

## Travel Motives and Golf Tourists: An Exploratory Study

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## Introduction

Sport tourism is one of the most important and fastest growing sectors within the tourism industry (Higham & Hinch, 2002). De Knop (2004) indicated that the relationship between sport and tourism in our modern world is symbiotic; it is not simply that sport influences tourism, but the opposite is also true. Moreover, this mutual relationship can be further extended to vacations when the emphasis is on sport participation, such as mountain biking, hiking, running marathons, or playing golf. As sport grows globally, it seems that sport and tourism are more linked than ever, and new and exciting possibilities are opening to improve tourism and provide experiences through sport. Higham and Hinch (2003) noted that a considerable amount of sporting activities is featured by increases in travel, as more and more people engage in and attend sporting events locally and internationally. In the U.S., both the growth in sport tourism and the role tourism plays in the national economy has led to the need for a greater understanding of this industry. For example, nearly 4 out of 5 (80%) domestic trips in the U.S. are for leisure purposes (U.S. Travel Association, 2019), in addition, the USTA stated that direct spending on leisure travel by domestic and international travelers totaled \$761.7 billion in 2018 (U.S. Travel Association, 2019).

Sport tourism was adopted as a term broadly describing sport-related leisure travel (Gibson 1998), which can be exhibited into three main forms: (1) watching sport events, (2) nostalgia sport tourism, and (3) actively participating in sport activities as part of a vacation. The third category has drawn growing attention from both practitioners and academics because of the substantial increase in the number of tourists engaging in sport activities, such as scuba diving, tennis, skiing, mountain biking, mountain climbing, and running (Butler, 2006). More specifically, according to Shani, Wang, Hutchinson, and Lai (2010), “among the active sport tourism activities, golf has attracted the most attention from researchers” (p, 337).

Hui, Wan, and Ho (2007) indicated that the global tourism industry has become increasingly competitive, and golf tourism, as a subcategory of sport tourism, has received more recent attention within the tourism industry. Additionally, according to Hudson and Hudson (2010), golf tourism has received more recent attention within the sport tourism industry because of its size and value, thus, the greater interest from sport and tourism researchers. Golf tourism includes tourists whose main travel purposes is to play golf, tourists who play some golf as a secondary activity while on vacation or a business trip, or those who attend golf tournaments as spectators (Shani et al., 2010, p. 338). As one of the most popular sports in the world, golf tourism has grown exponentially over the past few years, and all signs suggest this trend will continue to rise as more destinations enter the market with new golfing products (Mintel, 2016). Considering golf’s great tourism potential, it is important to investigate golf tourists’ motivations related to travel, so golf courses and golf destinations can find ways to promote golf tourism among the millions of U.S. golfers.

According to the National Golf Foundation (NGF), an estimated 24.2 million people played golf on a course in 2018 (National Golf Foundation, 2019). In addition, the NGF reports that in 2018, 23 million golfers hit golf balls at golf entertainment facilities like Topgolf, indoor simulators and driving ranges (National Golf Foundation, 2019). The NGF also reports that juniors (6-17) and young adults (18-34) comprise approximately 35% of all on-course golfers, with 5.7 million women playing golf on a course in 2018. The number of golfers age 65 and older increased by 17%, with 4.2 million playing golf in 2018 (National Golf Foundation, 2019). On average, golfers played about 18 rounds in 2018, with the average price paid for an 18-hole round at a public facility being \$35 (National Golf Foundation, 2019). The states with the

highest number of golf facilities include Florida, California, New York, Michigan, and Texas (Miller, 2017). With the steady number of people playing golf and golf courses available to play, the competition in the golf industry has increased exponentially, which has generated a great amount of interest in the study of golf travelers (Petrick, 2002).

