



Does a happy destination bring you happiness? Evidence from Swiss inbound tourism



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HIGHLIGHTS

- A destination-based model of happiness is developed based on the spillover theory.
- Destination image is associated with life satisfaction, eudaimonia, and affect.
- Life satisfaction can predict eudaimonia and both positive and negative affect.
- Tourists are reluctant to link their travel experience to negative affect.
- Tourist satisfaction has strong mediating effects in the model of tourist happiness.

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explain tourist happiness by examining a specific destination in which happiness is generated for tourists via their travel behavior at the destination. Building upon the spillover theory of happiness, we developed a destination-based model of tourist happiness, which is shaped by destination image and service quality and mediated by tourist satisfaction and life satisfaction. This model was tested using data from 1048 inbound tourists in Switzerland in 2015. We found that destination image is positively associated with life satisfaction, eudaimonia, and positive and negative affect; no evidence indicated the effect of service quality on life satisfaction and negative affect. In particular, life satisfaction can largely predict eudaimonia and positive and negative affect. We also discovered that negative affect is poorly explained by its antecedents in the tourism context, suggesting that tourists are reluctant to link their travel experiences to negative affect.

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1. Introduction

Happiness research has drawn considerable attention from academia, industry, and governmental organizations (Diener, 2000; Lounsbury & Hoopes, 1986; Mogilner, Aaker, & Kamvar, 2012). The academic study of happiness originated from positive psychology, which aims at promoting mental health to improve quality of life not only for those who are suffering but also for the general population (Seligman, 2002; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). This line of research has expanded from psychology to a broad range of social sciences, particularly economics, sociology, and political science, addressing various issues such as what

determines happiness and how to boost happiness (Easterlin, 2001, 2004, 2013; Johns & Ormerod, 2007). Interesting results from these studies include the nonlinear relationship between income and happiness, the prediction of happiness on success, and the effects of happiness on people's choices (Buchanan & Bardi, 2010; Carter & Gilovich, 2012; Cone & Gilovich, 2010; Easterlin, 2001; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Mogilner et al., 2012).

Not only has happiness research become a scientific field in general, but it has also brought attention to tourism scholarship (Bimonte & Faralla, 2016; Lounsbury & Hoopes, 1986; Uysal, Sirgy, Woo, & Kim, 2016). Tourism is among the most important life domains that generate happiness and thus improve overall life satisfaction (Allen & Beattie, 1984; McCabe & Johnson, 2013; McCabe, Joldersma, & Li, 2010; Neal, Sirgy, & Uysal, 1999). Happiness research in tourism first compared differences in life satisfaction between vacationers and non-vacationers, concluding that

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the former are generally happier than the latter (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004; Lounsbury & Hoopes, 1986). Holiday participation can enhance happiness, especially for those who greatly enjoy and value holidays (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004). Holidays can also mediate the well-established relationships between happiness and a wide range of sociodemographic variables, including gender, income, marital status, and employment status (McCabe & Johnson, 2013; McCabe et al., 2010).

Despite these findings, little is known about how holidays can boost happiness with regard to tourists' destination choices. In other words, do destinations affect tourist happiness, and if so, how? Happiness studies in tourism have not yet identified the determinants of tourist happiness at a destination, although empirical studies have shown that tourist happiness varies by destination-specific tourist activity (Bimonte & Faralla, 2012; Gillet, Schmitz, & Mitas, 2016; Voigt, Howat, & Brown, 2010). A lack of consensus on the operationalization and measurement of happiness has led to mixed results regarding the effects of holidays on happiness (Milman, 1998). Some studies have concluded that this effect is short-lived, while others have argued that vacation can boost long-term life satisfaction (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006; Nawijn, 2010a; Nawijn, Marchand, Veenhoven, & Vingerhoets, 2010). We aim to explain why and how destinations can determine tourist happiness by adopting a comprehensive measure of happiness consisting of life satisfaction, eudaimonia, and affect, as suggested by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2013). Such a comprehensive measure of happiness also allows us to bridge the gap between domain-specific happiness, such as tourist happiness, and life satisfaction in general to shed light on the extent to which holiday and destination choice can boost long-term life satisfaction.

