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What is This?

Segmenting the rural tourism market: The case of Potter County, Pennsylvania, USA

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Abstract

Because of its importance in the sustainable development of rural communities, rural tourism has been frequently studied as an alternative form of economic development in rural areas. In the United States, many rural communities rely on tourism for economic growth to compensate for declines in manufacturing, agriculture, extraction of natural resources, and population. Although there is an increased interest in developing rural tourism in many countries, there is little information regarding the motivations of rural tourists in the United States. Therefore, this study aims to understand travel motivations and characteristics of tourists visiting a rural destination to provide a better understanding of rural tourism in the United States. Our study site, Potter County, Pennsylvania, represents a typical American rural area with a population of 18,080, which is currently struggling to pursue economic revitalization by attracting tourists. The findings of this study indicated that visitors to Potter County do not fit a homogenous rural tourist profile due to their broad travel preferences. The findings also suggest that "tourism in rural areas" may be a better descriptor than "rural tourism" in the context of Potter County, Pennsylvania.

Introduction

Over the last century, challenges and pressures of economic development faced by rural communities have resulted in reconstructing the economic systems of many rural areas from extraction, agriculture, and manufacturing to tourism (Briedenhann and Wickens, 2004; Gannon, 1994; Wilson et al., 2001). Many rural communities now depend on tourism for economic growth to compensate for declines in manufacturing, agriculture, and extraction of natural resources (Fleischer and Felsenstein, 2000; Galston and Baehler, 1995; Hill, 1993; Sharpley and Sharpley, 1997).

As an alternative form of revenue for rural areas, rural tourism can be a stimulus to rejuvenate economies with the least negative impact

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on the environment for rural development (Fleischer and Pizam, 1997; Liu, 2006; Oppermann, 1996; Park and Yoon, 2009; Su, 2011). A majority of rural tourism segmentation studies have been conducted in European and Asian countries such as Cyprus (Farmaki, 2012), Korea (Park and Yoon, 2009), Portugal (Kastenholz et al., 1999), Scotland (Frochot, 2005), and Spain (Molera and Albaladejo, 2007). In the United States, rural tourism attracts many Americans, with 62% of all adults taking a trip to a small town or village during the past 3 years (Brown, 2002). However, there is little information regarding the motivations of rural tourists in the United States. Without the knowledge about travel motivations of rural tourists, policies to rejuvenate rural economies in the United States will be less effective. Therefore, this study aims to examine travel motivations and rural tourists' characteristics visiting a rural tourism destination to provide a better understanding of rural tourism in the United States.

Literature review

Understanding rural tourism

Prior to discussing the concept of rural tourism, "rural" or "rurality" needs to be addressed because both the words had been associated with the concept of rural tourism. The concept of rural or rurality is extensively examined in the literature in the UK/European context, but not in the US context. British scholars, Richard Sharpley and Sharpley (1997), defined the countryside "as those areas which lie beyond major towns and cities and which are, therefore, rural as opposed to urban (y) it includes a number of features, such as forests, reservoirs, canals, beaches and agricultural land" (p. 13). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has also conceptualized "rural" as "a territorial or spatial concept, not restricted to any particular use of land, degree of economic health, or an economic concept" (p. 23).

However, Frochot (2005) argued that these types of definitions cannot distinguish rural areas from some urban areas. Because of the complexity of the definition, Frochot (2005) suggested that "tourism in rural areas" should be a better description than "rural tourism" to avoid semantic confusion. Although rural tourism refers to specific forms of tourism activities in rural areas (Sharpley, 1996), it cannot be simply characterized as farm tourism. It should include all aspects of tourism (e.g. farm tourism, green tourism, outdoors, agritourism, and ecotourism or nature/wildlife tourism) with physical, social, and historical dimensions. The meaning and context of rural tourism differ across countries and cultures (Frochot, 2005).

Previous studies showed that rural tourists are likely to consider rural areas as places to escape the overcrowded and stressful urban life (Urry, 2002). In contrast to the urban life, rural settings appear to be ideal places reflecting peacefulness, simplicity and authenticity, relaxation, tranquility, greenery, and pure air. Although rural tourists tend to enjoy the old ways of life during their vacations, tourism in rural areas leads to a wide range of visitors' needs and expectations (Frochot, 2005). For example, as a form of cultural and sustainable tourism, lodging operations in rural areas can provide local cultural attractions for tourists and generate income for local communities in Taiwan (Huang, 2006). European scholars suggested that "successful tourism destinations must offer variety and new tourism products, addressing special interest niches" (p. 331) and health and wellness tourism should be integrated into rural tourism destination marketing strategy (Rodrigues et al., 2010).

