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**HOLIDAY-MAKERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF  
ENTERTAINMENT IN THE BEACH HOLIDAY EXPERIENCE**

The performing arts (along with museums, historical sites, shops, etc) are a significant part of the tourist resource of urban holidays. This paper summarises a study of views of (UK) holidaymakers about their experiences of live entertainment on overseas beach holidays. Interviews revealed that its significance was confined to a small proportion but most had, nonetheless, experienced entertainment on holiday and enjoyed it. There were not high expectations of standards and entertainment was sometimes regarded as a 'time-filler', though a necessary one. These initial findings may be developed in further studies to identify a 'beach-holiday-entertainment' market segment.

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## **Introduction**

This paper examines (from a UK viewpoint) the relationship between beach holidays and live entertainment. Historically entertainment has been part of UK domestic seaside holidays as an attraction drawing tourists from the ‘dullness’ of urban life. It has been a noticeable presence in coastal destinations (seaside resorts) for holidays which are not usually sun-based. For beach holidays overseas – usually in warmer and drier destinations - the importance of live entertainment may be less, though it could play a secondary role. Tourists may seek evening diversions such as listening and dancing to music or watching shows.

In urban tourism, the significance of entertainment has generally been subsumed within studies of ‘culture’ (often referring to heritage and visual and performing arts). Tourists have been identified who have an interest in culture (Richards 1996; McKercher and du Cros 2002). It can be a primary factor in the destination choice of some tourists: labeled the ‘specific cultural tourist’ (Richards 1996), the ‘purposeful cultural tourist’ (McKercher 2002) or the ‘arts-core tourist’ (Hughes 2000). This has generally been in an urban context and determined through questionnaire surveys at ‘attractions’. Studies have, though, often not discriminated between the various components of culture.

This study focuses on one aspect of culture – entertainment. Although it is an evident component of UK beach holidays, its significance as a tourist resource is relatively unknown. Existing beach holiday-entertainment studies have focused on domestic holidays and have a supply-side perspective. The study described in this paper moved the focus to significance from a tourist perspective and to overseas beach holidays. The aim was to determine, from the point-of-view of the (UK) tourist, the significance of live entertainment in the overseas beach holiday experience.

The study represented exploratory work to identify if a market segment characterised by entertainment interest and significance existed. It would give insight into whether there

was a distinctive and identifiable need prior to further analysis to assess segment characteristics, size, stability and accessibility.

### **Live Entertainment and Holidays**

Entertainment is a broad concept, commonly identified as being lighter and more amusing than 'high arts' such as opera, ballet and theatrical drama (Hughes 2000) and includes performances of variety and dance shows, musicals and concerts. Despite entertainment being increasingly technologically-based, individualised and home-centred, there are still audiences for live entertainment. Over two-thirds of adults in England, for instance, attended an 'arts event' such as theatre, plays and live music in 2005-06 (whether on holiday or at home was not specified) (Aust and Vine 2007).

Destinations such as Nashville (Tennessee, USA), Edinburgh (Scotland) or Salzburg (Austria) position themselves, at least in part, as performing arts and entertainment destinations. Atlantic City, Las Vegas and Sun City (South Africa), although primarily gaming centres, have a significant entertainment offer (Loi 2008). Branson (Missouri, USA) has come to national prominence through an extensive offer of country music in its theatres (Smith 2008).

Theatre productions, especially musicals, in many cities are formulated to appeal to tourists through a combination of spectacle and music (Bennett 2005). Tourists (domestic and international) are the majority of audiences in Broadway (NY) and West End (London) theatres and musicals account for well over half of tickets sold (MORI 2004; Hauser and Lanier 2006; Andrews 2007; Hauser 2007). Theatre was a 'main' or 'important' reason for visiting those cities for over half of the visitors in the audiences. A music heritage - such as Liverpool (England) and the Beatles, Memphis (Tennessee) and Elvis Presley - may also be exploited (Gibson and Connell 2005). Elsewhere, entertainment features in many different

forms; some is bespoke tourist shows not seen elsewhere (Pearce 2008). This includes shows of local culture as well as variety shows of singers, musicians, comics, and magicians – traditionally part of British beach holidays.

