

## **Promoting To The Drive Tourists: An Exploratory Queensland Study**

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### **Abstract**

This research was designed to increase understanding of demographic, planning and preferred attractions and activities characteristics of drive tourists in rural areas in Queensland. An important outcome is an enhanced understanding of the drive tourist market will assist rural communities to develop more effective promotional strategies. Major findings include the relatively homogeneous nature of drive tourists, the level of planning they undertook prior to their journey, information sources consulted and the activity clusters that drive tourists were most interested in participating in.

Key words: Drive tourism, information sources, activities

### **Introduction**

In recent decades, rural Australia has suffered significant negative migration as rural workers have been displaced by new agricultural technologies. Yet urban Australia views rural Australia as a highly desirable place to visit because of its position in Australian's view of themselves as a people and as a nation. While rural areas hold considerable appeal, at least in principle, the conversion from interest into a visit remains difficult for a variety of reasons including low standards of infrastructure, availability of information and the often-long distances between generating regions and destinations. Given the size of the drive tourism market (53 million trips in 2001) it is not surprising that many rural Australian communities actively court the drive tourist (Laws and Scott, 2003). In Queensland, drive tourism contributed an estimated AUD 3 billion to the state economy in 2000 (BTR, 2001). This paper is designed to develop a profile of drive visitors in rural areas and explore opportunities for local communities to tap into this resource through appropriate promotional strategies.

An increased awareness of the significance of drive tourism has generated a growing body of research in this area. A recent issue of the *Journal of Vacation Marketing* (2003, Vol 9(4)) and a monograph by Carson, Waller and Scott (2002) examined a range of issues related to drive tourism. Examples of drive tourism research include: Prideaux and Carson (2003) who discussed the characteristics of drive tourism; Pennington-Gray (2003) who looked at aspects of the VFR drive market in Florida; Sivijis (2003) who examines aspects of the drive tourism policy of Tourism Queensland; Olsen (2003) who examined aspects of themed routes; and Spotts *et al.* (1997) who looked at market segmentation of drive tourists. Previous research has examined new product development ideas (Scott, 2002); tourist flows in North-West Queensland (Black and Clark, 1998); motel promotion strategy development (Shanahan, 2003); and success factors in attracting this market (Hardy, 2003).

A review of the literature indicates that while there has been a substantial growth in the understanding of the characteristics of the drive tourism phenomenon there has not been a parallel growth in the understanding of the promotional strategies that are required to sustain

and grow drive tourism. Promotional strategies are a significant issue for the success of any tourism organisation (Shanahan, 2003) because they assist organisations to inform, persuade and induce consumers to choose a particular product and behave in a particular fashion towards the organisation's (or destination) offerings (Belch and Belch, 2004). For small rural communities relying on drive tourism, successful promotion is critical if they are to successfully encourage drive tourists to select their community as an overnight stop. Unfortunately, many small rural communities fail to undertake the type of research that is required to achieve this level of understanding of their market.

It is apparent that while there is growing interest in the drive tourism phenomenon there remains many knowledge gaps including detailed research into segment identification, and the development of a suitable suite of promotional strategies. To develop a greater understanding of these issues this research was designed to investigate the following objectives:

1. demographic and geographic characteristics of drive tourists;
2. travel behaviour patterns including pre-trip planning behaviour and information sources used;
3. activities and attractions that are of interest to drive tourists; and
4. Identify market segments.

## Methods

A survey of drive tourists was used to investigate the issues outlined previously. Data was collected in late 2003 from drive tourists passing through Goondiwindi, a small regional Queensland community that is located adjacent to a major north-south highway. Goondiwindi has limited tourism appeal and functions primarily as an overnight stop for visitors traveling from New South Wales and Victoria to Queensland or Queenslanders traveling to southern states (McClymont and Prideaux, 2005). The target population comprised individuals traveling by private, light vehicle (including four wheel drives) through Goondiwindi during the enumeration period. To capture this population a sampling frame of various accommodation, fast food outlets and petrol stations in Goondiwindi were used as distribution points for the survey. A pilot test was undertaken with 30 respondents who had previously traveled through Goondiwindi. The results were used to calculate a mean and standard deviation for one of the information sources used in the survey. These two measures were used to calculate the sample size of 95 based on a confidence interval of 95%. With an estimate response rate of 10% for mail surveys a total of 960 questionnaires were given out. A total of 156 usable questionnaires were returned giving a better than expected response rate of 15.6%. As with any study of this nature the snap shot approach captures only a small percentage of the total flow of drive tourists who pass through Goondiwindi and significant seasonal variations such as school holidays may be missed. As a consequence, the results should not be generalized for all drive tourism activities in Queensland.

