

The International and Domestic Tourists Behavior in Australia: Quality vs. Quantity Issue in Regional Tourism Development Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Tourism contributes to regional development and generates income for destinations. However, in many cases, the growth of tourist numbers does not necessarily result in an equivalent rise in economic contribution. The search for quality tourists over the quantity of tourists is certainly an important goal of regional development managers, but the efforts required to implement such an approach, especially the detailed documentation of tourist behavior while visiting the region, pose a challenge for most. This is perhaps why the analysis of quality vs quantity of tourists has been limited. This study focuses on the Great Ocean Road Region in Australia; an area that is experiencing increased visitor numbers but is not seeing commensurate economic growth. A fine-grained analysis of the international and domestic tourists is employed to determine behaviour-based tourist quality, including the measurement of their traveling behavior, overnight visitation pattern, expenditure, and regional dispersal. Data was collected from 311 domestic tourists and 562 international tourists. Descriptive statistical methods were used in analyzing data. Results indicate that the domestic tourists were of a higher quality than the international tourists; they stayed longer, spent more, and were more widespread across the region than the international tourists. Hence, high-quality tourists can be a valuable resource and should be a priority for regional tourism development.

KEYWORDS

International and domestic tourists
Tourist behavior
Quality vs. quantity
Regional tourism development

INTRODUCTION

Tourism and regional development are closely linked. Tourism contributes to regional development as it is a significant contributor to economic growth. Tourism not only stimulates the growth of jobs, it encourages enterprise creation, infrastructure development, and generates export revenue (UNWTO, 2018). When tourists are encouraged to visit less developed regions, it gives those regions

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direct access to the fruits of growth, effectively spreading the development and economic benefits throughout the country. When this happens, a major challenge for regional tourism planners, is setting up mechanisms to improve the quality and competitiveness of tourism products on offer, while ensuring a balanced and sustainable development of tourism at regional and local levels (Giaoutzi & Nijkamp, 2006)

Tourists play an essential role in developing regional tourism. The growth of tourist visitation is often associated with the success of the tourism industry in regional destinations. However, large numbers of tourists do not necessarily have a significant impact on economic contributions. This issue raises arguments about the quality vs. quantity of tourists. As the number of tourists rise, local businesses expect to benefit to these new customers. However, while more tourists can place significant demands on infrastructure and the natural environment, they may offer little benefit to local businesses. Such a mix, of high environmental impact and low economic impact, could be detrimental to the destination's image (Dean, Suhartanto, & Kusdiby, 2019; Februadi, Wibisono, & Purnamasari, 2019). Hence, destinations that rely on natural attractions, have begun to target high quality tourists over simply increasing tourist numbers.

One way to assess the quality of tourists is by examining their behavior while visiting the region. Tourist behavior includes what tourist do before, during, and after traveling to a destination as well as their attitudes towards tourist attractions in the region (Van Vuuren & Slabbert, 2012). One aspect of tourist behavior is what products/services they consume while visiting the destination. Their consumption of local accommodation, attractions, shopping, and other activities (Maroccu, Paci, & Zara, 2015) will directly contribute to any economic impact on the region. Likewise, the spread of this consumption shifts the regional balance of economic development, ultimately spreading the tourist consumption to the furthest reaches of the region. Thus, the failure to understand tourist behavior and to manage tourist dispersal can place tourism pressure on limited local resources and exacerbate economic imbalances in the region.

Great Ocean Road Region, a destination in Victoria, Australia, has been experiencing increased tourist numbers in the past years. The Great Ocean Road has long been a popular tourist destination in regional Victoria with the iconic Twelve Apostles coastline attraction. The number of tourists visiting the Great Ocean Road region reached nearly five million in 2014 and the direct economic impact of visitor spending was 6.1% of the regional economy (GORRT, 2015). However, a cursory examination shows some dramatic differences between domestic and international tourists visiting the region. Visitors that stayed in the region overnight were predominantly domestic tourists (82%), while the day-trippers were mostly international tourists, and numbers of the day-trippers has grown dramatically in the last few years (Victoria, 2014). This trend has become a critical issue in the region. The intense surge in the day-tripper numbers has not translated to a commensurate rise in visitor expenditure (GORRT, 2015), so when infrastructure, maintenance, and other costs are considered, the rise in day-trippers ultimately represents a significant economic loss to the region. This issue is aggravated by the fact that most tourists are geographically and seasonally concentrated. This means that other parts of the region have not experience similar growth in either domestic or international tourists. As a result, areas along the coast receive tourists that exceed their carrying capacity during the summer while the hinterland (inland) areas remain largely unvisited. These conditions not only place more pressure on the coastal environment, but they offer only limited spread of the economic benefits.

