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**POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO VISITATION: A RURAL CULTURAL HERITAGE
MUSEUM CASE**

The Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement Museum, located in north-west Victoria, Australia, has experienced a significant decrease in visitation in recent years and as a result, management are seeking to gain an understanding of potential visitation barriers in order to overcome future reduced visitation levels. This paper examines the perceived barriers identified by a potential day-tripper market from the surrounding regional centre of Bendigo, which is a new market for the Museum. Recommendations for future tourism and marketing related initiatives for the museum are also provided.

Keywords: Heritage, cultural tourism, marketing, motivations, perceptions

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Introduction

The Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement Museum (SHPSM), located in north-west Victoria, Australia, has experienced a decrease in visitation in recent years and as a result, management are seeking to gain an understanding of potential visitor barriers in order to increase visitation levels. When the Museum first opened it attracted tourists in excess of 300,000, however now the Museum only attracts approximately 35,000 to 40,000 visitors per year (Till, 2007).

This paper examines the barriers identified by potential visitors from the Bendigo region towards the historical SHPSM as a rural cultural heritage attraction. These results may be used to facilitate future initiatives to promote development of and increase visitation to the SHPSM.

The Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement Museum Background

The SHPSM is situated in Swan Hill, located 336 kilometres north-west of Melbourne on the Murray River in Australia. It is classified as a rural city by the Australian Bureau of Statistics with a municipality population of 22,000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). The museum was established in 1963 as an avenue for Australians to learn about their heritage. It represents the history of the pioneering days from the 1830's to the 1930's in the Murray-Melba region. It began operation as the Swan Hill Folk Museum, which was and still is currently under the Pioneer Settlement Management, one of the largest outdoor Museums in the Southern Hemisphere (Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement Museum, 2008).

The Museum is the home to a collection of Anglo-Saxton artefacts, exceeding twenty thousand, which range from documents, photos and maps through to buildings, paddle steamers and agricultural equipment. The museum site is set on seven acres and this area consists of approximately fifty historic buildings including a Bank, Post Office, Saddlery, Chemist Shop, Confectionary Shop, Original Homesteads and a Music Shop.

Reasons behind the decrease in visitation may be partly due to the highly competitive tourism industry. Similar attractions in Victoria including Sovereign Hill (located at Ballarat), Coal Creek (located at South Gippsland) and the Central Deborah Mine (located at Bendigo) all compete for a similar market. Numerous attractions in the Swan Hill region closed down in the 1980s which decreased the pull of Swan Hill's tourism product. The Museum has survived this downturn to date because of the unique collection in its possession and the support they have received from the Swan Hill Rural City Council. Currently the Museum aims to attract seniors, coach companies and service clubs, families with children, schools and enthusiasts in the areas of tractors, engine history and paddle steamers (Chalmers, 2008; Till, 2007).

These markets have all been sustainable in the past and often generate repeat business however, management of the museum are now looking to expand their target market segments to attract day-trippers as well. Perceptions of this new potential market relating to any barriers to potential visitation must be determined to assist the Museum in developing strategies to assist in marketing and increasing visitation.

Defining Cultural and Heritage Tourism

Many definitions exist in relation to cultural tourism and often the definition used will relate to the context to which culture is discussed, whether political, tourism or marketing orientated (Hausmann, 2007). Many do however share similar key elements.

Firstly cultural tourism is a form of special interest tourism where commercial interests are of primary consideration often followed by cultural heritage management. Secondly, cultural tourism utilises cultural and heritage sites and offerings to its visitors. Tourist needs and uses versus other possible target groups must be considered and often conflict arises between the different users of these cultural assets. Thirdly, cultural tourists

often consume a wide range of cultural related services and experiences. The needs and the wants of the tourist must be satisfied and therefore the cultural asset must be carefully customised and transformed in a way that will meet these needs. Issues of overuse and asset deterioration however may result in decreased visitation and consideration to withdraw the cultural asset from commercialisation altogether may occur. Finally, cultural tourism must consider the preferences and motivation of the tourist. Not all tourists are motivated by learning, self exploration and experiential reasons (Hausmann, 2007).