Gibson (2004) noted that the motivations of sport tourists have been used to categorize them on the basis of their travel intentions (e.g., travel to participate, etc.) but there has been relatively little work done to establish their motives for traveling to participate in specific sport activities (e.g., golf, tennis, skiing, etc.). Rather, the literature on sport tourism has focused on classic motivational theories borrowed from each discipline that are rooted in the “basic physiological and socio-psychological wants of humankind” (Gibson, 2004, p. 253). Further, Gibson (2004) cautioned that while the application of motivation theories will “aid in greater understandings of sport tourism behavior, motivation is complex” (p. 255). This complexity, however, should not dissuade attempts to improve what is known about the motives of sport enthusiasts who travel to participate in sport activities. Previous research has shown that “effective tourism marketing is impossible without understanding the consumer’s motivations” (Fodness, 1994, p. 588). In this study, the aim was to explore the motives of golf tourists.

### **Purpose of the Study**

It is becoming more important for golf courses and golf destinations to identify the variables which attract and retain their golfing clientele. This study should provide the golf and tourism industries with valuable information that can be used to create specific marketing and sales strategies. The identification of common characteristics and travel motivations among golf tourists could provide useful information to golf courses and golf destinations in targeting their marketing efforts.

The aim of this paper is twofold, first, to provide a general overview of the golfing tourists, second, to determine the travel motives of golf tourists who travel and play golf. In order to achieve this, the paper will be structured as follows: first, a review of relevant literature will be discussed, followed by the research methods chosen and the results of the study. The implications of this study will culminate in the implications and conclusions. The findings of the study provide important theoretical and managerial implications. Golf courses and golf destinations should design marketing programs based on the traveler’s motivational characteristics. The information provided in this study could lead to improved marketing strategies, which in turn could assist in ensuring that targeted golf travelers support and return to those golf courses and golf destinations.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Within the framework of examining golfer’s motivation to travel to play golf, Iso-Ahola’s (1982) Social Psychological Model of Tourism Motivation (SPMTM), known as the Seeking-Escaping Theory was incorporated into the study. Satisfaction that individuals expect to derive from involvement in a leisure activity is linked to two motivational forces according to Iso-Ahola, approach (seeking) and avoidance (escape). Essentially, “individuals perceive a leisure activity as a potential satisfaction producer for two major reasons: it provides certain intrinsic rewards, such as feelings of mastery and competence, and helps them leave the routine environment behind” (Iso-Ahola, 1982, p. 258). Therefore, individuals participate in leisure activities to derive satisfaction by seeking or escaping something. Iso-Ahola’s model provides four motivational categories: personal escape, interpersonal escape, personal seeking, and interpersonal seeking. Snepenger, King, Marshall, and Uysal (2006) tested Iso-Ahola’s model

and developed 12 motivational statements that characterized the four motivation categories (see Table 1).

## **Literature Review**

### **Golf Tourism**

In recent years, the tourism industry has become increasingly specialized, and a new range of tourism products has emerged, including ecotourism, heritage tourism, and sport tourism (Gibson & Pennington-Gray, 2005, p. 5). Golf tourism is defined by Readman (2003) as travel for noncommercial reasons to participate in golf activities away from the traveler's local environment. Golf 20/20 (2009) described golf tourism as a primary motivating factor for travel, or, as an enjoyable activity while traveling. Golf 20/20 (2009) also suggested that golf tourists can be classified into three generic categories: the avid golfer (plays 25 or more rounds of golf per year while traveling), the core golfer (playing 8 to 24 rounds of golf per year while traveling), and the occasional golfer (plays one to seven rounds of golf per year while traveling). Kim and Ritchie (2012) identified three basic types of travel motivations related to golf. These were golf intensive golfers (primary purpose of travel was to play), golf multi-motivated golfers (tourists who engage in other activities in addition to golf), and companion golfers (people accompanying golfers and who may sometimes also participate in the game). For the purposes of this paper, golf tourism is defined as the segment of tourism which involves visiting one or more destinations for the purposes of participating in the game of golf (Butler, 2019, p. 236).

Globally golf tourism is considered a major activity both as a direct form of special interest travel and as an adjunct to other forms of travel (Hall, 1992, as cited in Weed & Bull, 2004). According to the Golf 20/20 – 2016 U.S. Golf Economy Report (2016), the U.S. golf related tourism expenditures were estimated at \$25.7 billion, with golf travelers making approximately 102 million golf-related visits (referred to as “person-stays”<sup>12</sup> in the travel industry), and spending an average of \$350 per person per overnight trip. Golf, therefore, represents one of the largest sport related travel markets (Readman, 2003), with its own trade association, the International Association of Golf Tour Operators (IAGTO), which runs annual conventions in both North America and Asia; the latter reflecting recent rapid growth in the provision of golf facilities, many of which are aimed at the golf tourism market (Butler, 2019, p. 236).