Motivations

Researchers have been studying tourism motivations to understand the complex nature of people's travel motivations for decades. Murray defined motive as "an internal factor that arouses, directs and integrates a person's behavior" (1964: 7). Dann stated that "[motivation] is a meaningful state of mind which adequately disposes an actor or group of actors to travel, and which is subsequently interpretable by others as a valid explanation for such a decision" (1981: 211). According to previous research, tourism researchers used the three main conceptual frameworks, including (a) Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs model, (b) Iso-Ahola's escape-seeking theory (1982), and (c) Dann's (1977, 1981) push–pull factor framework to study tourism motivations.[1] Maslow's hierarchy of needs model is regarded as the earliest theory to explore people's motivation and guide later theoretical developments to tourism motivation studies. Later, Iso-Ahola established his escape-seeking dichotomy, which is a motivational dimension in leisure behavior including escaping and seeking for tourist motivation research (Iso-Ahola, 1982, 1983, 1990). The third major theory

is Dann's push–pull factor framework, in which push factors refer to people's internal forces driving them to travel, whereas pull factors are regarded as the external forces explaining reasons of selections of a particular destination. Therefore, many studies apply and utilize these theories in their investigation of travel motivations.

Segmenting the travel market

Benefit segmentation was initially developed by Russell Haley to understand consumers' purchasing behavior in 1968 (Haley, 1968). Since then, many studies used benefits perceived by travelers or motivation as segmentation variables. Visitors are segmented into homogenous subgroups with similar motivations, so that tourism planners and providers can better understand tourist behaviors to effectively allocate scarce marketing resources (Kastenholz et al., 1999). In this regard, the strategy of segmentation has been used to identify homogeneous subgroups within participants in various types of activities: for example, outdoor recreation (May et al., 2001), park visitation (Galloway, 2002), mature travel (Bieger and Laesser, 2002), destination selection (Smith and Smith, 2011), ecotourism (Palacio and McCool, 1997; Weaver and Lawton, 2002), rural tourism (Farmaki, 2012; Frochot, 2005; Kastenholz et al., 1999; Molera and Albaladejo, 2007; Park and Yoon, 2009), and others.

May and his colleagues' (2001) study focused on understanding the characteristics and motivations of snowmobilers. The results of the study indicated that five distinct segments exist among Wyoming snowmobilers in the United States. Galloway used Dann's (1977, 1981) push–pull factor framework to understand park-related attitudes and behaviors in Canada. The author found three dimensions of park experience, which supported the usefulness of the push and pull factors to analyze park visitor groups. Similar to Galloway's study, Bieger and Laesser (2002) also used push motivation factors to study the segmentation of mature travelers in Switzerland. Bieger and Laesser indicated that the clustering of motivations was a valuable means of segmenting markets. Family travel is determined by a push factor. While most researchers used factor analysis and cluster analysis for segmentation research, Smith and Smith (2011) utilized an innovative approach Unidimensional Sequence Alignment to study segmentation. Understanding the perceived benefits of nature-based tourism or ecotourism is also an important step in providing products usable to the visitor and

in developing a sustainable tourism policy. There are few published studies segmenting the nature-based tourism market using a benefit segmentation approach. Palacio and McCool's study (1997) examined ecotourist segments with a sample of visitors to Belize. The study revealed that ecotourists had similar levels of activity participation with other segments but were different in terms of socio-demographic and trip characteristics. Based on their overnight ecotourism market segmentation study in Australia, Weaver and Lawton's (2002) study found ecotourists did not possess the same behavior and they could be segmented into three distinct groups.

In addition, some tourism researchers conducted segmentation studies in rural settings. Farmaki (2012) used qualitative methods to identify the factors that motivate people to visit rural Cyprus. Farmaki's study found different types of rural tourists existed and main tourism motivations were not related to the rural settings. Frochot's study (2005) identified four segments of tourists to Scotland distinguished in terms of different activities, preferences, leisure behaviors, and socioeconomic profiles. Similar to other studies, Kastenholz et al. (1999) identified four beneficial segments in their study. Kastenholz and her colleagues used guidelines published by the OECD (1994) to study tourism motivations in rural Portugal. The OECD addressed the motives to rural settings including a growing interest in culture and heritage, the search for peace and solitude, increasing interest in the outdoor activities as well as other general trends of tourist motivation. Because of the growth of rural tourism in Spain, a more in-depth research into the nature, motivations, and intentions of rural tourists was suggested by Molera and Albaladejo (2007). Their study found five segments of tourists who sought different benefits in rural Spain. Park and Yoon's study in 2009 was based on push motivation factors to market segmentation in rural Korea resulted in identifying four distinct segments. Their study supported push motivation factors to be an acceptable approach to study marketing segments. While rural tourism segmentation studies are providing interesting insight into some regions (i.e. Europe and Asia), examinations of rural tourist markets in other areas (e.g. the United States) are conspicuously absent.