## Results

### **Objective 1. Demographic and geographic characteristics**

Results show that the sample was almost equally split between males (47.4%) and females (52.6%). There was a much greater variation in age with 18% of respondents aged under 35 years, 40% aged between 35 and 55 years and 41.4% aged 55 years and over. The most significant occupation categories were retirees (29.6%), professional/semi professionals (27%) followed by administration/manager (8.6%), clerical/service workers (8.6%) and

primary producers (6.6%). The majority of respondents (42.3%) were from Queensland, New South Wales (26.4%) and Victoria (15.2%). Other states contributed less than 15% of all visitors. Overall, the final travel destination for the majority of respondents was Queensland (60%) followed by New South Wales (23.6%).

### **Objective 2. *Travel behaviour patterns***

The main trip purpose was for a holiday (59.1%). A smaller number of respondents were engaged in travel for business and training (16.1%), visiting family and friends (14.1%), or a special event/ recreation/ sport (7.4%). The main travel parties were adult couples (47.7%) and family groups (29.4%). The remaining 25% of respondents travelled alone or in non-family groups or with business associates. The main type of accommodation used were motels/hotels (54.7%) and caravan parks (33.7%). Few respondents stayed in other forms of accommodation such as pubs, backpackers, bed and breakfast or with family and friends. The primary form of travel was by private car (85.1%) followed by motor home/campervans (11.7%).

The majority of respondents (91.7%) planned some or all of the route to be travelled while another 34% planned some of the route. Similarly, most respondents (82%) planned all or some of the towns to be visited during their trip. In contrast, only a little over half (56.8%) of respondents planned all or some activities and attractions to be undertaken during their trip. The remaining respondents, either did not plan (22.6%) or did not visit any attractions or undertake any activities.

Just under half (45.45%) of respondents reported that they did not consult information sources during their trip (see Table 1). Although most respondents planned the route and towns, approximately half of these planners did not use any external sources of information. This situation indicates that these respondents are relying on internal information sources such as their personal knowledge and memories to make travel decisions. This finding is not surprising given that a substantial number of respondents are from Queensland and may have been familiar with the area and its offerings. Results for information sources discussed next relates solely to those who did use information sources.

Those respondents who did use information sources to plan their trip were asked to rate the level of importance of various travel information sources as shown in Table 1. The importance of sources was measured on a five point scale with 1 being very unimportant and 5 being very important. The most important sources of information were Royal Automobile Club Queensland (RACQ) and National Roads and Motorist Association (NRMA) maps, Goondiwindi visitor centre and visitor brochures, prior knowledge, road signs and word of mouth communication. Respondents were neutral towards information on the Internet, radio and Western Downs touring guide and found information in other guidebooks unimportant.

### **Objective 3. *Activities and attractions***

The most frequently selected attraction/activities reported by respondents were visiting a historical attraction (48%) followed by dining out (46.1%), shopping (38.3%) and visiting botanical gardens (32.5%). Other activities such as bush walking, attending an event/festival, river activities, having a BBQ lunch and visiting galleries/antiques were selected by a quarter or less of the respondents. Clustering these activities into recognized groupings such as heritage tourism (historical attraction), nature tourism (botanical garden/river activities/bird watching/bush walking), food (dining out/BBQ) and cultural tourism (guided tours/art galleries, events and festivals) indicates that the cluster with the greatest interest was nature

tourism (188 positive responses) followed by food (111), cultural activities (101) and heritage (74).