The concept of novelty plays a significant part in the consideration of the golf tourist (Petrick, 2002; Weed & Bull, 2004). Petrick (2002) described novelty as visiting someplace that is new or provides unique stimulation and noted that age was determined to be a good indicator of novelty, not education or income. Petrick also mentioned that young golfers are more likely to be novelty seekers and frequent golfers are more likely to avoid novelty. For some golf tourists on their first golf trip, the novelty of a different type of vacation is likely to have been a significant element in the trip decision-making process (Weed & Bull, 2004). For more experienced participants, the novelty of taking part in a new destination of “collecting places” may be an important motivating factor (Weed & Bull, 2004), suggesting that novelty could provide a motivation to travel and participate in golf.

### **Tourism Motivation**

This review is focused on the pleasure vacation traveler, specifically those who travel to play golf, and is concerned with the variety of motives and participation patterns that influence that travel. Crandall (1980) provided a summary of the basic and applied uses of leisure/motivational research. According to Crandall, the basic and applied uses include using needs to predict leisure choices and demand patterns, providing the most need-fulfilling leisure

counseling, basing activity packages on contemporary needs and activities, designing the environment to facilitate relevant needs in activities and to optimize programming and sustainability to meet consumer needs.

Owners, managers, and leaders of the sport tourism industry likely value knowing what motivates their consumers. In many respects, motivation is made up of needs, feelings, and desires that drive people to a certain behavior (de Araujo Pereira & Gosling, 2019). According to Caber and Albayrak (2016) “motivation is the starting point of the consumer decision process and an important construct for understanding tourist behavior” (p.75), and for this reason, it is a recurrent theme in the tourism literature and very important to marketing initiatives (Gazley & Watling, 2015; Caber & Albayrak, 2016), and golf tourism.

Travel motivation refers to a set of needs that cause a person to participate in a tourist activity (Swanson & Horridge, 2006). Motivation also reflects numerous sets of needs that will subsequently affect individual’s choices in various ways. Park, Reisinger, and Kang (2008) stated that a desire to meet these needs for relaxation triggers a decision to engage in certain behavior to meet these needs. Marketers in the tourism industry stimulate these individual (tourist) needs by marketing tourism products that meet those needs (Van der Merwe, Slabbert, & Saayman, 2011, p. 459).

Traditionally, motivation to travel or engage in some form of tourism is defined as that set of needs and desires which influence a person to act in a specific goal directed way (Kurtzman & Zauhar, 2005). One of the key motivations for tourism, according to research (Crandall, 1980; Crompton, 1979; Iso-Ahola, 1982), is a desire to experience things that would not normally be experienced in everyday work or leisure lives. Many sports tourists may also engage in activities undertaken while on tourist trips in their home environment and, as such, it is likely that these activities already provide some level of stimulation (Weed & Bull, 2004). Tourism literature similarly identifies motivation as something that occurs when there is a need. Tourism motivation research demonstrates the myriad of conscious and sub conscious reasons for travel, which in turn effectively illustrates the complexity of this area of study (Robinson & Gammons, 2004). By studying travel motivations, the fundamental starting point in understanding the psychology of tourist travel behavior is brought to light (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2003).

Crompton (1979) focused his study on the pleasure vacation traveler and was concerned with identifying the aspects of pleasure vacations that influence the selection of a destination. Crompton suggested that most research insists that motivation is only one of the many variables that could contribute to explaining tourist behavior and choices. With regards to tourist motivations, Crompton noted that most research on a tourist’s motivation has revolved around the concepts of pull and push. The push factors for choosing a vacation are socio-psychological motives; the pull factors are motives that are stimulated by the destination itself, rather than initially coming from the traveler. Traditionally, push factors have been thought useful for explaining the desire to go on vacation while the pull factors have been thought useful for explaining the choice of destination.