Rural tourism in the United States

Rural sightseeing is one of the top leisure travel activities for the US domestic travelers (US
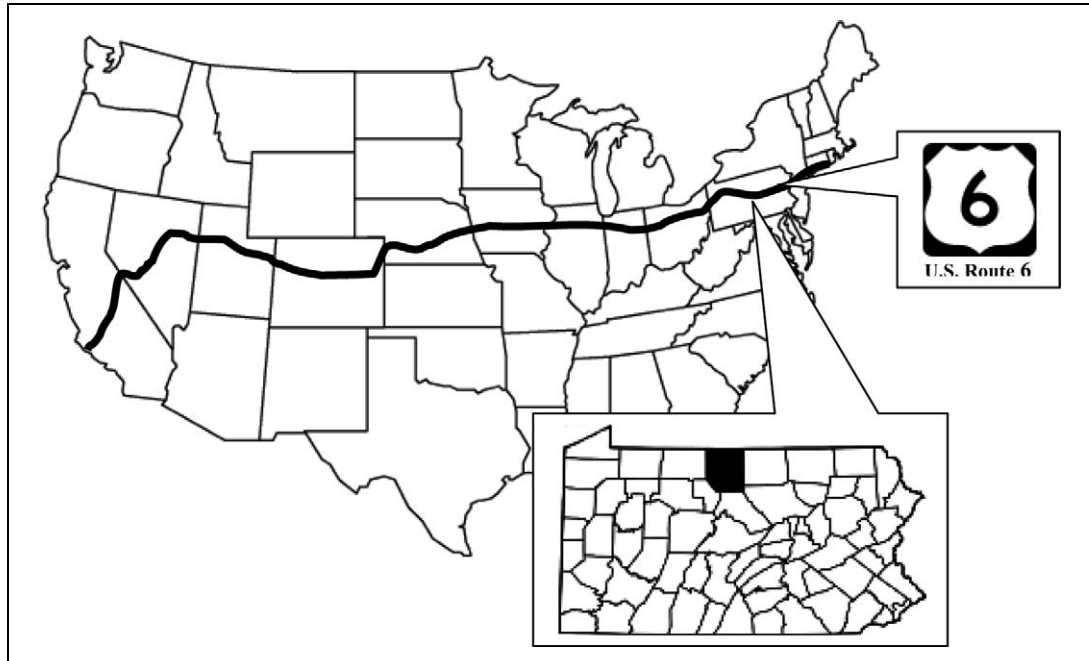
Figure 1. Geographic location of Potter County.

Travel Association, 2011). In rural tourism studies, American tourism researchers primarily conducted studies related to the perception of local residents of rural tourism (Byrd et al., 2009; Petrzelka et al., 2005; Wang and Pfister, 2008; Wilson et al., 2001). For example, Byrd and his colleagues (2009) found that stakeholders, such as entrepreneurs and government officials, residents and government officials, residents and entrepreneurs, and residents and tourists, have different perception of tourism impacts on a rural community. Petrzelka and her colleagues (2005) explored local residents' perceptions of rural tourism and gender differences with a regional survey of intermountain Western United States. Wang and Pfister (2008) found residents' perceptions of personal benefits (e.g. contributions to the economy, shopping and dining choices, downtown revitalization, and recreation opportunity) from tourism were positively associated with their attitudes toward tourism in a small rural community in North Carolina. US Department of Agriculture (USDA) actively promotes rural tourism as an important economic boost for rural communities in the United States (US Department of Agriculture, n.d.). However, rural tourism has not been officially recognized by the USDA. Furthermore, there is a lack of research on the characteristics of rural tourism and the motivations of rural tourists in the United States.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the characteristics and the motivations of individuals visiting a US rural destination. We are particularly interested in exploring whether or not "tourism in rural areas" would be a better description than "rural tourism" in the United States. To achieve the purposes of this study, we have the following three research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of rural tourists in terms of geographic location, activities, and purpose of visit?
2. What are the profiles of different travel market segments based on benefits sought by rural tourists?
3. What are the characteristics of clusters based on rural tourists' travel motivations?