Silberberg (1995) suggests that rather it may be more sensible to explain cultural tourist motivation as being on a continuum of tourists who are 'highly motivated' to those tourists who are 'less motivated'. Similarly McKercher and Du Cros (2002) devised a cultural tourist typology to explain cultural tourist motivation. Tourists are categorised as purposeful; sightseeing; serendipitous; casual or as an incidental cultural tourist. Depending on the degree to which tourists are motivated by culturally related activities will depend upon their responses to specific marketing activities displayed by these cultural sites and destinations.

Cultural tourism is a complex phenomenon as previously discussed and heritage tourism may be considered a sub-class of cultural tourism (Zeppel and Hall, 1991; Prideaux and Kininmont, 1999). Artefacts, buildings, traditions, museums, monuments and festivals representing the past all constitute heritage tourism. According to Bonn et al (2007), 'heritage and cultural tourism encompasses visiting a number of cultural or heritage orientated facilities, including museums, aquariums, performing arts centers, archaeological digs, theatres, historical sites, monuments, castles, architectural relics, religious centers and even zoos' (p. 346). The focus of heritage tourism goes beyond simply an interest in the past, also incorporating the natural, historic and cultural value of a destination (Boyd, 2002).

For the purpose of this research cultural heritage tourism is defined in accordance with that of Hausmann (2007), 'visits by people from outside the host community, motivated

either entirely or to a certain degree by cultural offerings and values.....of a particular destination' (p. 174). A destination may be considered as a region, community or institution and a balance must be achieved between the conservation of these cultural assets and the needs and wants of the tourist.

Motivations for Visitation of Cultural and Heritage Tourism

Each visitor seeks a specific set of characteristics and attributes in a tourist attraction or destination (Bonn et al, 2007). 'Tourist motivations are characteristics of individuals that influence the choice of destinations, and the effects of motivational influences of this nature on an individual have also been labelled as push factors' (Park & Yoon, 2009, p. 100).

Hausmann (2007) outlines in her research a typology of cultural tourists constructed from a combination of research (Silberberg, 1995; McKercher & Du Cros, 2002; Richards, 1996).

The 'highly motivated people' are those tourists who travel specifically to a destination for a cultural experience such as a museum or a festival. The 'people motivated in part' are those tourists who travel to a destination because of its cultural offerings but also take the opportunity to take in additional attractions or visit family or friends. 'People with other primary interests' visit a destination for a primary purpose such as for business or to attend a conference and will also engage in heritage and culturally related activities. 'Accidental visitors' are those who visit a destination with no intentions at all of visiting a cultural site, however may do so as a result of other activities being cancelled or friends taking them along with them. Lastly, there are those tourists who will not visit a culturally related destination or site under no circumstances whatsoever. Depending on the degree to which tourists are motivated by culturally related activities will depend upon their responses to specific marketing activities displayed by these cultural sites and destinations.

Poria, Butler and Airey (2006) alternately consider defining tourism sub groups, such as cultural and heritage tourism, based on the 'tourist perceptions of a site relative to their

own heritage' (p. 51). These researchers argue that often the same activity may be considered under various tourism sub-groups. For example a visit to a winery may be classified as wine tourism, gastronomic tourism, rural tourism, heritage tourism and cultural tourism. Also confusion may exist in relation to the tendency for sub-tourism groups to be further categorised, for example heritage tourism broken down into rural heritage, cultural heritage, built heritage, natural heritage, ethnic heritage and culinary heritage. Poria, Butler and Airey (2006) based their research on examination of visitation patterns through exploring the link between individual and site. These researchers found that 'tourist perception is the key to the understanding of visitation patterns' (p. 51).

Barriers to Visitation of Cultural Heritage Attractions and Sites

Recent visitor trends (Tourism Australia, 2008) indicate that since 2006 the number of domestic overnight cultural and heritage visitors has grown by 11%, while total domestic overnight visitation remained flat over this same period. The cultural heritage tourism market primarily consisted of domestic visitors with domestic day cultural and heritage visitors having increased by 15% the year ended 2006. This provides great opportunity for such attractions to appeal to the day tripper segment as a new potential target market. Victoria is the second most popular State for domestic visitors, while New South Wales is the most popular State for both domestic and international cultural and heritage visitors (Tourism Australia, 2008).