### **Social Psychological Model of Tourism Motivation**

Iso-Ahola (1982) introduced the Social Psychological Model of Tourism Motivation (SPMTM), known as the Seeking-Escaping Theory. In the model he recognized four motivational categories: seeking personal rewards; seeking interpersonal rewards; escaping personal environment; and escaping interpersonal environment.

An awareness of the potential satisfaction from traveling as a tourist provides a person with the energy for selecting goals for travel. Specifically, “it provides the energy for deciding the relative importance of the two motivational forces (seeking and escaping) and their components as the perceived reasons for traveling and for subsequently selecting appropriate travel plans and behaviors that are believed to lead to the potential satisfaction” (Iso-Ahola, 1982, p. 260). Once the awareness of the potential satisfaction has developed, the two motivational forces become the critical determinants of tourism behavior and simultaneously influence the tourist/individual (Iso-Ahola, 1982). These forces are: (1) the desire to leave the everyday environment behind oneself; and (2) the desire to obtain psychological (intrinsic) rewards through travel in a contrasting (new or old) environment. Suggesting that “the tourist may escape the personal world and/or the interpersonal and may seek personal rewards such as feelings of mastery, learning about other cultures, rest and relaxation, recharge and getting renewed, ego enhancement and prestige and/or interpersonal rewards such as varied and increased social interaction, interacting with friendly natives or members of the travel group, interacting with old friends in a new place or with new friends in an old place” (Iso-Ahola, 1982, p. 259). Furthermore, the theory can be used for practical considerations, because a person’s reasons (the relative importance of the two forces and their categories) for travel may significantly influence his/her selection of the tourist group with whom he/she wishes to travel as well as the destiny of the travel (Iso-Ahola, 1982).

As stated, Iso-Ahola’s theory emphasizes that personal escape, personal seeking, interpersonal escape, and interpersonal seeking are motivations for tourism. After a thorough review of the current golf tourism literature, the authors discovered very little that clearly tested Iso-Ahola’s four categories of motivation theory. However, Snepenger et al. (2006) was able to specifically operationalize within a tourism and recreation context, Iso-Ahola’s theory by scaling each of the four motivational categories. The research and subsequent findings from Snepenger et al. (2006) were important to the current study because the 12 motivational statements (Table 1) created in their study characterize Iso-Ahola’s four motivational categories, which were used as variables within the study.

Table 1: Snepenger et al. (2006) 12 motivational statements that characterize Iso-Ahola’s Four Motivational Categories

Motivational Categories	Statements
Personal escape	To get away To have a change in pace from my everyday life To overcome a bad mood
Interpersonal escape	To avoid people who annoy me To get away from a stressful social environment To avoid interactions with others
Personal seeking	To tell others about my experiences To feel good about myself To experience new things by myself

Motivational Categories	Statements
Interpersonal seeking	To be with people of similar interests To bring friends/family closer To meet new people

### Methodology

This exploratory study specifically focused on golfers' motives for travel during their most recent golf trip. The research was conducted by means of survey distribution to individuals who specifically had travelled to play golf within the past two years. The items contained in the survey were intended to measure golfers' motivations for travel using the Seeking-Escaping Theory, thus, providing an exploratory profile and travel history of golfers', which would include their motivations for travel.

The questionnaire was developed by means of a comprehensive literature review and was based on Snepenger et al. (2006) 12 motivational statements that characterize Iso-Ahola's (1982) four motivational categories within the Seeking-Escaping Theory. Specifically, the authors modeled the Midwest travel survey that was designed and developed by the National Laboratory for Tourism and eCommerce at the University of Illinois-Champaign (Peerapatdit, 2004). The items contained in the instrument were intended to measure golfers' motives to travel and participate in golf. Additionally, a pilot study examined the reliability and validity of the survey instrument. Based on the findings from the pilot study, some modifications (mostly wording) to the survey instrument were completed.