**Table 1: Level of Importance of Information Sources for Respondents**

Sources of information used	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median
NRMA/ RACQ Maps	63	4.05	1.069	4.00
Goondiwindi visitors centre	56	3.84	1.359	4.00
Prior Knowledge	59	3.61	1.232	4.00
Goondiwindi visitors brochures	50	3.60	1.385	4.00
Word of mouth communication	48	3.50	1.321	4.00
Roads signs directing to Goondiwindi	73	3.38	1.613	4.00
Internet	46	3.30	1.489	3.00
Radio advertisements	41	2.88	1.552	3.00
Western Downs touring guide	35	3.03	1.524	3.00
Lonely Planet travel guide	31	2.29	1.371	2.00
Walk about Australia travel guide	31	2.48	1.546	2.00

Source: Research results

#### **Objective 4. Market segments**

The following discussion will focus on the identification of specific behaviours by either the whole sample or segments within the sample. Firstly, the research investigated if respondents who planned their activities/attractions differed in any way from those respondents who did not. It appears that respondents who planned attractions/activities for their trip would tend to be more reliant on external information sources compared to those who did not plan, since they may need information to plan their trip. Since only half of respondents planned their trip, investigating further differences between these two groups became necessary. A Mann-Whitney-U test was used with a 95% confidence interval to test these for these differences. The results showed a p value of .033 which indicates that information sources are important to drive tourists who had planned to undertake activities or visit attractions during their trip.

Next, demographic differences between planners and non-planners of attractions was tested in order to identify characteristics of these two groups which would make them measurable. A Mann-Whitney-U test and a Kruskal Wallis test were used for gender and age, and occupation and travel party respectively to investigate whether they explained the differences between planners and non-planners. The percentage of respondents who planned was greater in the under 35 age group compared to the percentage of those who planned in the over 35 age group.

Given that planners and non-planners of attractions differed in age and in the amount of information used, this research went further to investigate whether the activities/attractions of interest to planners differed from non planners. This was tested using a chi square with a 95 per cent confidence interval. Results showed that there were no differences in activities and attractions of interest to planners and non-planners.

Finally, this research investigated if the activities/attractions of interest to respondents differ according to demographic and trip characteristics such as gender, age, occupation and travel party respectively. If respondents differ in the attractions/activities of interest, promotional brochures would need to target promotional content to suite different interest groups within

this market. A Chi square statistics with a 95 per cent confidence interval was used to investigate this issue. The results showed that there were no significant differences between all most all demographics and travel characteristics for most activities. The only significant differences found were that more females than males preferred shopping and visiting botanical gardens, and river activities were more popular for travel groups without children.

### **Discussion**

The homogeneous nature of the sample precluded the development of a realistic set of market segments. The only major point of difference was the level of planning engaged in by respondents but this difference was not strong enough to be used as the basis for market segmentation. The lack of strong points of differentiation has a major benefit for rural communities because scarce promotional dollars can be targeted to specific media and therefore one promotional strategy would be suitable for the entire group of drive tourists.

The research did identify some issues that were relevant to rural communities when decisions had to be made about what activities should be supported based on the activity clusters identified in this research. Previous research (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004; Shanahan, 2003; March, 1994; Jaworski and Kohli, 1993) has indicated the need to base promotional strategies on the target market and to develop promotional decisions that are embedded within the communities' marketing orientation. This research found that the target market are mainly those over 35 years who are professional/semi-professional or retired from Queensland, Victoria or New South Wales, travelling mainly as couples or as family groups. In turn, nature tourism, heritage attractions and dining were important activities to this target market and so they should become an important part of the promotional message content for this market. Moreover, this message should be incorporated into sources such as maps and information centres which were deemed important by this group. While not ranking towards the top of the information sources used, the Internet was considered more important than guidebooks and radio adverts, suggesting that rural communities do need to ensure that information is available via this medium. The importance of adequate road signs was also noted and is especially important for drive tourists who do not plan activities/attractions or travel routes. Both the public sector and private sector have a role in ensuring that accurate and informative signage is installed.

### **Limitation**

The impact of travel purpose on behaviour was not investigated in this research. Further research using a stratified random sampling method should be employed to overcome this limitation.

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