Barriers to visitation of cultural heritage sites, including museums, include the fact that many of these attractions do not consider themselves as a tourism player, many lack government assistance and are reliant upon the goodwill of local sponsors, benefactors, unpaid volunteers, situated in a rural location with many only accessible by car and often the lack of funding also results in amateur displays and the inability to preserve artefacts

(Prideaux & Kininmont, 1999). Location of cultural attractions may be within a remote or unattractive area which ultimately reduces the chances of successfulness in terms of attraction of tourists, however “development of linear or circular touring routes is one way of overcoming locational disadvantages” (McKercher et al, 2002, p. 4). Many cultural attractions encompass a combination of unique features of the destination that reflects its history and surrounding environment (McKercher et al, 2004). Often the decision to pursue cultural attractions is made without total “knowledge of potential impacts or requirements for a successful product” (p. 1). It is naïve for the operator to believe that the local cultural asset automatically will become a primary attraction according to McKercher et al (2004).

Barriers may also be linked to success factors associated with cultural and heritage sites and attractions. A number of common characteristics associated with successful cultural attraction development include; must be interesting, unique, appealing beyond the local heritage community, be of value and relevance to the tourist, must effectively tell a story, offer a participatory experience, be of a quality standard, offer an authentic experience, show a direct link from the past to the present and making it a spectacle or special event (McKercher, 2002; McKercher and Du Cros, 2002; Gallagher, 1995).

Methodology

Highlighted as a new potential day tripper market, 265 local Bendigo residents were surveyed towards the end of 2008. The data collection process involved passerby’s being selected randomly in four of the city’s shopping precincts. The surveyor administered the questionnaire by guiding the respondent through each question with precautions taken to reduce interviewer bias. Fifteen likert-scale questions were included in the survey pertaining to various potential barriers and heritage tourism interest levels as highlighted in the literature, along with interest in visiting the Swan Hill region. Respondents were also asked to

identify any additional potential barriers via an open ended question. Potential attributes to entice visitation were also focused on with a number of attributes identified within the literature provided in the form of a multiple choice question where respondents were instructed to select as many attributes as they felt relevant. A number of possible responses were also provided regarding the information sources that respondents use when deciding where to take a holiday to assist in identifying future advertising mediums. Respondents were provided with the opportunity to submit additional comments at the conclusion of the survey which enabled possible topics or issues being discovered that the researcher may not have initially considered. Basic visitor profile information was also obtained.

Quantitative data from the questionnaire surveys was subjected to preliminary basic descriptive statistical analysis to gain insight into the data. The relevant data was also analysed qualitatively in accordance with the reviewed literature.

Barriers to Visitation of the Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement Museum

Although respondents regarded Swan Hill to be a tourist destination, just below half agreed that they had little interest in travelling there for tourist purposes. Interest levels increased by 10% however when asked whether respondents would be interested in visiting the SHPSM if it were part of an accommodation and dinner package.

Respondents indicated they generally agreed to enjoying learning about heritage of a destination and travelling to rural areas. 40% of respondents felt that historical museums were not becoming out of fashion as a tourist attraction. In support, just over 50% of respondents indicated they would be interested in visiting historical museums. However, when presented with the statement ‘when travelling I like to participate in activities involving history and culture’ the largest percentage margin fell in neutral. This indicates that although those interviewed may agree to have an interest in heritage and rural destinations, they do not

necessarily engage in heritage/culture specific type activities. This suggestion is supported by the responses provided relating to whether respondents would prefer to engage in other tourist type activities before visiting a historical museum. Just over 42% agreed with this statement.

Bendigo respondents indicated that in general much potential for visitation to historical museums and sites do exist, however specific visitation to the SHPSM appears to be less popular. The corresponding mean for each likert-scale question is outline below in table 1, with 1 strongly disagreeing and 5 strongly agreeing with the statements.

