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**INTERNATIONAL TOURISM: AN UNRECOGNIZED POTENTIAL  
IN RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT**

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an overview of international tourism and its role in rural economic development. It briefly describes the current approaches to rural economic development followed by a brief look at international tourism in the United States, and the potential for tourism in rural areas is examined. An initial step in assessing the extent to which international tourists visit rural America is determining the factors which currently attract those visitors to rural areas. The purpose of this paper is to profile potential international travelers to rural areas.

## INTRODUCTION

The economic crisis of the 1980's sharpened public awareness of the downturn in the fortunes of rural America. Nowhere was this downturn more evident than in the decline in personal income and widespread concern for sustained economic vitality than in the rural areas of the United States.

Until recently, economic growth in most rural communities was fostered by the location of new businesses. Shifts in the United States rural economy away from an agriculturally based economy toward an information and service society (8) have expanded the range and locational opportunities available to firms as location decisions are no longer tied to a single resource. For example, approximately 1,000 industrial firms seek to relocate each year and approximately 15 cities and rural areas actively recruit for each of these firms (2). Thus a highly competitive situation is occurring between economic development groups in rural areas attempting to attract businesses to their communities. Many rural areas are finding it difficult, however, to compete with urban areas for these firms, particularly those involved in manufacturing.

The size and density of these rural communities place them at a serious disadvantage in the development of economic change programs. Thus, rural policy analysts have identified the necessity for the development of innovative policies if rural residents are to emerge from the shadows of economic decline (4). Rural areas are moving beyond their parochial and limited roles framed solely by their local economic base, to communities with a genuine stake in the international economy (2, 3).

Although economic development has in the past been linked with the recruitment of new industries, shifts in the economic structure of the United States have led many rural areas to seek innovative ways to stimulate their economies. One industry which appears to be receiving increased attention is tourism. Rural tourism development has the potential to generate tax revenues, employment, and encourage economic diversification in rural areas (5, 6). Thus rural communities are beginning to shift their economic development efforts toward attracting visitors. This new competition between rural communities will be for visitors rather than for industries.

Tourism is one of the top three revenue producers in forty-six states and ranks as the third largest retail service industry in the United States. During 1989, foreign and domestic visitors spent approximately \$350 billion for goods and services in the United States (10, 12). These receipts accounted for 6.5 percent of the nation's gross national product, generated 5.5 million jobs directly and contributed an estimated \$36.6 billion to federal, state, and local taxes.

There appears to be a slowdown in the United States travel industry since May 1990 (11). The vacation travel market has been moderately strong during the first several months of 1990, but has slowed down in May, June, and July. Although the growth in the industry is the slowest since 1985, it has surpassed the growth in the overall economy. Employment in the travel industry continues to grow, exceeding the job creation in all

other employment sectors (5).

International tourism is a growing dimension of the tourism industry in the United States. Almost 30 percent of the growth in tourism spending can be attributed to foreign visitors. International visitors accounted for 11 percent of the \$250 billion travel industry (11). The United States Travel and Tourism Administration projects that 44.1 million foreign travelers will visit the United States in 1991; approximately a 9 percent increase from 1990. The largest segment of international travelers to the United States were Canadians accounting for 40 percent of all foreign visitors to the United States (10).

Taking the current revenues from tourism into account and then applying the current rates of travel to rural communities, the potential revenue for communities from international travelers was \$12.2 billion total or from Canadian travelers alone \$4.9 billion. The implications of rural community even receiving a small percentage of these revenues could be the difference between some rural communities surviving or not.

International tourism has the potential to be an important tool for rural economic growth and diversification. Rural areas are an important part of the attractions available to international tourists in the United States. Previous rural tourism research has primarily focused on the impacts of tourism on host communities (7, 9) and on residents' attitudes toward tourism development (9). One study of international tourists visiting rural areas limited to federal and state public recreation areas found that in general, international tourists enjoyed sightseeing, viewing scenic beauty and visiting attractions (1).

One important aspect of international tourism about which relatively little is known is the factors which motivate international tourists to visit rural areas. The purpose of this paper is to examine the factors which motivate Canadians, the largest segment of the United States international market to visit rural America. Additionally the paper will determine if marital status, age, gender, income, lifecycle, and travel party type vary with the type of benefits sought from a rural visit. The paper concludes with a discussion of possible alternatives for tourism development in rural areas.

