

## **Tourist Perceptions of Environmentally Friendly Innovations**

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### **Introduction**

As the environmental movement got underway and environmental awareness came into focus in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the tourism industry began incorporating 'environmentally friendly' efforts into their business practices. Requests for towel reuse and water conservation has become common in hotel rooms; recycling bins, organic souvenirs and renewable energy systems have also made appearances at tourist sites, particularly those that are nature or outdoor oriented. Several articles have discussed the industry's applications of sustainable tourism, particularly in terms of 'best practices' and policy creation and implementation (Bendell & Font, 2004; Font, 2002; Hobson & Essex, 2001; Todd & Williams, 1996). Few, if any, studies however, have considered tourists' views of environmentally responsible and innovative business practices. This paper investigates tourists' perceptions of environmentally responsible practices by analyzing the attitudes of tourists towards 'green' practices in tourist spaces.

### **Methods**

This study is based on a survey of individuals who visited the Arizona Welcome Center in northeastern Arizona and the Chamber of Commerce offices in Holbrook and Springerville, Arizona. Each week for a year, beginning in July 2002, two or three randomly selected days were used to enrol travel parties in the study. Travel counselors at the three sites were trained in survey methods and approaches to asking individuals to participate. Qualifiers were used to limit the sample to those visitors who considered themselves on a vacation in Arizona of four weeks or less. At all the sites, a member of visiting travel parties was asked to complete a one-page survey which asked questions about their stop (Welcome Center  $n=805$ ; Holbrook  $n=101$ ; Springerville  $n=219$ ). They were then provided a diary to be completed during their visit. Reminder postcards were sent to respondents' homes if their diaries were not received within three weeks of the initial contact. For those who did not return the diary within six weeks of their stop, an abridged survey was mailed to their homes. The diary total response rate for the entire sample was 76 percent: 77 percent for the welcome center visitors, 68 percent for motorists who stopped in Holbrook, and 75 percent for Springerville.

## Findings

Two questions were asked of visitors to gain some understanding of the importance they place on environmentally responsible practices of tourism businesses. Results indicate that more than half of respondents felt that seeing environmentally friendly efforts, such as recycling bins or items made from recycled materials, were quite to extremely important. The second question asked visitors to respond to a series of specific types of environmentally responsible measures. All of those listed were considered at least ‘quite valuable’ (measured on a 5 point scale from ‘not valuable’ to ‘extremely valuable’) (Table 1).

Next, analysis was conducted to determine relationships between environmental practices perceptions, traveler characteristics, and travel behavior. This analysis involved ANOVA and Pearson’s correlations. With respect to demographic differences, women reported that they feel environmentally friendly practices are slightly more valuable than men. As well, unmarried individual rated both variables higher than married people. Finally, there was a negative correlation between age and perceive value of green practices indicating that younger respondents value these practices more highly.

Table 1: Specific Environmental Efforts at Tourism Businesses

Special efforts	Not valuable %	Slightly valuable %	Valuable %	Quite valuable %	Extremely valuable %	Means
Landscaping with native plants	1.4	4.3	19.2	29.4	45.6	4.1
Energy efficient systems/ energy conservation	1.1	5.3	21.5	30.5	41.5	4.1
Recycling programs	1.4	6.3	24.0	27.5	40.8	4.0
Renewable energy systems	1.3	5.4	23.9	30.6	38.7	4.0
Gray-water systems	1.5	8.4	21.0	31.7	37.4	4.0
Architecture compatible with the local environment	2.2	6.9	23.5	31.1	36.3	3.9
Items made of recycled materials	2.9	9.7	27.8	27.0	32.6	3.8
Recycling items such as maps, trail guides	3.5	10.6	30.6	26.7	28.6	3.7
Water use reduction programs	3.3	10.8	26.6	30.0	29.3	3.7
Composting toilet systems	5.2	13.2	30.9	25.7	25.0	3.5
Items made from natural/ organic materials	6.2	17.8	31.7	22.8	21.5	3.4

Scale: 1=not valuable to 5=extremely valuable

Perhaps the most enlightening results were related to the importance of activities (on a 5 point importance scale). The importance of seeing environmentally friendly efforts at tourism and recreation sites was not, or weakly, correlated with visiting family and friends, visiting the Grand Canyon, shopping, watching sports, entertainment, golf, other sports, resort stays, family business, business trip, explore retirement areas, and explore new jobs. It was, however, strongly correlated ( $p < .01$ ) with the importance placed on sightseeing; natural area activities; cultural arts and heritage activities; and adventure activities. Nearly the same pattern emerged for perceptions of the value of green practices with one exception: there was also a strong correlation with entertainment. This suggests that outdoor recreation tourists feel environmentally friendly business practices are more important and valuable than do other tourists.

Several motives for the trip were included on the questionnaire. With the exception of visit friends and family, there was a positive correlation between all the motive items and both the practices variables. It is important to note, though, that the highest correlations (.25 or better) were found between perceptions of the value of environmental practices and learning about the natural environment, experiencing nature, being physically active, and viewing scenery (listed in order of highest to lowest). The strongest correlations between importance of environmentally friendly practices and importance of seeing such practices were found between (highest to lowest): be physically active, experience nature, and learn about the natural environment. Though somewhat less interesting that the activity variables, these results continue to suggest nature tourists are those to whom environmentally friendly business practices matter most.

## **Discussion**

Of greatest importance, this study documents the fairly high levels of importance and value tourists place on environmentally friendly practices at tourism and recreation sites and businesses. Visitors with a stronger nature orientation, especially, had more positive views of environmentally responsible practices by tourism businesses than tourists not nature oriented. They felt such practices are important and feel they are valuable. Though there were a number of nonsignificant relationships with respect to tourist characteristics and a number of variables, similar to others who have studied environmental perceptions and tourism (Hashimoto, 2002; Hong, Kim, & Kim, 2003; Jurowski, Uysal, Williams, & Noe, 1995), visitors who valued environmentally friendly practices to a greater extent tended to be younger, perhaps suggesting a generation gap. Hashimoto (2000), however, also noted that there may be an inclination to appear 'politically correct' as suggested by Wheeler (1994) or 'socially desirable' as suggested by (Hofstede, 1984). Each of the special efforts listed in Table 2 are already in some form of practice in a limited number of Arizona's

tourism sites, from state parks to high-end golf resorts. However, visitors' perceptions of these practices have not been well documented. This study sheds light on the value placed on certain practices, and also profiles the visitors who value them. This demand-orientated research has value for tourism operators as they move forward in planning future operations.

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