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TRIP ACTIVITY PREFERENCES OF USA TRAVELERS

INTRODUCTION

For marketing purposes it is valuable to understand the trip activity preferences of travelers that reside in one's travel market. In this case the market is the USA and its relationship to the NWT as a destination. Such an understanding permits a **judgement** of the destination's strengths and weaknesses relative to the preferences, in both an absolute sense and in comparison to other (competitive) destinations. Furthermore the understanding gives direction to emphasis in marketing programs and can point to desirable changes **in** the facilities and **services** of the destination.

PURPOSE

To examine the preferred **trip** activities of USA residents, and to compare them to the attributes of the NWT.

Furthermore to compare the NWT attributes to those activities USA travelers seek in other destinations.

METHODOLOGY

This review report is based on a paper:

Rae, S.R., Edward G. Thomas and **Rajshekhhar G. Javalgi**, "Activity Preferences and Trip-planning Behavior of the U.S. Outbound **Pleasure** Travel Market". Journal of Travel Research, Volume **XXX**, No. 3, Winter 1992. •

which in turn is based on a report:

Tourism Canada (1986). USA Pleasure Travel **Market**, Canadian Potential: Highlights Report. Ottawa: Department of Regional Industrial Expansion.

This latter report was reviewed and interpreted for the NWT **in** the report:

Economic Development and **Tourism**, Government of the Northwest Territories (May 1986). The USA Market Segments for Northwest Territories Tourism.

Rao et al examined six of the eight USA **traveller** trip types **identified** by Tourism Canada:

- Touring trip
- City trip
- Outdoors trip
- Resort trip
- Cruise
- Theme park/special event trip

(Two trip types were ignored by Rao et al as non relevant to Canada Visit to friends and relatives; and, Close to home leisure trip.)

For each trip type they listed, **in** rank order of importance, the trip activity preferences of USA residents. The term “activity” is broad; and, it actually includes three kinds of listings: activities in the strict sense (**eg.** shopping), amenities or services (**eg. staying in first** class hotels) and location factors (eg. having predictable weather).

In addition to Canada the listings and rankings were also done for Mexico, the Caribbean Islands and Europe.

For this review there is further focus upon only those **two** trip types that are relevant to the **NWT**:

- Touring Trip
- Outdoors trip

To each preference list there is added a corresponding list of the judgments of the strengths and weaknesses of the **NWT**. The strengths are limited to those few activities in which the **NWT** has a clear comparative advantage over other parts of the world. Also added to each preference list is a list of corresponding implications for the **NWT** tourism industry.

FINDINGS

TABLE 1

Touring trip: A trip by car, bus, or train through areas of scenic beauty and cultural and general interest.

Preferred Activities	Rank Order of Importance (USA travelers to all destinations)	NWT Strength	Implications for the NWT
Having predictable weather	1	-	*PE
Visiting natural parks	2	+	RE
Walking or strolling about	3		*F&S
Dining at a variety of restaurants	4		F&S
Sampling the local cuisine	4		F&S
Seeing wildlife I don't usually see	6	+	RE
Being close to the mountains	7		*O
Visiting small towns and villages	8		O
Having budget accommodations	8	-	F&S
Being by the ocean	10	-	*O
Being by a lake	11	+	RE
Exploring wilderness areas	12	+	RE
Taking guided tours	13	-	O
Visiting big cities	14	-	O
Staying in first class hotels	15	-	F&S
Swimming	16	-	O
Shopping	17	-	*RE
Going to zoo or wildlife exhibits	18	-	O
Sunbathing	19	-	O

•Notes regarding Strengths: + denotes strength for the **NWT**
- denotes weakness for the **NWT**

Notes regarding Implications: RE denotes a need to **reinforce** the **NWT** in marketing efforts (no developmental changes are required).

PE denotes a need for a marketing emphasis that alters the current **perception**.

F&S denotes a need for an improvement in **facilities and/or services**.

o denotes a situation that cannot be changed by either marketing or development efforts.

* denotes a special situation that bears discussion as per the following:

***Special notes:**

1. The activity (**location** factor) concerning weather supposedly centres on predictability. However, one would suspect that the people being surveyed would have implanted a sizeable amount of subconscious thought about how “good (or how cold) the weather in Canada (and **NWT**) is in an absolute sense. Regardless of the definition of the weather activity, one must give it heavy consideration because it is the most important activity (rank number one).
3. The walking and strolling activity is separate from hiking. Facilities for casual walking are not a strength of the **NWT**. Improvements in easy trails and town sidewalks are desirable.
7. The **NWT** does **have** mountains; **but**, they are not accessible in the way the mountains of Alberta and B.C. are approachable by road and by foot. The reasoning is similar **re** oceans (activity 10).
17. Shopping in the usual sense is not a strength of the **NWT**. The sales of arts and crafts is a specific situation that could be mentioned in marketing. However, at number 17 in rank of importance, it does not bear great emphasis.

TABLE 2

Outdoors trip: A trip to a natural area where one can engage in activities such as camping, hunting, fishing, hiking, or rafting.

Preferred Activities	Rank Order of Importance (to all destinations)	NWT Strength	Implications for the NWT
Having predictable weather	1	.	*PE
Being by a lake	2	+	RE
Being close to mountains	3	.	*O
Exploring wilderness areas	4	+	RE
Visiting natural parks	5	+	RE
Walking or strolling about	6	.	*F&S
Having budget accommodation	7	.	F&S
Seeing wildlife I don't usually see	7	+	RE
swimming	9	.	O
Fresh water fishing	10	+	RE
Being by the ocean	11	.	O
Visiting small towns and villages	12	.	O
Hiking or backpacking	13	.	*F&S
Sunbathing	14	.	O
Sampling the local cuisine	15	.	F&S"

Notes: See the table above regarding Touring trips.