2. Literature review

2.1. Tourism, life satisfaction, and happiness

It has been well acknowledged in the literature that happiness, or subjective well-being, can be defined by cognitive life satisfaction and affective emotions (Easterlin, 2001, 2004, 2013; Diener, 2000; Nawijn, 2010a; Nawijn et al., 2010). Life satisfaction is seen as a composite index of individuals' satisfaction with various life domains, ranging from economic and health conditions to leisure and holiday participation (Allen & Beattie, 1984; Hoopes & Lounsbury, 1989; Kim & Woo, 2014; Neal, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2007; Neal et al., 1999). Empirical studies have shown that leisure and holiday participation can significantly increase people's overall life satisfaction, even for those who are not satisfied with some of their life domains (e.g., their economic situation) (Allen & Beattie, 1984; McCabe & Johnson, 2013; McCabe et al., 2010). This conclusion was verified by Neal et al. (1999), who found that travel experience has a direct impact on life satisfaction for leisure travelers. Hoopes and Lounsbury (1989) further argued that holidays can not only increase life satisfaction but can also permeate other life domains, thereby boosting people's satisfaction in other areas. In a similar vein, Kim and Woo's (2014) study showed that satisfaction with leisure activities, along with satisfaction with one's family, health, and emotional state, can increase overall life satisfaction for the elderly.

The mechanism by which leisure and tourism satisfaction increases overall life satisfaction is elucidated by spillover theory, which postulates that overall life satisfaction is determined by people's satisfaction with their major life domains in a hierarchy (Neal, Sirgy, & Uysal, 2004, 2007, 1999; Neal et al., 2004). At the bottom of this hierarchy is people's satisfaction with the life conditions that comprise a particular life domain. Their conditional

satisfaction determines their overall satisfaction with a given domain (e.g., satisfaction with holidays) which, together with their satisfaction with other life domains such as work, health, and family, determines life satisfaction at the top of the hierarchy (Neal et al., 1999). When it comes to the leisure domain, spillover theory suggests that people's leisure satisfaction can spill upward to boost their overall life satisfaction (Neal et al., 1999, 2007). Satisfaction with leisure and tourism experiences is derived from tourists' reflection on, memories of, and emotional arousal from their travel experiences as well as from their satisfaction with a variety of tourism services (Neal et al., 1999, 2007). However, spillover theory does not necessarily explain the complexity of tourist happiness in its own right, especially in relation to different travel phases and activities, which may cause tourist happiness to fluctuate over time.

Tourist happiness has been found to vary across different travel phases, suggesting a fade-out effect over time (Nawijn, 2010b; Strauss-Blasche, Ekmekcioglu, & Marktl, 2000). In particular, the positive effect of a holiday on happiness diminishes as tourist activities come to an end (Filep & Deery, 2010; Neal et al., 2004). The fade-out effect was especially evident in some studies in which happiness was measured using a set of affective constructs, such as emotion and mood (Filep & Deery, 2010; Nawijn, 2010b). For instance, Nawijn (2010b) found that compared to the pre-holiday level, tourists' moods peak during the first 70% of the holiday duration, then slightly decline and finally balance out when the holiday concludes. Strauss-Blasche et al. (2000) discovered that happiness, as measured by mood, sleep quality, and a decrease in physical complaints, increases in the post-holiday period.

2.2. Tourism services, travel activities, and tourist happiness

Tourist happiness is composed of life satisfaction, affect, and eudaimonia, all of which have been underscored by many studies related to the tourist experience (Diener, 2000; Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006; Gillet et al., 2016; Kler & Tribe, 2012; Knobloch, Robertson, & Aitken, 2017; Matteucci & Filep, 2017). Tourist happiness fluctuates over time because the affect component of happiness is short-lived (Hoopes & Lounsbury, 1989; Nawijn, 2010b; Neal et al., 1999; Strauss-Blasche et al., 2000). A great deal of evidence has shown that tourist happiness varies according to different types of tourism services and travel activities (Bimonte & Faralla, 2012; Gillet et al., 2016; Voigt et al., 2010). For instance, Bimonte and Faralla (2012) found that park visitors are happier than beach tourists. Voigt et al. (2010) noted that spa visits can evoke more positive, hedonic well-being compared to resort visits and spiritual retreats. Kler and Tribe (2012) found that scuba diving can result in positive experiences, which may lead to higher life satisfaction. Tsaor, Yen, and Hsiao (2013) discovered that highly engaging travel activities, such as mountain climbing, can boost happiness by immersing tourists in transcendent experiences. Gillet et al. (2016) found that photography can boost short-term positive emotions and long-term life satisfaction due to its role in building social relationships.

2.3. Tourist experiences and the multiple facets of happiness

Evidence has suggested that different tourist activities touch on different facets of happiness, including affect, eudaimonia, and life satisfaction (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006; Hosany, 2012; Kler & Tribe, 2012; Matteucci & Filep, 2017; Nawijn, 2010a; Nawijn et al., 2010; Tsaor et al., 2013). This may explain why the effects of a holiday on tourist happiness were short-lived in some studies but long-lasting in others (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006; Nawijn, 2010a; Nawijn et al., 2010). By classifying tourism experiences along a continuum with hedonic and eudaimonic end-points, Voigt et al. (2010) argued that spa visitation can activate the hedonic component of

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