It is clear that there are significant problems regarding the quality of international and domestic tourist based on how they travel, spend, and spread during their visit to the region. Thus, assessing the quality of domestic and international tourists by investigating their traveling behavior is the

primary focus of this research. Understanding tourist behavior is imperative for the tourism marketing activity as it allows the destination managers to obtain a real and objective image of the tourists' demand and to forecast future behavior (Kotler & Keller, 2012). A comprehensive assessment of the tourist behavior also provides a better understanding of the quality of tourist visiting the region, which can help the government or destination management organizations to develop regional tourism strategies that will have the biggest economic impact to future regional development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Regional Tourism Development

The concept of regional development comprises a number of development dimensions for a particular geographical area, including economic, social, and environmental development. Many studies acknowledge that these development dimensions must be approached with sustainability in mind, while extracting the most value from region's potential features. Regional tourism development is expected to achieve these objectives, while creating benefits to the industry and surroundings (Saarinen, Rogerson, & Hall, 2017).

There is growing body of literature examining regional tourism development. Some researchers examine the concept at a macro level, employing a variety of disciplinary frameworks in order to assess the complex and multifaceted phenomenon of tourism development (Ramos & Jimenez, 2008). Other authors have looked at the local, place-based factors that affect tourism development and investigate the cause of development imbalances in a region (Raina & Agarwal, 2004). For either perspective, the research challenges are numerous, but the benefits are valuable. If more was known about the role tourism plays in less developed regions, regional destinations could reduce the problems they face in their pursuit of tourism-led development goals (Tefler & Sharpley, 2008). Local authorities are in the center of these decisions; vital elements in formulating the policy of tourism development. Likewise, the role of tourist behaviour in regional tourism development is important, although only a few studies have investigated it.

Consumer Behavior in Tourism

Consumer behavior has been widely discussed by researchers and practitioners in the marketing discipline. It is defined as "*the study of how individuals, groups, and organizations select, buy, use, and dispose of goods, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy their needs and wants*" (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 151). Consumer behavior is present in tourism studies, often called 'travel behavior' or 'tourist behavior', and refers to a set of acts, attitudes, and decisions regarding selecting, buying, consuming, and evaluating tourism products and services (Schiffman, Hansen, & Kanuk, 2007). Understanding tourist needs and decision processes is critical for planning tourism marketing activities as it allows the destination managers to obtain an objective and realistic image of tourist demand and forecast future behavior. Furthermore, it is essential for developing new tourism products and services because it presents a more detailed view of what tourists are searching for, and outlines what managers should consider in the development process (Fratu, 2011).

Tourist behavior research often views the concept in three distinct stages: pre-visit, on-site, and post-visit (Cohen, Prayag, & Moital, 2014). Much of the pre-visit research is concerned with the

decision making factors when choosing a holiday and destination and post-visit research often looks at destination endorsement and intentions to re-visit. However, on-site behavior is related to travel patterns and expenditure while on holiday, precisely the behaviors that lead to economic impact. The on-site behavior is also important because it captures the real phenomenon that happens in the destination (Swarbrooke & Honer, 2007). For market research purposes, tourism organizations collect various data on tourist behavior both quantitative and qualitative. Statistical profiles of tourists often include age and gender, country of origin, occupation, and income, but far less often, the on-site behavior of visitors is collected. Behavioral data where tourists have been on their holiday, how much they have spent on their holiday, their routes and means of travel from one location to another, and other behaviors related to their visit. The behavioral data adds another dimension to standard demographics and has the potential to provide much needed and valuable information for policy makers.