Method

Study site

Our study site, Potter County, with a population of 18,080, was established in 1804. Potter County is also called "God's Country" located in Northwest Pennsylvania. It is encompassed by Route 6, which is introduced by National Geographic as "one of America's most scenic drives" (Figure 1). The county seat, the historic town of Coudersport, is a "superb example of

19th Century small town America'' (PA Route 6 Tourist Association, 2011). For decades, the primary occupations of local residents are lumbering and clearing land. At the same time, tourism and recreation resources also generate revenue for the county (Potter County, Pennsylvania, 2013). The county is struggling to reduce economic decline by attracting tourists from other areas. Potter County has many attractions, such as the Pennsylvania Lumber Museum, over 800 miles of streams for fishing, Cherry Springs State Park as well as outdoor recreation resources in the vicinity of Potter County. (Figure 1)

Data collection and survey instrument

A total of 2500 participants were randomly selected from 4000 nonlocal residents who requested an information packet from Potter County Visitors Association. A modified Dillman's (1978, 2000) mail survey method was used for data collection. A questionnaire with a cover letter of request for participation was mailed to each selected informant in the sample. A reminder card was mailed 1 week after the questionnaire was distributed. The survey consisted of four sections: *use of information of Potter County*, *previous visits*, *motivations,* and *sociodemographic information*. Twenty-one motivation items, such as *to gain a sense of self-confidence* and *to experience the open countryside*, were compiled from the most common motivation items used by previous rural tourism segmentation studies (Frochot, 2005; Kastenholz et al., 1999; May et al., 2001). These questions were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from *not important* to *very important*. As a result, a total of 343 questionnaires with 13.7% return rate were completed and collected. All the twenty-one items had high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$). Therefore, we were satisfied with the 13.7% return rate in this study. In addition, the average age of our respondents is 55.50 years with 54.7% males.

Data analysis

Data analysis of the study consisted of five steps. First, in order to understand the characteristics of rural tourists in terms of geographic location, activities, and purpose of visit, descriptive statistics were calculated for all survey items such as sociodemographic information, trip activities, and motivations. Second, factor analysis was used to identify and analyze segments of tourists

to rural areas in Pennsylvania to answer the second research question of this study. A principal components factor analysis was used in this study with both varimax and direct oblimin rotation. The results were compared in terms of interpretability. While principal components analysis is usually done with varimax rotation with SAS as well as other statistical packages, most statistical experts (e.g. Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007) think it best used for data reduction only. Varimax, an orthogonal rotation method that produces uncorrelated factors, is widely used and often produces easily interpretable results (Costello and Osborne, 2005). However, genuinely uncorrelated factors in social science research are very unlikely. Costello and Osborne (2005) recommend oblique rotation in order to arrive at more accurate and possibly more reproducible results. Factor items were selected and retained if a factor loading was 0.35 or higher. Five factors had been identified initially by the criteria of eigenvalues over 1.00. Mean variables of each factor were computed and compared with factor scores of varimax and direct oblimin rotation in order to decide which factor loadings should be chosen. The reliabilities of variables in each factor were tested with reliability analysis. Third, cluster analysis was employed to identify and place observations into groups or clusters to further identify benefits sought by market segments, respondents within each group shared many similarities, while members of different groups exhibited many differences. Cluster analysis produces a classification when there is little pre-existing knowledge about what the number of categories or the components (i.e. members) of these categories will be (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2005; Hair et al., 1995). Cluster analysis has been widely used to segment the travel market by motivations and other travel-related characteristics (Hudson and Ritchie, 2002; Loker-Murphy, 1996). In particular, K-mean cluster was used in this study because it is helpful when sample sizes are larger than 200 (SAS, 2013). Fourth, in order to ascertain the accuracy level of classification of segmentations, a discriminant analysis was performed on the three clusters with travel motivations as discriminant variables to determine the predictor variables (travel motivations) that contribute most to the distinction between clusters (Pearce and Lee, 2005). Finally, in order to further answer the first research question and the third research question of this study, cross-tabulation and χ^2 tests were employed to

Table 1. Sociodemographic information of visitors to Potter County.