The survey utilized for this study consisted of six major parts with a total of 22 questions: general demographic information, general golf interest, specific golf travel related questions, non-golfing activities, and travel motivations. The general demographic questions, the non-golfing activities were adapted from previous studies with changes made for question sequence, flow, and question importance. The questions about general golf interest, specific golf travel, and travel motivation questions related questions were adapted from previous research literature. Question responses were obtained on a variety of scales ranging from open-ended questions to closed-ended questions to a typical Likert scale where a "1" indicated the subject strongly disagree with the statement through a response of "5" which was interpreted to indicate that the subjects strongly agreed with the statement.

The data for this study were acquired from an on-line survey. To draw a representative sample from the golfing population, stratified random sampling was used to select the participants. Stratified random sampling is a form of random sampling in which a population is first divided into subgroups or strata, and subjects are selected from each subgroup (Babbie, 2007).

Stratified random sampling was implemented through a series of sampling methods. First, subjects were alumni of golf management programs, second, subjects for this study had to play golf and third, subjects needed to have traveled to play golf within the past two years. All subjects received an email with an introductory letter explaining the purpose of the study. The body of the email contained a tentative date for survey completion, as well as a link to *Qualtrics* for survey completion. Descriptive statistical analyses were performed by using Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS). A total of 22 questions was used in the final statistical

analysis. The statistical analysis included descriptive analyses and frequencies. The final data set consisted of 288 usable surveys.

### **Results**

The results comprise two sections – first, an overall socio-demographic and golfing profile of subjects, and second, motives for traveling and playing golf based on the Seeking-Escaping Theory. In addition, data analysis using inferential and descriptive statistics was used to generate these findings.

#### **Demographic Profile of Golf Tourists**

Descriptive analysis indicates that most of the survey respondents were Caucasian (97%), 1% were Asian, 1% were Hispanic, and 1% answered “other.” Of the survey respondents, 66% were between 21 and 35 years of age, 24% were between 36 and 45, 9% were between 46 and 55, 0% between 56 and 65, and 1% were 65 years of age and above. A higher percentage of males (59%) participated in the study than females, additionally, the results indicate that a large percentage of the respondents were married (59%). Household annual income varied greatly, 3% had annual household incomes less than \$25,000, 15% were between \$25,000 and \$39,000, 15% were between \$40,000 and \$49,000, 21% were between \$50,000 and \$74,000, 17% were between \$75,000 and \$99,000, 18% were between \$100,000 and \$150,000, and 11% had annual household income of \$150,000 and over.

#### **Golf Interest of Tourists**

Survey respondents were asked about their introduction to the game of golf. Seventy-three percent of survey respondents were introduced to the game of golf by a parent, 15% were introduced by a friend, 5% worked as a caddy and were introduced to golf through work, 1% were introduced through a school activity, and 7% of the survey respondents answered “other” and indicated they had been introduced to golf by grandparents, relative, or a local PGA Professional. Forty-six percent of survey respondents became passionate about playing golf during childhood, 45% became passionate during adolescence, and 9% during early adulthood. Fifty-two percent of the survey respondents felt their initial passion for golf was mainly because it was fun, 27% felt their initial passion was because it was challenging, 9% because they could spend time with family, 7% because they could spend time with friends, and 10% answered “other” and included responses like “they could spend time alone” or participating in golf “got them out of classes.”

#### **Golf Travel of Tourists**

Survey respondents were asked to identify the most important factor in planning a golf trip. The golf course (67%) (e.g., Bandon Dunes, Sawgrass, etc.) and geographic location (25%) (e.g., beach, etc.) were the two most important factors in planning a golf trip. Additionally, respondents stated that lodging (3%) and shopping opportunities (4%) contributed to their planning. The survey revealed that many respondents (36%) traveled in groups (more than 5) on their most recent golf trip, with 28% of respondents traveling with four individuals, and 16% traveling with two individuals, suggesting that traveling to play golf is a social occurrence. Many respondents (89%) travelled within the U.S. on their most recent golf trip, while a smaller amount (11%) traveled outside the U.S. Of those who travelled within the U.S., the Southeast (35%) received a good amount of travel, followed by the Midwest (21%), Southwest (17%), and West (17%), with only 11% of respondents traveling to the Northeast on their most recent golf trip. It is easy to see that warm weather locations play an important role with golf travel.