Quality over Quantity

Mass tourism strategies, like mass marketing strategies, have long been popular, with the goal of achieving the highest tourist visits or becoming the most popular tourist product or service. In mass tourism, the quantity of tourists visiting the attraction is the key performance indicator and determines the success of the tourism attraction or destination. However, if un-checked, this kind of practice can be an unviable method of managing a destination; in extreme cases, it can become 'destructive mass tourism' (Divino & McAleer, 2010). As a result of mass tourism, some destinations have experienced over-crowding or 'saturation tourism,' especially in mature tourism destinations (Gilmore, 2017). Others use the term 'over-tourism' to describe destinations that have reached or exceeded their carrying capacity to serve their visitors (Cheer, Milano, & Novelli, 2019). 'Over-tourism' is often large numbers of tourists accompanied by low tourist expenditures, inducing a limited or sometimes negative economic injection to the destination. Moreover, local residents often bear the cost of over-tourism in extra municipal costs/taxes but also less tangible degradation of their lifestyles and community well-being.

Considering the negative impact of mass tourism, there is a recent shift to a more focused or specialized tourism approach. The shifts are generally based on sustainability issues, often with a strong environmental dimension as a core concern for developing the region. While protecting and conserving the local environment and culture, destinations have begun to focus on attracting fewer, but better quality tourists, rather than large numbers (Milano, Cheer, & Novelli, 2018). Some practices also include de-marketing and targeting the promotion of the destination to particular groups of tourists. The quality over quantity argument often causes debates between environmental agencies (such as government organizations, public bodies, special interest group) and tourism-based businesses. The challenge is to strike a balance between quality and quantity by taking into account the multi-dimensional nature of tourism products and services while conducting responsible tourism marketing activities (Gilmore, 2017).

METHODS

This research is a descriptive study. A descriptive study is undertaken to ascertain or describe the characteristics of the variables of interest (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). The data was gathered in several phases using a questionnaire as the collection instrument. The questionnaire consisted of several

parts, including screening questions, demographics, and tourist behavior, including the geographic locations and routes followed while visiting the regions. In developing the tourist questionnaire, interviews were conducted with tourism stakeholders in the Great Ocean Road region along with a review of previous empirical research in related topic areas.

The survey was conducted in October 2016. The population under study was visitors to the Great Ocean Road region who could communicate in English. Using convenient sampling, a self-administered questionnaire was collected from 311 domestic tourists and 562 international tourists across the popular townships in the region; Lorne, Apollo Bay, and Port Campbell (Twelve Apostles). The data was analyzed by using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULT

Demographic Profile

The results indicate that 64% of the tourists visiting the Great Ocean Road were international visitors and 36% were domestic travelers. Figure 1 shows that China contributed the largest number of tourists, representing 22% of the international tourists. This was followed by 12% from the UK and 8% from Germany. Interestingly, 44% of the international visitors were from Asian countries comprising China, Malaysia, Taiwan, India, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Meanwhile, 40% of the domestic travelers were Victorians, followed by visitors 23% from New South Wales and 15% from Queensland.

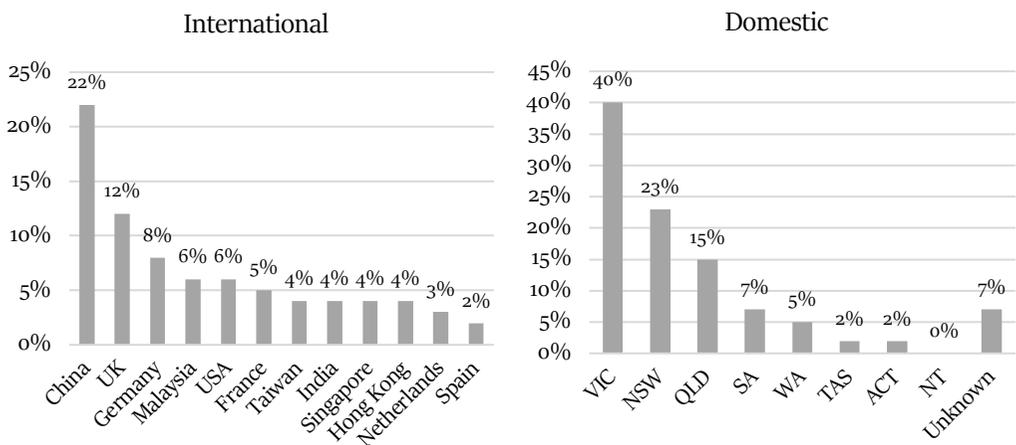


Figure 1. Origin of domestic and international tourists

The data in Table 1 shows some similarities and differences between the domestic and international tourists. Both groups had more females; 58% for domestic and 52% for international. In terms of age, 39% of the domestic tourists were aged 22-35 and 28% were aged 52-69. This representation of young and old was also seen in the occupations of the domestic tourists, where 40% were professionals, and 22% were retired. The international tourists were younger, with 61% aged 20-35, and their occupations were 45% professionals and 22% students.