Characteristics	Pennsylvania	New York	Ohio	New Jersey	Other states	Total
Gender	N = 181	N = 28	N = 24	N = 26	N = 61	N = 320
	56.6	8.8	7.5	8.1	19.1	
Male	N = 94	N = 16	N = 14	N = 16	N = 35	N = 175
	53.7	9.1	8.0	9.1	20.0	54.7
Female	N = 87	N = 12	N = 10	N = 10	N = 26	N = 145
	60.0	8.3	6.9	6.9	17.9	45.3
Average age	51.44	51.36	49.00	58.4	56.27	55.50
Retirement status	N = 183	N = 30	N = 24	N = 28	N = 63	N = 328
	55.8	9.1	7.3	8.5	19.2	
Retired	N = 45	N = 6	N = 3	N = 10	N = 27	91
	49.5	6.6	3.3	11.0	29.7	27.7
Employed part time or full time	N = 138	N = 24	N = 21	N = 18	N = 36	237
	58.2	10.1	8.9	7.6	15.2	72.3
Education	N = 181	N = 29	N = 23	N = 29	N = 60	N = 322
	56.2	9.0	7.1	9.0	18.6	
High school or less	N = 96	N = 7	N = 6	N = 10	N = 19	N = 138
	69.6	5.1	4.3	7.2	13.8	42.9
College	N = 55	N = 15	N = 14	N = 14	N = 32	N = 130
	42.3	11.5	10.8	10.8	24.6	40.4
Graduate school	N = 30	N = 7	N = 3	N = 5	N = 9	N = 54
	55.6	13.0	5.6	9.3	16.7	16.8
Income	N = 151	N = 25	N = 23	N = 26	N = 58	N = 283
	53.4	8.8	8.1	9.2	20.5	
Less than $44,999	N = 73	N = 6	N = 8	N = 7	N = 23	N = 117
	62.4	5.1	6.8	6.0	19.7	41.3
$45,000 to $74,999	N = 45	N = 10	N = 8	N = 11	N = 23	N = 97
	46.4	10.3	8.2	11.3	23.7	34.3
$75,000 or more	N = 33	N = 9	N = 7	N = 8	N = 12	N = 69
	47.8	13.0	10.1	11.6	17.4	24.4
Ethnicity	N = 179	N = 30	N = 23	N = 28	N = 63	N = 323
	55.4	9.3	7.1	8.7	19.5	
White	N = 172	N = 27	N = 23	N = 27	N = 62	N = 310
	55.5	8.7	7.4	8.7	19.7	96.0
Non-white	N = 7	N = 3	N = 0	N = 1	N = 2	N = 13
	53.8	23.1	0	7.7	15.4	4.0
Community	N = 183	N = 30	N = 24	N = 28	N = 63	N = 328
	55.8	9.1	7.3	8.5	19.2	
Large city and small city	N = 31	N = 8	N = 9	N = 6	N = 26	N = 80
	38.8	10.0	11.3	7.5	32.5	24.4
Small town, rural area, and village	N = 103	N = 12	N = 8	N = 13	N = 27	N = 163
	63.2	7.4	4.9	8.0	16.6	49.70
Suburb	N = 49	N = 10	N = 7	N = 9	N = 10	N = 85
	57.6	11.8	8.2	10.6	11.8	25.9

investigate statistically significant differences between sociodemographic variables and clusters.

Results

Characteristics of rural tourists in terms of geographic locations, activities, and purpose of visit

Table 1 reports the sociodemographic information of visitors from Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, New Jersey, and other states. More than 50% of visitors were from Pennsylvania. Less than 10% of visitors were from each adjacent state. Nearly 45% of the respondents were female. More than 70% reported "employed as part-time or full-time," whereas less than 30% of the respondents indicated "retired." Approximately 40% of the respondents graduated from high school or less and only 57% had a college degree. Approximately 40% of the respondents had an annual household income of less than $45,000. A total of 96% of the respondents were white and nearly half of the respondents reported they came from rural communities.

Table 2. Description of the primary purpose of visitors and events/attractions attended by visitors to Potter County.

Primary purpose of visitors			
Vacation/sightseeing	56.6%	Event/festival	8.2%
Visit friends/family	8.2%	Business	2.0%
Convention/meeting	0.3%	Other (miscellaneous)	13.4%

Events/attractions during the latest visit to Potter County			
Restaurants	41.4	Bird-watching	9.6
Shopping	33.2	Stargazing at Cherry Spring State Park	9.3
Hiking/walking	29.2	Hunting	9.0
Historical sites	28.3	Biking	7.6
Fishing	23.0	Golf	2.6
Festivals and events	21.3	Ski Denton Hill State Park	2.3
PA lumber museum	17.8	Snowmobiling	1.7
Elk watching/Sinnemahoning SP	15.2	Cross-country skiing	0.9
Ole Bull State Park	13.4	Other	0.3

More than 50% of respondents indicated that their primary purpose of the visit was vacation or sightseeing followed by other miscellaneous purposes. Vacation/sightseeing, visiting friends/family, and events/festivals were the top three primary purposes for a visit to Potter County. Surprisingly, enjoying outdoor activities was not listed among the top three primary purposes (Table 2). Eating in restaurants and shopping were the top two activities during the respondents' latest visit to Potter County. This result was consistent with the primary purpose of the latest visits, which was vacation/sightseeing. However, traditional outdoor activities (e.g. hunting and fishing) and park visiting were not ranked as the top two activities (Table 2).