Golf resorts provide golf travelers with numerous amenities (e.g., golf course, shopping, lodging, etc.) in one location, and many of the respondents (46%) took advantage of those



amenities on their most recent golf trip, with 27% playing at a private facility and 21% playing at a public facility. A smaller percentage (14%) indicated they traveled and played “other.” Lodging and choice of lodging plays an important role when traveling for leisure purposes, 37% of survey respondents stayed at a resort setting on their most recent golf trip, 36% stayed at a traditional hotel, 17% stayed with family and friends, 6% stayed at a bed and breakfast, and 4% stayed at a motel. Moreover, a high percentage of survey respondents like to travel frequently. Forty-eight percent of survey respondents had taken one to two golf trips in the past two years, 31% have taken three to four trips, and 20% have taken more than five trips in the past two years.

### **Non-Golfing Activities**

This section focuses on the importance of non-golfing activities when determining where to travel for golf (see Table 2). A list of nine statements was included in the questionnaire and subjects were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement using a typical Likert scale where a “1” indicated the subject strongly disagreed with the statement through a response of “5” which was interpreted to indicate that the subjects strongly agreed with the statement.

Table 2: Non-Golfing Activities Profile of Survey Respondents

Statements	Mean	Variance	SD	Valid N
Hike, bike, etc.	2.51	1.49	1.22	286
Attend a cultural site/event	2.70	1.36	1.17	285
Attend a festival, etc.	2.49	1.19	1.09	285
Participate in an outdoor activity (hunting, fishing)	3.04	1.71	1.31	285
Boating	2.63	1.23	1.11	283
Visit a beach/water area	3.58	1.20	1.09	288
Gamble	3.29	1.44	1.20	285
Visit a historic site	2.94	1.21	1.10	285
Go shopping	2.62	1.28	1.13	286

### **Golf Travel and Non-Golfing Review**

The major findings from the study relating to golf travel and non-golfing activities are summarized as follows. First, when planning a golf trip/vacation, the golf course itself, not the location of the golf course, is the most important factor. This supports Crompton’s (1979) pull factor theory which suggested motives are stimulated by the destination itself, rather than initially coming from the traveler.

Second, on their most recent golf trip/vacation, 89% of the respondents traveled within the U.S., and 35% of those respondents traveled to the Southeast for their trip. The Midwest was the second highest travel destination. The respondents in this study traveled to 32 different states with the majority of their travels to South Carolina, Florida, and California; these findings are in line with those of Miller (2017), who suggested the states with the highest number of golf facilities include Florida, California, New York, Michigan, and Texas.

Third, resort and private golf courses were visited by the majority of respondents on their most recent golf trip/vacation. In addition, most respondents stayed an average of three to four days at the facility. Wang, Rompf, Severt, and Peerapatdit (2006) examined the effects of socio-demographic, travel-related and psychographic variables on travel expenditures. They found length of stay to have a significant impact on expenses relating to lodging, meals and restaurants, transportation, attraction and festivals, and shopping. Fourth, with respect to accommodations on respondents' most recent golf trip/vacation; resort hotels were the most visited with traditional hotels a close second. This supports Gibson (1998) findings that suggested active sport tourists who are golfers are attracted to resorts more so than other types of golfing facilities.

Fifth, according to the results, the respondents traveled frequently to play golf, with 34% traveling three to four times in the past two years to play golf, and 20% taking five or more trips in the past two years. This data is interesting for a couple of reasons. First, based on this information the respondents cannot be classified into one of the three generic golfer categories suggested by Golf 20/20 (2009), because those categories are based on rounds played per year and not trips taken. This study did not ask respondents to include total rounds played. Second, the motivation to travel and participate in an activity is a basic intrinsic motivation as described by Deci and Ryan (2008). In addition, it is an intentional choice because the motivation is influenced by sport involvement. Also, the frequency to travel and play golf supports Weed and Bull's (2004) sport motivation concept because there is an internal motivation to travel to play because there is a strong sense of connection to a group.

