavioural intentions. Other studies have employed

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emotion as the basis for segmentation in tourism (e.g. Bigné & Andreu, 2004). Indeed, across a range of contexts, our understanding of the role emotions play in determining important outcomes from tourism experiences and/or responses to tourist destinations is rapidly developing (Bigné, Matilla, & Andreu, 2008; Hosany, 2012; Ma, Gao, Scott, & Ding, 2013).

However, knowledge of how experiences engage emotions or how emotions work in channelling consumer activities in particular directions remains limited, despite calls for further investigation for some time (e.g. Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). The majority of recent research in tourism is based on the application of psychological scales developed to measure emotional responses; these are constrained in their ability to explain how tourist's consumption experiences lead to a particular emotional response (Ma et al., 2013). Therefore qualitative approaches may contribute a more nuanced understanding of the range of emotion experiences and how they might influence motivations for certain types of tourist behaviour. Specifically, qualitative approaches may enable a more fine-grained analysis of emotion. Hedonic response for example contains both positive (joy, pleasure) and negative (hubris, disgust) valence, for which qualitative approaches may be useful to explicate. One potentially fruitful context in which to explore these issues is ethical tourism.

Ethical tourism offers "emotional recreation" or a platform for liberation and emancipation driven by a consumer's desire to "feel good" (Goodwin & Francis, 2003, p. 273). However, the link between hedonic emotions and ethical consumption practice is largely unexplored. Tourism is fraught with complex ethical issues, this fact has spawned a debate about the ethics of tourism development (Butcher, 2003; Fennell, 2006; Smith & Duffy, 2003). Simultaneously, a market has developed which attempts to differentiate tourism products and destinations as more ethically oriented within the rubric of sustainable, responsible, ecotourism, alternative tourism and many more labels (Caruana & Crane, 2011; Goodwin & Francis, 2003; Lansing & DeVries, 2007). Whilst tourist's experiences of ethical/responsible tourism practices have attracted the attention of researchers, few efforts have focused on the role hedonic emotions play in ethical choice or in the tourism consumption experience.

This dearth of knowledge on ethical tourism experience and the emotions that drive it is the focus of this study. This paper aims to explore tourism experiences of consumers who self-identify as ethical tourists. Specifically, the study sought to understand the role of emotion in consumers' ethical choice and to investigate the relationship between pleasure and ethical tourism consumption experiences by exploring hedonic value in ethical tourism. The findings highlight the importance of emotion in influencing, motivating and reinforcing consumers' ethical choice, which offers important insights into tourist behaviour and implications for tourism management and marketing.

## Emotions, ethical consumption and ethical tourism

Definitions of emotion are somewhat fragmented in the literature. It is a psychological term that has been used quite loosely in many subject areas. Psychology draws a distinction between basic or visceral emotions (e.g. fear, anger) and self-conscious emotions (e.g. shame, guilt, pride). Emotions are psycho-physiological, they can affect our physical state but are also experienced as mental states, states that display immediacy and intensity. Emotions are real (as felt) but also subjective representations of an individual's being. It is perhaps this rather complex conceptual duality that has until recently limited the academic study of the role of emotion in hedonic consumption (Alba & Williams, 2013). Tourism is inextricably related to pleasurable motives, and yet research has only recently begun to explore and apply methods to determine links between hedonic response and behavioural intentions and other issues (Gnoth, 1997). A major difficulty has been the subjective nature of emotional response, for example an experience might be richly emotional for one person and distinctly utilitarian for another (Alba & Williams, 2013).

Hedonic consumption has been defined as the multisensory, fun and emotive aspects of consumer's experience of products (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Within tourism studies, the links between pleasurable emotions and satisfying outcomes are fundamentally important (Aho, 2001). Yet the focus for much research on the sensorial aspects of tourist experience, has been on a single sense, such as the 'gaze' (Urry & Larsen, 2011), embodied performance (Veijola & Jokinen, 1994), and the olfactory (Dann & Jacobsen, 2002) with little connection between emotions and other sensory aspects of

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