With respect to beach destinations, some in the UK have a reputation for lively entertainment whereas the attraction of others lies in their quietness and natural resources (ETC 2001). This is also the case for foreign beach destinations with places such as San Antonio (Ibiza) and Benidorm (eastern Spain) having a particularly ‘lively’ reputation. Holidays that are beach-based are the most popular type of holiday, domestic and foreign, undertaken by UK holidaymakers (VisitBritain et al 2008; Mintel 2007). Entertainment has always been part of UK domestic holidays (Urry 1997) and is an important feature where beach activity is often weather-limited. At one extreme, young holidaymakers (average age of 24) in the seaside resort of Torquay (south-west England) concluded that evening drinking and dancing were most important reasons for being on holiday (Carr 1999).

Since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there has been a decline in the provision of live entertainment in UK resorts (Hayler 1999). It does, nevertheless, continue in most and the variety show remains particularly popular; it is also believed, by many tourist managers and marketers, to be important in attracting tourists (Hughes and Allen 2008). A study of a small sample of English seaside resorts confirmed this importance but only as part of the ‘total package’ (Bull and Hayler 2009). Studies of entertainment from the tourists’ perspective are limited; nearly half of holiday-makers in Blackpool (a major UK seaside resort) rated entertainment ‘very important’ or ‘fairly important’ in the decision to visit (Hughes and Benn 1997). This resort is, however, particularly well-served with live entertainment.

With respect to overseas holidays, entertainment is likely to be a less important activity than beach activities though may be a significant adjunct. Nearly half of UK holiday-makers on overseas beach holidays rated nightlife (specified as bars and clubs) as part of their

activities (Mintel 2005). Mediterranean seaside resorts, the most popular destinations for British holidaymakers, do not have the UK legacy of entertainment; it takes different forms and is offered in venues such as bars, clubs and hotels. Some UK-based inclusive tour operators offering overseas beach holidays include hotels that offer live entertainment.

In summary, a number of studies have confirmed that entertainment is part of the UK domestic beach holiday product. It is also important in attracting visitors though this reflects views of the tourism industry rather than of tourists. This study was carried out to determine the significance of live entertainment from the point-of-view of the tourist and with a focus on overseas beach holidays.

### **Study Methodology**

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews as there was a desire to gain insight into people's attitudes and behaviour expressed in own words (Flick 2006). Such qualitative approaches are increasingly common in tourism research (Phillimore and Goodson 2004).

Informants were chosen 'purposively'; target informants were people living in the UK who had 'recently' been on holiday overseas. The object was to access informants who broadly reflected the population in age, sex and occupation in order to minimise informants having similar backgrounds and experiences (Jordan and Gibson 2004). There was no intent to generate material that could be construed as being representative of the population. Between 20 and 30 interviews were to be held; the study continued until it was considered that no new insights were emerging (Flick 2006). The number undertaken (26) was consistent with and comparable to other qualitative studies (such as Brunt and Courtney 1999; Ali and Holden 2006). Initial contact with interviewees was through personal acquaintances with subsequent snow-balling (Jennings 2005). Interviews were undertaken, in 2009, with people

living in Manchester (UK), largely as a matter of convenience.

The research instrument was made up of open-ended questions (a topic guide) which had been informed by the literature review. The analysis of data followed conventional qualitative techniques which may be summarised as ‘theming’ (Smith 1995).

## **Findings**

Narratives are included from as many of the informants as was considered necessary to demonstrate both common and diverse experiences and views. They are representative of the views expressed though are not a basis for generalization. Twenty six people were interviewed, (12 male and 14 female) with an age range of 21 to 70 years representing a cross-section of occupations. They had different experiences of beach holidays – some as a hotel-based package including hotel entertainment, others as accommodation without in-house entertainment. There were also differences in type of destination including large popular ‘busy’ seaside towns and quieter, smaller up-scale places.

### *Choice Decisions*

When asked unprompted to identify what made a ‘good’ beach holiday and what they did on a beach holiday, entertainment was mentioned by only three and six informants respectively. For the remainder of the interview, informants were prompted to discuss entertainment but even then, only a small number considered its availability to be a necessary part of the holiday. John N felt that ‘it’s just part of the holiday; it’s not much of a holiday without entertainment’ whereas for Stacey, there was an almost inevitable link between entertainment and holidays: ‘it kind of comes with the package I would say, you always get live entertainment when you go on holiday, don’t you?’ Similarly only a few considered entertainment provision important when deciding where they might to take a holiday. Karys stated it was ‘something I would always look for..... -

entertainment in the night time'. There were also a few informants for whom entertainment was important in choice of accommodation. Sarah favoured this because 'it's organised, it's there on your doorstep, rather than you have to go and search for it, because a holiday is about relaxing'.