Rural tourism market segmentation: factor analysis

As indicated above, we conducted principal components analysis on tourism motivations. The value for the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.872 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant (approximate $\chi^2 = 2468.16$, $df = 210$, $p = 0.000$). Communalities were, with one exception (0.29), all above 0.3, indicating shared common variance between the items. These results indicate that factor analysis is appropriate with these data (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). Visitors were categorized and segmented based on the various benefits they were looking for. The SAS program generated a five-factor solution with eigenvalues >1, accounting for 37.0% of the total variance. As a result, the five factors of well-summarized motivations of visit and Cronbach's α of the

five-factor solution were 0.90, 0.71, 0.83, 0.85, and 0.85, respectively, which were appropriate values. The final solution (principal components with varimax) is presented in Table 3.

Factor 1 was labeled as "*personal growth and escape.*" Factor 2 was identified as "*nature and rural exploration.*" Factor 3 was described as "*relaxation.*" Factor 4 reflects "*social bonding seekers.*" Factor 5 had a significant component of "*family fun.*"

The cluster analysis

A K-mean cluster analysis generated a three-cluster solution to describe the visitors to Potter County (Table 4). *Experiential travelers* (49.6%) sought all benefits except for social bonding, with positive score on personal growth compared with other clusters. These visitors had a great interest in exploring rural life mixed with enjoying time in rural areas with families. *Rural explorers* (26.5%) sought rural life and meeting new people. *Indifferent travelers* (23.9%) did not seek any benefits with a negative score on every factor compared with other clusters.

Table 5 indicates the overall recreational activities undertaken by all clusters. Restaurants (54.1%), shopping (46.1%), and hiking/walking (40.5%) are the top three activities among all clusters. Cross-country skiing had no participants. Snowmobiling (2.4%) and golfing (3.4%) had very low participation rate among all clusters.

When compared across the three clusters, differences observed among the five recreational activities including restaurants (54.1%), hiking/walking (40.5%), historical sites (37.6%), Pennsylvania Lumber Museum (25.9%), and bird-

Table 3. Factor analysis of benefits sought by visiting Potter County.

Factor	Factor loading	Eigen values	Cumulative percentage	Cronbach's α
1. Personal growth and escape		7.77	37.00	0.90
To gain a sense of self-confidence	0.84			
To learn what I am capable of doing outdoors	0.82			
To feel independent	0.76			
To think about who I am	0.75			
To experience the excitement of challenging situations	70			
To experience a nicer temperature	66			
2. Nature and rural exploration		1.90	46.10	0.71
To experience the open countryside	0.72			
To observe the scenic beauty of the rural countryside	0.72			
To learn more about nature and wildlife	0.59			
To learn about rural life and agriculture	0.58			
3. Relaxation		1.80	54.64	0.83
To avoid everyday responsibilities for a while	0.82			
To get away from the clatter and racket back home	0.78			
To help release some built-up tensions	0.76			
4. Social bonding seekers		1.27	60.68	0.85
To meet local people	0.84			
To meet new and varied people	0.77			
5. Family fun		1.10	65.90	0.85
To do something with my family	0.90			
To bring my family closer together	0.83			

Table 4. Mean comparisons of motivation factors of the visitors to Potter County by clusters.

	Factor 1: Personal growth and escape	Factor 2: Nature and rural exploration	Factor 3: Relaxation	Factor 4: Social bonding seekers	Factor 5: Family fun	Number of sample	Percentage of sample
Experiential travelers	0.47	0.21	0.47	−0.28	0.20	112	49.6
Rural explorers	−0.73	0.68	−0.30	0.76	−0.23	60	26.5
Indifferent travelers	−0.16	−1.18	−0.64	−0.25	−0.16	54	23.9
						226	100

watching (13.7%) were statistically significant. Experiential travelers distinguished themselves through a high rate of dining at restaurants and hiking/walking. Rural explorers had a higher participation rate of visiting Pennsylvania Lumber Museum, bird-watching, and historical sites. Indifferent travelers showed the lowest participation rate of the five statistically significant activities.

Discriminant analysis

The results of the discriminant analysis are summarized in Tables 6 and 7. Two canonical discriminant functions were computed using discriminant analysis of all five motivation factors. The two functions are statistically significant. Therefore, the results of discriminant analysis showed that all the five motivational factors statistically contributed to the discriminant function.

The classification results were used to evaluate how respondents are correctly classified into the three clusters. Almost all (97.5%) of the 243 grouped cases were correctly classified. As a result, 96.9% of 226 grouped cases were correctly classified. Particularly, *experiential travelers* (100%), *rural explorers* (95.0%), and *indifferent travelers* (92.6%) were correctly classified into their respective groups. In addition, 95.6% of cross-validated grouped cases were correctly classified, representing a very high accuracy rate. These results indicated that the three clusters are valid and reliable.