Lastly, respondents were asked to identify non-golfing activities, if any, they considered important when planning a golf trip/vacation. Nine activities were provided to choose from, and "visiting a beach or waterfront area" had the highest mean at 3.58; second highest was "gambling," with a mean of 3.29. Third on the list was "participating in an outdoor activity (hunting, fishing, etc.);" with 3.04. The lowest mean was "attending a festival" with 2.49. This is another interesting piece of data, "visiting a beach or waterfront area" and "gambling" are specific types of destination, which again supports Crompton's pull motive that suggests the individual is stimulated by the destination itself, which is an extrinsic motivation.

### **Travel Motives**

Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of their travel motives when deciding to take a golf trip/vacation. A list of 12 travel motives created from Iso-Ahola's (1982) Seeking-Escaping Theory was included in the survey. Survey respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement using a typical Likert scale where a "1" indicated the subject strongly disagreed with the statement through a response of "5" which was interpreted to indicate that the subjects strongly agreed with the statement. The 12 statements with the corresponding responses are listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Travel Motives of the Survey Respondents

Statements	Mean	Variance	SD	Valid N
To have a change in pace from my everyday life	4.00	0.79	0.89	287
To overcome a bad mood	2.65	1.07	1.04	288
To experience new things by myself	3.05	1.35	1.16	288
To avoid people who annoy me	2.37	1.24	1.12	288
To get away from a stressful situation	3.02	1.47	1.21	288
To bring friends/family closer	3.99	0.72	0.85	288
To avoid interactions with others	2.02	0.88	0.94	288
To tell others about my experiences	2.93	1.19	1.09	287
To get away from my normal environment	3.80	0.87	0.93	285
To feel good about myself	3.32	0.99	1	288
To be with people of similar interests	3.84	0.85	0.92	288
To meet new people	3.14	1.04	1.02	287

### Travel Motivations Review

Although the research question was narrow in focus, on the basis of the tourism motivation literature, it was expected that motivations to travel and play golf would be supported by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, given that prevailing motivational themes within travel motivational literature encompass variations of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. The mean value for “to have a change in pace from my everyday life” (M=4.0) and “to bring family and friend closer” (M=3.99) reveals that personal escape & interpersonal seeking are still important motives in tourism, specifically golf tourism.

The data supported the relationship between travel and personal escape motives (to have a change in pace from my everyday life: M= 4.0 & to get away: M=3.80) and interpersonal seeking motives (to bring friends/family closer: M=3.99 & to be with people of similar interests: M=3.84). Both personal escape and interpersonal seeking motives are indeed dynamic in character. The significance of both motives and their relation to golf tourists could be found within the research conducted by Weed and Bull. Weed and Bull’s (2004) sport motivational theory stated that sport (rather than tourism) is a particularly strong internal motive because it provides a sense of connection, and the need to belong to a team, group, club or society. Also,

being in the company of like-minded individuals is a further enhancement to the experience, highlighting again the importance of the interaction of activity, people, and place (Weed & Bull, 2004). The respondents to this study were golf tourists, individuals who participate in an activity with like-minded individuals. Golf tourists are a very select group that has a sense of connection and feels an association with all golfers, similar to Weed and Bull's sport motivational theory.

Motivational literature related to leisure travel (Crompton, 1979; Locker & Perdue, 1992; Fodness, 1994; Bansal & Eiselt, 2004) indicates that some travel motivations occur regularly, for example, those of relaxation, socialization, novelty, family togetherness and escape. These are somewhat independent of the destinations, while others are more destination/product related (e.g., learn about nature, photography, climate, culture, and festival attributes). The concepts of family togetherness and escape are supported within this study, which reaffirms current travel motivations but also provides further support for golf tourists having similar motivations to travel as other special interest tourists, whereas travel for benefits are similar to the psychological travel motivations of pleasure tourists (Frochet & Morrison, 2000). In addition, these findings of golf travel motivations are like other travel motivations where golf tourists who are amotivated to travel for escape/relax and social interaction are like the "anomie" tourists in pleasure travel market (Dann, 1977).