Table 1: Mean Response for Likert Scale Statements

1=Strongly Disagree 5=Strongly Agree	MEAN
LEARNING ABOUT THE HERITAGE OF DEST INTERESTS ME	3.53
I ENJOY TRAVELLING TO RURAL DESTINATIONS	3.77
WHEN TRAVELLING I LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN ACTIVITIES INVOLVING HISTORY & CULTURE	3.30
A MUSEUM NEEDS TO BE EDUCATIVE & INTERACTIVE IN NATURE FOR ME TO VISIT	3.72
I REGARD SWAN HILL TO BE A TOURIST DESTINATION	3.27
THE RISING PETROL PRICES IS A BARRIER FOR CHOOSING TO TRAVEL TO SH	3.42
I REGARD SWAN HILL TO BE TOO FAR TO TRAVEL TO VISIT ONLY FOR A DAYTRIP	2.99
I THINK HISTORIAL MUSEUMS ARE GENERALLY BECOMING OUT OF FASHION AS A TOURIST DESTINATION	2.94
THE RISING INTEREST RATES IS A BARRIER FOR CHOOSING TO TRAVEL TO SH	2.82
I HAVE LITTLE INTEREST IN TRAVELLING TO SWAN HILL FOR TOURIST PURPOSES	3.18
I HAVE LITTLE INTEREST IN VISITING HISTORICAL MUSEUMS	2.77
I WOULD BE INTERESTED IN VISITING SHPSM IF IT IS PART OF AN ACCOMM & DINNER PACKAGE	3.44
I WOULD PREFER TO ENGAGE IN OTHER TOURIST TYPE ACTIVITIES BEFORE VISITING A HISTORICAL MUSEUM	3.27
I AM INTERESTED IN VISITING SWAN HILL IN THE NEXT 12 MTHS	2.97
I AM AWARE OF THE SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES AVAILABLE AT THE SHPSM	2.64

Barriers ranged from more specific factors such as distance, lack of complimentary activities in the Swan Hill region, perceived as boring, little awareness and the paddle steamer not consistently operating to those in more general of lacking time and money, busy lifestyle and museums often being perceived as aimed at an older market. Those surveyed were asked to reveal the last time they visited a pioneer settlement museum (not necessarily the museum in Swan Hill), the highest response (16.7%) fell within the last five years, followed by within the last ten years (15.5%). 37.8% indicated that they had never visited a pioneer settlement museum at all. These results indicate that overall there is still a reasonable level of interest in visiting historical museums which provides the SHPSM with the opportunity to increase the level of visitation to their tourist site.

Table 2 indicates the additional potential barriers respondents identified qualitatively in association with visitation to the SHPSM.

Table 2: Additional Potential Barriers of Visitation to the SHPSM

IDENTIFIED POTENTIAL BARRIER	PERCENTAGE %
Distance/location	22.7
Lack of knowledge of what's at the museum	9.4
Costs involved including entry & travel	28.7
Busy lifestyle	9.9
Lack of complementary activities in the region	5.0
Closer alternatives available	2.2
Aimed at older market perceptions	4.4
Perceived as boring/lack of interest	13.3
Weather	4.4

Recommendations

Respondents indicated a reasonable interest level exists in visiting cultural attractions, such as the SHPSM, however problems arise in the conversion of interest into actual participation. The general consensus reached by many respondents is that the awareness level of the SHPSM and its offerings must be increased dramatically. Promoting the museum

beyond the local visitor information centre, website and brochures via overt advertising in sources identified by respondents may also result in raising its attraction and activities profile and encourage increased overall visitation. Respondents identified key sources of information that they rely on for informing them of such tourism related activities as the internet, friends and relatives, past experiences, brochures, travel agents, newspaper advertisements and news articles.

The museum needs to consider co-operating with the surrounding local restaurants and accommodation establishments in order to entice visitors to the region and to extend their stay. A marketing membership scheme could be established in which local tourism related businesses contribute funds and subsequently, receive a variety of advertising benefits. Differing membership levels may be available to businesses with benefits received matched accordingly to financial contributions.

The museum exhibits are tired looking and amateur, it is strongly recommended that these undergo some form of restoration to increase the attractiveness of the site. Interpretation of the site also needs improvement. The introduction of a pre-recorded audio guide would enable tourists to take self guided tours at their own leisure.

Developing circular touring routes and tourist packages may also assist in attracting those tourists motivated in part and those with other primary interests.

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