Table 5. Range of activities participated by each cluster (%).

	Experiential travelers (%)	Rural explorers (%)	Indifferent travelers (%)	Sample average
Shopping	49.0	51.9	34.0	46.1
Golfing	2.9	0.0	8.0	3.4
Fishing	35.0	30.8	34.0	33.7
Hiking/walking*	51.5	34.6	24.0	40.5
PA lumber museum**	23.3	38.5	18.0	25.9
Restaurant**	61.2	53.8	40.0	54.1
Stargazing at Cherry Spring State Park	12.6	15.4	8.0	12.2
Snowmobiling	2.9	1.9	2.0	2.4
Biking	12.6	9.6	6.0	10.2
Skiing	2.9	5.8	4.0	3.9
Ole bull state park	20.4	15.4	12.0	17.1
Elk watching at Sinnemahoning State Park	25.2	15.4	12.0	19.5
Bird-watching*	13.6	25.0	2.0	13.7
Hunting	16.5	13.5	6.0	13.2
Cross-country skiing	0	0	0	0
Historical sites*	36.9	51.9	24.0	37.6
Festivals and events	32.0	30.8	24.0	29.8
other	25.5	19.2	18.0	22.1

*Significant differences among clusters are at the 0.05 level.
**Significant differences among clusters are at the 0.01 level.

Table 6. Results of discriminant analysis of travel motivation cluster.

	Discriminant function	Eigenvalue	Canonical correlation	Wilks' λ	Significance
Travel motivation factors	1	1.68	0.79	0.15	0.000
	2	1.43	0.77	0.41	0.000

	Standardized canonical discriminant function coefficients	
Travel motivations	Function 1	Function 2
Personal growth and escape	−0.65	0.62
Nature and rural exploration	0.80	0.64
Relaxation	−0.11	0.85
Social bonding seekers	0.81	−0.23
Family fun	−0.20	0.34

Note: 96.9% of original grouped cases correctly classified. 95.6% of cross-validated grouped cases correctly classified.

Table 7. Evaluation of cluster formation by classification results.

	Predicted group membership			
Cluster case	Experiential travelers (%)	Rural explorers (%)	Indifferent travelers (%)	Total (%)
Experiential travelers	112 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	112 (100.0)
Rural explorers	2 (3.3)	57 (95.0)	1 (1.7)	60 (100.0)
Indifferent travelers	4 (7.4)	0 (0.0)	50 (92.6)	54 (100.0)

Cross-tabulation and χ^2 tests

Table 8 indicates a series of χ^2 tests of sociodemographic characteristics, and travel motivations of three clusters showed no significant difference with regard to all sociodemographic variables including residences, gender, employment status, education, income, ethnicity, and community.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the characteristics and motivations of individuals visiting a US rural destination. The visitors to Potter County were interested in exploring rural life including both enjoying rural scenery and interacting with other visitors and local residents. The results indicated that the visitors were more

Table 8. Sociodemographic characteristics and travel motivations of three clusters.

Characteristics	Experiential travelers (%)	Rural explorers (%)	Indifferent travelers (%)	χ^2 value
Residences (n = 223)	48.9 (N = 109)	26.9 (N = 60)	24.2 (N = 54)	7.85*
Pennsylvania	67.0	65.0	59.3	
New York	4.6	6.7	11.1	
Ohio	11.0	3.3	13.0	
New Jersey	6.4	6.7	5.6	
Other states	11.0	18.3	11.0	
Gender (n = 218)	50.0 (N = 109)	26.1 (N = 57)	23.9 (N = 52)	1.57*
Male	59.6	50.9	61.5	
Female	40.4	49.1	38.5	
Employment status (n = 224)	N = 111	N = 59	N = 54	1.19*
Retired	21.6	28.8	22.2	
Employed part time/full time	78.4	71.2	77.8	
Education (n = 221)	48.9 (N = 108)	26.7 (N = 59)	24.4 (N = 54)	4.67*
High school or less	44.4	45.8	38.9	
College	41.7	30.5	46.3	
Graduate school	13.9	23.7	14.8	
Income (n = 196)	49.0 (N = 96)	25.5 (N = 50)	25.5 (N = 50)	3.98*
Less than $44,999	47.9	32.0	40.0	
$45,000 to $74,999	33.3	40.0	34.0	
$75,000 or more	18.8	28.0	26.0	
Ethnicity (n = 223)	49.3 (N = 110)	26.9 (N = 60)	23.8 (N = 53)	2.73*
White	95.5	100	96.2	
Non-white	4.5	0	3.8	
Community (n = 224)	49.1 (N = 110)	26.8 (N = 60)	24.1 (N = 54)	3.26*
Large city and small city	27.3	21.7	20.4	
Small town, rural area, and village	50.9	46.7	57.4	
Suburb	21.8	31.7	22.2	

*$p > 0.05$.

interested in passive or cultural activities (e.g. dining at restaurants, shopping, and visiting historical sites) than sport or outdoor activities (e.g. biking, fishing, and hunting). The findings concur with previous research conducted in European countries (e.g. Frochot, 2005). Dining at restaurants and shopping were popular activities among rural tourism visitors, which pose both opportunities and challenges for local food service and retailing industries.

