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After September 11th: Determining its Impacts on Rural Canadians' Travel to the U.S.

This study examined the degree that rural Canadians were immediately affected by the September 11th events and how the events subsequently impacted their satisfaction of traveling to the U.S. The results suggested: 1) the 9/11 events did not have much effect on rural Canadians personally; and, 2) the events had little affect on rural Canadians' satisfaction of traveling to the U.S. Even though the media portrayed that the impacts of the events were widespread, this did not translate into rural Canadians feeling personally affected or being dissatisfied with travel to the U.S. shortly after the events occurred.

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Introduction

The aftermath of the September 11th 2001 (9/11) terrorism events' effects in Canada has been widespread (WTO, 2002). Even three years after the event, the media still dedicates a substantial proportion of news coverage to its impacts, especially on how the 9/11 events impacted tourism economically. Most media coverage of the 9/11 events focus on urban population centers even though it is known that rural areas often view the impact of world events differently (Pizam, Smith and Steene 2000). Since the majority of rural Canadians are physically distanced from the terrorism events, it was unknown how they were affected as it relates to tourism. Tourism, perhaps more than any other industry, has felt the economic consequences of 9/11 as people altered or cancelled their travel plans due to 9/11 related concerns (Tourism Canada 2002). Tracking has shown that cross border travel was down by as much as 75% in some areas in Canada immediately after 9/11 and, since then, has not returned to pre 9/11 levels (Wilton, 2004). This aspect is especially important given the close proximity of Canada to the U.S. and the propensity of Canadians to travel to the U.S (Harrison-Hill, 2001).

The purpose of this study is to determine the degree that rural Canadians were immediately affected by the 9/11 events and how the events subsequently impacted their satisfaction of traveling to the U.S.

Methods

Residents of Northwest Ontario were randomly selected to be interviewed by telephone during December 7-12, 2001, three months after the 9/11 events. Those who had traveled to the U.S. since the 9/11 events were included in the analysis. The usable sample size was 246. The study area encompassed a radius of approximately 50 miles extending out from Thunder Bay,

Ontario, Canada. Thunder Bay is a community of 120,000 people located in a rural area about 40 miles north of the U.S. border and approximately 400 miles from a metropolitan center.

Results

Canadians in the study felt that, overall, they were only somewhat affected by the 9/11 events (Table 1). The items most affected were view of others, view of the world, and feelings of safety/security, but even these items had only moderate effects. Spending patterns and frequency of travel were little affected.

Table 1. Degree that the 9/11 Events Personally Affected Canadians

Affected Items	n=246
View of others	2.5
Spending patterns	1.5
Trust of strangers	1.9
Desire to see new places	2.0
View of the world	2.9
Feelings of safety/security	2.4
Frequency of travel	1.8

Means based on a 1-5 point scale where 1 is none and 5 is a lot.

In describing how satisfied Canadians were with their trips taken to the U.S. after the 9/11 events, respondents were generally satisfied with a variety of travel factors (Table 2). Even items that traditionally had been considered constraints to traveling to the U.S., such as low exchange rates, generated little dissatisfaction. It is noted that exchange rates for Canadians were at historical unfavorable lows at this time. Security concerns that were a focus of the 9/11 impacts did not seem to be of great concern to these travelers as all four safety related issues

were rated as satisfactory. Problems with border crossings generated little concern and were rated as satisfactory. The items that had the highest level of satisfaction were visiting family and friends, friendly people, warm climate, and variety of things to do.

Table 2. Satisfaction of Canadians Traveling to the U.S.

Affected Items	n=246
Favorable exchange rate	3.2
Variety of things to do	1.6
Friendly people	1.5
Reasonable costs	2.4
Ample shopping opps.	1.9
Visit family& friends	1.4
Warm climate	1.6
Hassle-free border Xing	2.1
Safety when visiting Large cities/destination	2.0
Feeling safe in crowds	2.0
Feeling safe while flying	2.1
Feeling safe while driving	1.7

Means based on a 1-5 point scale where 1 is very satisfied and 5 is very unsatisfied.

Discussion

This research highlights two important points: 1) the 9/11 events did not have much effect on rural Canadians personally; and, 2) the events had little affect on rural Canadians' satisfaction of traveling to the U.S. Although, the events were acknowledged to have profound impacts, they did not affect people's satisfaction toward traveling to the U.S. as initially thought. Even though the media portrayed that the impacts of the events were widespread, this did not translate into rural Canadians feeling personally affected or being dissatisfied with travel to the U.S. shortly after the events occurred. These high levels of satisfaction may also be related to the fact that many Canadians frequently visit the U.S. to see family and friends so there may be a high degree of familiarity and known expectations related to travel. The benefits to visiting the U.S., for

many, clearly outweighed the perceived costs.

Certain effects of the 9/11 events stand out more than others, such as the concern for safety. The aspect of safety was probably discussed more in the media than any other concern. It is surprising then that respondents gave such high evaluations of satisfaction about safety while traveling to the U.S. Even other high visibility issues such as air travel and border-crossings were not seen as concerns that led to dissatisfaction. A possible reason for these results is that safety is important but Thunder Bay's isolation provides a degree of security. In addition, most people in the region travel by auto rather than air so air safety is not as much of a personnel issue overall. Furthermore, border-crossing problems may not be of great concern because the rural checkpoints used by many people in the study were never busy in the first place and the additional problems were not seen as a significant burden.

In conclusion, this study showed that the rural nature of the Thunder Bay area might have provided a tempering mechanism that influenced local people to perceive that events in large cities affected them little. These results also suggested that the events might have affected Canadians in rural areas quite differently than people in large metropolitan areas. Subsequent to this survey, many important international decisions have been made (such as Canada's relations with the U.S. on the Iraq war) that have further impacted travel between the U.S. and Canada. It is unknown to what extent these actions have had on rural Canadians' travel to the U.S.

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