13. The NWT has splendid terrain for hiking; but, there is a need for trails,

TABLE 3

Compared trip types - positive NWT strengths only -common activities marked #

Touring		Outdoors	
Rank	Activity	Activity	Rank
2	parks #	lakeside #	2
6	wildlife #	wilderness #	4
11	lakeside #	parks #	5
12	wilderness #	wildlife #	7
<hr/>		fishing	10
31, average 7.75, (31 for #)		28, average 5.6, (18 for #)	

It is evident **that**, of the two trip types, the Outdoors trip is more relevant to the **NWT**. It has more positive activities, the total and average rank scores are lower (lower is better), and the rank score for the four common activities is lower. However, the two trip types (more accurately the respective types of travelers) are similar as seen from the large number of common activities.

TABLE 4

NWT COMPETITIVENESS - TOURING TRIPS

ACTIVITY	RANK			
	NWT (strengths +)	Mexico	Europe	Caribbean
Weather		1	2	3
Parks	2+	3 -	8~	8 -
Walking		4		
Variety of restaurants		5	3	3
Local cuisine		2	1	1
Wildlife	5+	6 -	13-	11-
Mountains		7		
Small towns		8		
Budget accommodation		9		
Oceanside		10		
Lakeside	11+	12~	15-	14~
Wilderness	12+	10-	16~	16-
Guided tours		12		
Cities		14		
1st class hotels		15		
Swimming		18		
Science exhibits		16		
Shopping		19		
zoo		17		
Sunbathing		20		
Totals (means)	31+ (7.75)	31-(7.75)	52-(13.0)	49-(12.3)

It is evident that the Mexico bound touring travelers are closer to seeking what the NWT has to offer in strength than are the Europe and Caribbean bound people. The Mexico scores are lower (better) than those of Europe and the Caribbean. Conversely it can be seen that the Europe and Caribbean bound touring travelers are seeking activities that are not strengths of the **NWT: Local** cuisine and Variety of restaurants. This **all** means that the Mexico bound touring travelers would be good prospects for travel to the **NWT; but**, it would be less worthwhile attempting to **divert** Europe and Caribbean bound touring travelers to the **NWT**.

TABLE 5

NWT COMPETITIVENESS - OUTDOOR TRIPS

ACTIVITY	NWT (strength +)	RANK		
		Mexico	Europe	Caribbean
Weather		1	3	
Lakeside	2+	2~	2~	2 -
Mountains		3		
Wilderness	4+	4~	1~	1~
Parks	5+	5~	7~	2 -
Walking		6		
Budget accommodation		7		
Wildlife	7+	8~	8~	8 -
swimming		9		
Fishing	10+	11~	11~	13-
Oceanside		9		
Small towns		14		
Hiking		12		
Sunbathing		13		
Local cuisine		15		
		<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
		28+ (5.6)	29-(5.8)	31 -(6.2) 26-(5.2)

All USA outdoor trippers are seeking about the same things, regardless of their destinations. The NWT should about **equal** success in attracting all segments of USA outdoor trip people.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

Many of these findings are already known and the Tourism Canada report and the Rao et al paper act as confirmation. For example, the NWT strengths lie in the natural activities; **but**, the NWT can provide the stated activity preferences to **only** certain degrees. For example the NWT can provide the highly ranked (preferred) natural parks; **but**, is deficient in walking and strolling facilities that would make the parks more useable.

The activity of weather bears special consideration. It is the most important activity for the two trip types that are examined here (Tables 1 & 2), and for the other four trip types examined by Rao et al. Its importance (priority) ranks as number one or two for all **trip** types and for the people of all destinations. At the same time weather (or climate) is a factor that is obvious and often bears a negative connotation for the **NWT**; **but**, it receives

little mention in the marketing of the NWT'. In the face of its overwhelming importance marketing must actively and openly address the weather (climate) factor.

Similarly, for outdoor trip people, "being by a lake" is **very** important (in second place after weather). This is something that could be very easily addressed in **NWT** marketing programs by way of photos of lakeside scenes.

For many of the other activities specific marketing and/or development inferences could be made as per the general "implications" of Tables 1 and 2.

Comparing the two trip **types**, it would appear that the outdoor trip is a better fit with the strengths of the NWT in the sense of its absolute score of ranks and by its relative (competitive) situation versus Mexico and Europe. However, the differences between the two trip type people are not great; **and**, marketing campaigns could be combined to a large extent.

Finally the limitations of this research, and particularly the original Tourism Canada **work**, should be discussed. It is clear that the Tourism Canada eight trip type segmentation is not an ideal fit with the **range** of **NWT** trip types. The segmentation is too general to isolate NWT specific trip types. For example the touring trip does not include travel by air, a dominant mode in the vast and road poor NWT. Major NWT experiences involve fishing, hunting, and naturalist activities, **all** by way of packages and the use of lodges. These trip types are probably contained within the Tourism Canada "resort trip" type, where they are overwhelmed by the large emphasis and number of trips to sun and sand destinations. Similarly the small and specialized NWT cruise industry is **lost** in the Tourism Canada "cruise" trip type that contains a host of warm weather fun cruises.

Taken all together there are valuable insights to be had **in** examining the trip preferences of USA travelers. The revelation about weather (climate) alone is worth the effort.

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