## METHODOLOGY

Data used to investigate the relative importance of rural areas in tourists' decisions to take a pleasure vacation were obtained from the 1983 Canadian Tourism Attribute and Motivation Survey (TAMS) conducted by the Department of Labor Force Surveys. The study consisted of 11,500 completed interviews covering the 10 Canadian provinces. The sample was designed with a disproportionate distribution across the province so that the residents would have a similar probability of being selected for the study from each province. The overall purpose of the survey was to develop a framework for the TAMS data base that would provide an understanding of the Canadian Travel market and that would be used as input to monitoring development decisions in the Canadian travel industry.

For the purpose of this study, the paper focuses on a sub-sample drawn from the entire TAMS sample. The sample was then further refined by selecting respondents who went on a pleasure trip to a destination in the United States (n=3814; 33 percent of the total sample). These respondents were then profiled on the basis of the importance of visiting a rural location (rural areas, small towns, and villages) in choosing a travel destination in the United States. Importance was measured on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 4 with only those indicating a rural location as being very important in choosing a travel destination included in further analyses. The analysis was performed in two stages. In the first stage, factor analysis was employed to identify dimensions of travel motivation. One-way analysis of variance was used to determine if there were significant differences for marital status, gender, age, income, lifecycle and travel group and the travel motivation factors.

## RESULTS

The results of the factor analysis displayed in Table 1 show that the 25 motivation items were reduced to six dimensions. Only dimensions with an eigenvalue greater than one were retained for further analysis. Six dimensions, excitement, family exploration, sports, escape and familiarity explaining 52.60 percent of the variance emerged from the factor analyses.

The first dimension, excitement, contained eight items which suggested that international visitors from Canada seek adventure, thrills and excitement from rural locations. Five items clustered together to form the second factor. The items revealed that international visitors are motivated to visit family, to do things that bring families together or to visit rural areas where family members came from. In contrast the three items comprising the rural third factor suggest the importance of exploration for some international visitors. The fourth dimension, sports, suggests visitors go to rural areas to participate or watch sports. The fifth and sixth dimensions, escape and familiarity, reveals that international visitors need to get away from the demands at home, while at the same time feeling comfortable in the unfamiliar rural surroundings.

Table 2 displays the results of the one way analysis of variance. Inspection of the table shows the only significant difference found for excitement was age. The results of the Duncan's Multiple Range Test revealed that the difference was identified between those aged 17-24 and 25-34. It appears that the younger Canadian travelers placed higher importance on excitement than the older age group.

Two characteristics, income and travel groups revealed significant differences for those reporting incomes \$34,000 and over, placed less importance on the family dimension than did those reporting incomes less than \$20,000. Canadian visitors traveling with friends placed less importance on the family dimension than did those traveling alone, or with family, or with family and friends.

The only significant difference found in the exploration dimension emerged for the travel group. The data suggests that friends traveling together are more interested in exploration than are family groups or those who travel alone. Significant differences were found for three travel characteristics, marital status, income and lifecycle with the escape dimension. The results in Table 2 suggest that married international visitors place greater importance on escape than the other group. Additionally, those with incomes of \$34,000 or over place more importance on escape than those with incomes less than \$34,000. Finally married travelers 35-64 years of age and without children place more importance on escape than all other lifecycle groups.

For the final motivation dimension, familiarity, significant differences were found for the income and travel group composition. The data suggests that those individuals reporting incomes of \$20,000 or less placed more importance on familiarity than those with incomes of \$34,000 or more. The familiar surroundings dimension was most important to the traveler who traveled alone.

#### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Rural areas which understand the needs and wants of national and international tourists the best, will be able to compete more successfully for tourist visitation. This preliminary analysis of the potential benefits of attracting international travelers to rural America suggests that economic development programs in rural areas need to consider the potential contribution that these international tourists may have to their local economic revitalization efforts.

1. International tourists appear to seek activities which are consistent with the current rural natural and cultural environment. Thus development of the rural tourism industry must be careful not to destroy the natural environment which initially attracted the rural tourist.