### **Implications**

The identification of common characteristics among golf tourists could provide useful information to golf courses and golf destinations in their marketing efforts. Participating in golf tourism is driven by the desire for satisfaction and positive experience (Humphreys, 2014, p. 32). Thus, an exploratory study centered on golf travel and tourism makes sense based on the increased interest in understanding the phenomena that is sport tourism. Golf is an estimated \$84 billion industry (National Golf Foundation, 2019), in addition, golf tourism is said to be the largest sport travel market (Humphreys, 2014). However, the golf industry is adapting to shifts in consumer needs and demands like any other industry, golfers engage and consume the game differently than in years past. While golf and golf related businesses are facing an increasingly competitive environment in terms of how people spend their time and discretionary income, with an estimated 107 million golfers in the U.S. (National Golf Foundation, 2019), often with above average income levels, this is a viable market for many tourist destinations.

As noted by Wilson and Thilmany (2006), at a time when golf destinations and facilities are competing among themselves and with other outdoor recreation activities, it would be helpful for golf marketers to target big spenders, those golf travelers who spend more while at the destination. The need to attract golfers with high spending power is important because of the rising costs associated with maintaining golf courses (Chen, 2004).

Theoretically, the main contribution of the study is the application of travel motivations to special interest tourists in general, and to golf tourists specifically. The findings of the study provide important theoretical and managerial implications. Golf courses and golf destinations should design marketing programs based on the traveler's motivational characteristics. Additionally, the information provided in this study could lead to improved marketing strategies, which in turn could assist in ensuring that targeted golf travelers support and return to these golf travel destinations.

The motivation studies in the context of leisure and tourism imply that individuals may have different motivating factors to release tension and satisfy motives (Kim & Ritchie, 2012, p. 256). In other words, "destination marketers should develop differently targeted marketing strategies for golf tourists because tourists are not homogeneous but rather heterogeneous in that

golf tourists with different motivations for traveling on overseas golf holidays may vary in sociodemographic, golf related behavior and travel characteristics, and destination preferences” (Kim & Ritchie, 2012, p. 256). These results give product developers and marketers clear indicators of issues that should be taken into consideration when developing marketing strategies and products specifically for the golfing population that travels.

A combination of psychological motives and additional tangible characteristics should be used in tourism marketing strategies in order to attract a higher number of visitors to golf destinations. Tassiopoulos and Haydam (2008) noted that the targeting of tourism marketing segments drives repeat visitations to tourism destinations because it allows destination marketers to accurately determine the needs and expectations of targeted tourists and develop more effective marketing strategies.

### **Conclusions**

The aim of this paper was twofold, first, to provide a general overview of the golfing tourists, and second, to determine the travel motives of golf tourists who travel and play golf. Results indicated that two distinct travel motives, “to have a change of pace in my everyday life,” and “to bring family/friends closer,” identify the unique motives of golf tourists. Additional results also suggested that non-golfing activities play a role in determining travel motives related to golf tourism. For example, “visiting a beach/water area,” and “gambling opportunities” play an important role in ultimately determining travel destinations and motives for golf tourists. Also, the golf course itself (e.g., Bandon Dunes, Sawgrass, etc.) and location (e.g., beach, etc.) of facility play an important role in determining golfing trips. These results also indicate that golf tourists are seeking a variety of activities and things to do in addition to playing golf, when planning a golf trip.

The decision not to study all levels (e.g., beginners, advanced etc.) of golfers was a limiting factor. The researchers only studied individuals who traveled and participated in golf recently, in addition, the data was predicated upon the assumption that respondents will respond accurately. An additional limitation included the sampling method. While a stratified random sampling method was applied to the study, the methodology could be viewed as a convenience sample with a direct link to golf travel. A more robust stratified random sampling method could have provided more generalizable results. Also, only including alumni of golf management programs to “enhance respondents’ positive opinions of golf and increase response rate of the survey” was an additional limitation, again, not including the general golfing public limits the generalizability of the study.

Another limitation was the ability to generalize the findings to other non-golfing populations. Specifically, the ability to generalize the findings to other active sport tourist populations would be difficult because the representative sample is very golf specific. The respondents in this study were golfers who specifically travelled to play golf; respondents were not the general golfing public. Lastly, the use of an on-line survey suggests that only individuals who had access to a computer could participate, which potentially skews the responses to a group who has greater access to technology.

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