Although the average age of these visitors was 55 years, retired visitors only accounted for less than one third of visitors, whereas more than 70% of visitors were employed. There is a potential to expand the retired segment of the rural tourism market. In the United States, born between 1946 and 1964 with an age range between 45 and 64 years, the baby boomer cohort comprises more than 81 million Americans, accounting for 26.4% of total American population in 2010 (US Census Bureau, 2010). The baby boomer generation will have many impacts on society as well as on tourism and leisure offerings (Patterson, 2006). The destination marketing organizations of rural tourism destinations can consider working with

associations like American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) to promote special events or savings to members especially during off-season, such as members of AARP receiving a 15% discount on hotel bookings. Besides technology-based media, traditional marketing media, such as flyers, local or community newspapers, and trade magazines of special interests, should be used to approach the group of travelers who may have limited access to technology or may be less confident using the Internet. Travel promoters can bear the special interests of older adults in their minds and design tours specifically targeting older visitors.

Furthermore, this study found that a majority of visitors to this rural destination were from within the state. This finding suggests that this destination is preferred by individuals with more information and expertise about the region—an interesting finding when contrasted with the visitor statistics of destinations like Philadelphia, State College, or Pittsburg that seem to be visited more predominantly by out-of-state tourists. These findings seem to give some preliminary hints that rural destinations like Potter County may tend to be unknown to more distant markets

or may pose insurmountable challenges (e.g. how to reserve lodging in a region with few establishments available in online retailers) to less knowledgeable or experienced potential tourists. Definitive insight into the disproportionate visitation by in-state tourists will require further investigation. For example, researchers should probe deeper into the constraints experienced by rural tourists and the ways in which their ancestral connections and travel expertise may help them negotiate such constraints (Rodrigues et al., 2012). Additionally, researchers might need to extend the investigation if cognitive distance played a role in decision making to rural tourism, in particular with regard to the purportedly inflated inaccuracy of cognitive distance to rural destinations (Lin and Morais, 2008).

This study identified four dimensions including personal growth and escape, nature and rural exploration, relaxation, social bonding seekers, and family fun. Only nature and rural exploration included items relating to experience rural or open countryside. Rest of the dimensions emphasized relaxation, travel experiences, and family recreation. These results confirmed that visitors to Potter County wanted to gaze upon tourism destination and gain travel experiences in a visual manner (Urry, 2002). The findings also suggested that the market should be divided into three clusters based on the benefits sought by visitors. Experiential and rural travelers were much more enthusiastic about their travel experiences, which make them an easier target for local business. Yet the indifferent travelers, about one fourth of the total sample (23.9%), can still be an attractive market for restaurants and retailers. Business owners can study this segment for an opportunity of increasing market share. Contrary to the first two clusters who wanted to gain tourism experiences through visiting a rural destination, the third cluster of visitors (26.5%) were interested in rural scenery and culture.

Conclusion

This study attempted to examine the characteristics and motivations of visitors to a rural destination. The study provides interesting insights to both tourism researchers and managers. Potter County has rich natural resources for outdoor activities. However, outdoor activities were not the primary motivation for many visitors. Instead, other leisure activities (e.g. dining at restaurants and shopping) are pursued by the visitors. Furthermore, the study indicates that rural tourism is different in various cultural contexts. Due to visitors' broad travel preferences, visitors to Potter County cannot simply be defined as "rural tourists." This finding supports Frochot's (2005) study that "tourism in rural areas" may be a better descriptor than "rural tourism" in the context of Potter County, Pennsylvania.

The primary limitations of this study and future studies are needed to be addressed. Due to a lack of racial and ethnic diversity in this study, travel promoters should look into the racial and ethnic background of the local communities as well as the adjacent communities. There might be a need for some recreational activities or events promoted among a diverse population (Teye and Leclerc, 2003). Due to the nature of an exploratory study, findings of this study may not be generalized to the whole tourist population who visit rural tourism destinations other than Potter County. Future studies should be conducted in different locations in Pennsylvania (and later on other rural destinations in the United States) to validate and compare the results.

Note

1. A complete list of these references is available from the first author (see the appendix).

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Appendix

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