2. As the population continues to age and international rural tourists tend to be older, the mature market represents a rich potential target market for rural areas. Additionally, the "baby boomers" have demonstrated a renewed interest in "rural values" and rural life, even if their involvement is only temporary through short visits to rural areas.

3. Local economic development officials; seeking to develop a tourist industry must pursue business opportunities which are consistent with the local area residents and desires of the rural visitor. Rural tourists appear to be seeking different benefits from these visits. Younger international visitors desire excitement. Type of travel group appears to be an important variable for rural economic development planners to consider. For example, significant differences were found for three dimensions, family exploration and familiarity and type of travel group.

4. Although the dissemination of professional information such as brochures, magazine advertisements will continue to be important, rural tourism officials must continue to stimulate positive word of mouth communication about the local area.

5. Rural tourism officials should conduct a thorough market analysis before beginning a comprehensive marketing program, first with an assessment of the motives of travelers to their respective areas. Identification of visitors' motives for traveling followed by a strategic marketing program will lead rural communities to a more successful plan for tourism development.

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TABLE 1

RESULTS OF FACTOR ANALYSES OF INTERNATIONAL "RURAL VISITORS MOTIVATORS"

ITEM	EXCITEMENT	FAMILY	EXPLORATION	SPORTS	ESCAPE	FAMILIARITY	
Seeing as much as possible in the time available	.63						
Finding thrills and excitement	.62						
Having fun being entertained	.62						
Being daring and adventuresome	.60						
Going places my friends haven't	.58						
Talking about the trip after I return home	.56						
Rediscovering myself	.49						
Being free to act the way I feel	.48						
Visiting friends and relatives		.74					
Being together as a family		.71					
Visiting places my family came from		.70					3.0
Taking advantage of reduced fares		.45					
Meeting people with similar interests		.42					
Experiencing new and different lifestyles			.77				
Trying new foods			.70				
Visiting places that are important in history			.57				
Participating in sports				.84			
Watching TV sports				.70			
Being physically active				.46			
Getting away from the demands at home					.66		
Doing nothing at all					.63		
Experiencing a simpler lifestyle					.56		
Getting a change from a busy job					.48		
Feeling at home away from home						.70	
Reliving past good times						.63	
Alpha	.79	.67	.66	.64	.52	.51	
Percent of the variance explance	21.9	9.4	6.4	5.5	4.8	4.5	52.6

TABLE 2

**RESULTS OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE BETWEEN VISITOR CHARACTERISTICS  
AND MOTIVATION DIMENSIONS**

<b>Visitor Characteristics</b>	<b>Excitement</b>	<b>Family</b>	<b>Exploration</b>	<b>Sports</b>	<b>Escape</b>	<b>Familiarity</b>
<u>Marital Status</u>	NS	NS	NS	NS	6.83 <sup>1</sup>	NS
Married					2.31*	
Single					2.47	
Other					2.70*	
<u>Age</u>	2.58 <sup>3</sup>	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
17-24	1.93*					
25-34	2.32*					
45-54	2.19					
55 and over	2.17					
<u>Income</u>	NS	3.74 <sup>3</sup>	NS	NS	3.25 <sup>3</sup>	6.42 <sup>1</sup>
Under \$20,000		1.85*			2.51*	1.69*
\$20,000-\$34,000		2.02			2.32+	1.88
\$34,000 and over		2.15*			2.27*+	2.12*
<u>Lifecycle</u>	NS	NS	NS	NS	8.04 <sup>1</sup>	NS
Single under 35 without children					2.33+	
Single 35-65; older without children					2.85+	
Married 35-64 without children					2.19*+	
Married 65 & older without children					2.60*	
Single with children					2.23+	
Married with children					2.28*+	
<u>Travel Group</u>	NS	7.50 <sup>1</sup>	3.82 <sup>2</sup>	NS	NS	4.89 <sup>1</sup>
Alone		1.86	2.65*			1.72*+
Family		1.93*	2.40+			1.78*+
Friends		2.48*	2.04*+			2.12*
Both family/friends and other		1.94*	2.22*			2.23+

Significance level of F  
1 = .001; 2=.01; 3=.001

\* = pairs of means significantly different at the .05 level.  
+ = pairs of means significantly different at the .05 level.