### *Contribution of Live Entertainment*

Most informants had seen live entertainment on holiday at some time and associated it with positive holiday experiences. For some, it contributed to a feeling of change that distinguished home life from the holiday. Mark remarked that: 'it's different, it's something that we wouldn't normally do at home'. It was identified by Louise as something that 'probably makes you feel like you're more on holiday because if you're at home .....you don't really go to the theatre as much or watch a live show'. Karys saw a holiday as an occasion for intentionally seeking out entertainment: 'I think it's more important because you feel you've got to fill your time. You're there to enjoy yourself so you want to make the most of it'. Live entertainment was deemed by informants to have its own merits. It was rarely described negatively and it was depicted in terms such as 'enjoyable', 'brilliant', 'relaxing', and 'fun'. Stacey considered that entertainment 'added [an] extra touch; the icing on the cake if you know what I mean... It gives it that little more extra touch and feeling'. Karys felt it contributed 'a great deal...; some of my best memories [of holidays] were of night time entertainment'.

Preferences were understandably wide but were invariably for 'light' entertainment; Ian, for instance, preferred, a 'relaxed atmosphere, not a formal show'. Some informants had a concern for entertainment for children, sometimes expressed as 'something for them to do'.

Despite the obvious attraction that entertainment held for some informants, the same persons on occasion implied a casual view about it expressed by John N, for instance: 'well, you're looking for something to do really..... [It] just makes the evening pass a lot quicker'.

There was not a high expectation of standards of holiday entertainment but nonetheless it was accepted and was enjoyable. Stacey, for instance, considered that ‘you’re more relaxed on holiday aren’t you, so therefore you enjoy it more despite whether it may be good or not. You enjoy it that bit more because you’re that bit more relaxed;.... I suppose at home you’ve got less time so therefore you are more choosy’. It was the view of Sarah that holiday audience expectations were lower because so much holiday entertainment was free of charge and ‘if you watch something that’s pretty poor and cheesy here you’d come away annoyed, whereas when you watch it on holiday you laugh it off almost.... It’s about having fun, isn’t it, and I think entertainment on holiday represents that’. Informants were not seeking anything other than that which required little intellectual demand as evidenced by Louise’s comment: ‘it helps you to relax, just by watching it and not having to think’.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

The study confirmed that there were people for whom entertainment was a necessary component of beach holidays and contributed positively to the holiday experience. A particular performance or performer was not a key factor but entertainment in a less specific sense was a critical factor. Such tourists are analogous to the ‘specific cultural tourist’ (Richards 1996), ‘purposeful cultural tourist’ (McKercher 2002) or ‘arts-core tourist’ (Hughes 2000) generally associated with urban tourism – though in the context of entertainment, a specific aspect of culture. Further, most of the informants in this study had experienced live entertainment on holiday at some time and associated it with positive feelings. For some, entertainment was solely a holiday experience. Preferred entertainment was light and undemanding (as might be expected on a beach holiday) – comparable to the popularity of musicals in urban areas – though expectations about quality were not high. On

occasion, it was regarded, almost casually, as a time-filler though still with positive experiences.

Whereas culture tourism studies have often treated culture as an undifferentiated concept, in this study the significance of one aspect of culture – entertainment – was examined and in the context of beach holidays. As such it complemented studies of urban tourism. The few existing UK beach tourism studies have focussed on domestic holidays and assessed entertainment significance from the supply side (Hughes and Allen 2008; Bull and Hayler 2009). This study considered the issue from the perspective of tourists themselves and within a foreign holiday context. In certain studies of urban destinations, a tourist perspective has been adopted though usually as audience surveys (such as MORI 2004; Hauser 2007) rather than as tourist surveys. This study broadens the scope by focusing on tourists. Further the urban tourism studies' data was accessed through questionnaire surveys whereas, through personal interviews, this study facilitated an in-depth expression of views in informants' own words.

This was an exploratory study to determine the existence of a market segment for which live entertainment was important in the beach holiday experience. The findings suggest the existence of such a segment and it remains to determine the characteristics and behaviour of the segment, its size, accessibility and profitability potential for targeting and positioning. Appropriate targeted product and promotional strategies could subsequently be developed.

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