

## Seeking Antarctica: An Investigation into Visitors' Travel and Recreation Value-Based Motivation

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### Abstract

Antarctica is a unique travel destination in many respects: climate, remoteness, extreme environment, accessibility and management regime. To visit Antarctica one must be highly motivated, and to date hundreds of thousands of visitors have found ways to experience Antarctica. Through National Antarctic Programmes, tourism or independent ventures, the activities that visitors engage in have expanded and diversified. Trends for outdoor recreation have shown exponential growth over the past decade, despite tourism numbers actually declining in recent years (IAATO, 2011). This thesis seeks to understand why visitors engage in travel to Antarctica and participate in recreation activities while in Antarctica. By investigating travel and recreation phenomena across the spectrum of Antarctic visitors, this research aims to achieve in-depth empirical insights into the value-based motivations of individual Antarctic visitors.

This research is exploratory and broad in scope. The ontological approach to the inquiry is based on a constructivism paradigm, and through an interpretivist lens this research develops. The methodology is based on means-end theory, where from a consumer behaviour standpoint the theoretical assumption is that it is possible to uncover value-based motivations by linking an experience to the consequences of that experience and then to personal values (Gutman, 1982). The method of inquiry is qualitative, using in-depth, semi-structured interviews whilst incorporating reflective and reflexive processes into the research design. Soft laddering is employed during interviewing in order to gather insights about individual Antarctic visitors' motivations and personal values. Purposive, maximum variation, convenience and snowball sampling procedures are used to identify participants with a wide range of Antarctic experiences. Fifteen face-to-face, one-on-one interviews have been conducted from August 2009 to March 2010 in New Zealand, Canada and the United States. Emergent themes are presented using narratives that best represent an individual participant's 'voice'.

This study identifies five motivational themes for travel to Antarctica: to *experience freedom*, to *interact with others*, to *be challenged*, to *experience real Antarctica* and to *pursue an adventure*. These are linked to eleven values of environmental, social and individualistic orientation. The findings also suggest that value orientations may influence the mode of travel to Antarctica. Then, four motivational themes are identified for recreation engagement: to *escape*, to *enjoy the company of others*, to *challenge oneself in the environment* and to *experience Antarctica's unique landscape*. These are linked to eight values of social and individualistic orientation.

The investigation into recreation motivations reveals several interesting changes in visitor motivations, particularly after visitors arrive in Antarctica or for subsequent travels to Antarctica after returning home. As a result, two key findings emerge from the discussions with participants. First, participants seek what they consider to be authentic Antarctic experiences, and second, recreation is a way that facilitates and achieves authentic experiences. Therefore, the findings point toward recreation participation as a means to fulfil unfulfilled travel motivations, which suggests

that recreation has for many (scientific staff/base personnel, commercial tourists and independent travellers) become an integral part of the Antarctic experience.

To conclude this thesis, the findings are conceptualised in an Antarctic Tourism System Model using Leiper's (1979) geographical tourism system to give structure to the discussion of the relationship between psychological elements and visitor movements to, at and from Antarctica. Directions for future research are suggested, particularly focusing on continued engagement with qualitative discourse that will expand and deepen an understanding of Antarctic visitor motivations and values. A call is then made for researchers to address an emergent social science research agenda for Antarctica that acknowledges the dynamics of travel and recreation in Antarctica (and the environmental, political and socio-psychological dimensions of the Antarctic tourism system) that have become increasingly apparent in recent years.