Table 1. Demographic profile

	Total N=873	Domestic N=311	International N=562
Gender			
Male	46%	42%	48%
Female	54%	58%	52%
Age			
<21 years	10%	7%	11%
22-35 years	54%	39%	61%
36-51 years	16%	16%	15%
52-69 years	16%	28%	9%
>69 years	6%	9%	4%
Occupation			
Professional	43%	40%	45%
Trade & Services	12%	15%	11%
Student	19%	14%	22%
Self-Employed	8%	6%	9%
Retired	12%	22%	6%
Unemployed	5%	3%	7%

Traveling Behavior

The data from Table 2 shows that most of the domestic and international visitors travelled to the Great Ocean Road region for a holiday, followed by visiting friends and relatives, on their honeymoon, and for business/conference reasons. The most common travel group size for international tourists was two people, followed by larger groups, then 3 people, and for domestic tourists it was 2 people, followed by 3 people, then larger groups.

Mode of transport preferences differed between the domestic and international visitors. It was not surprising that most of the domestic tourists, many from Victoria, drove their own vehicle (63%), followed by rented vehicle (17%) and then a tour operator (13%). For international visitors, the top three choices were rented vehicle (40%), tour operator (35%), and their own vehicle (17%).

International and domestic visitors differed on how they booked their trip to the Great Ocean Road region. International visitors were evenly spread amongst the booking options with 35% using an online platform for bookings, 33% booking with a travel agency, and 32% traveling without an itinerary. For domestic visitors, 60% travelled without any itinerary (60%), followed by 29% booking via online platforms, and only 11% used a travel agency.

Furthermore, the data clearly shows that most visitors approached the Great Ocean Road region from the East (International: 90%, Domestic: 85%) with small amount of visitors approaching from the West (International: 9%, Domestic: 7%) and from the North (International: only 1%, Domestic: 8%).

Table 2. Domestic and international tourists traveling behavior

		Origin			
		Domestic	(%)	International	(%)
Purpose of Visit	Holiday	251	81%	464	83%
	Honeymoon	6	2%	27	5%
	Business/Conference	14	5%	20	4%
	Visiting friends and relatives	39	13%	37	7%
	Education	1	0%	14	2%
Travel group size	1	4	1%	46	8%
	2	142	46%	201	36%
	3	64	21%	127	23%
	4	38	12%	55	20%
	4+	63	20%	133	24%
Mode of Transport	Own car	195	63%	98	17%
	Rented car	52	17%	225	40%
	Motorcycle	9	3%	4	1%
	Cycling	1	0%	5	1%
	Air transport	0	0%	6	1%
	Tour operator (bus, shuttle)	41	13%	197	35%
	Public transportation	2	1%	11	2%
	Caravan/Camper/Motor-home	11	4%	16	3%
Trip Description	I make my bookings with a travel agency	34	11%	187	33%
	I use some of the online platforms to make some of the bookings	90	29%	196	35%
	I travel without an itinerary	187	60%	179	32%
Direction of Travel	From the East (Melbourne/Geelong)	264	85%	540	90%
	From the West (Adelaide)	22	7%	51	9%
	From the North/Hinterland (Ballarat, Bendigo, Hamilton, etc.)	25	8%	7	1%

Overnight Visitation Pattern

Table 3. Domestic and international tourists overnight stays

		Origin				Total	(%)
		Domestic	(%)	International	(%)		
Are you staying overnight during your trip to the GOR region?	No	320	57%	209	67%	529	100%
	Yes	242	43%	102	33%	344	100%

Among respondents who were interviewed in this survey, there were some differences in their overnight behavior between domestic and international visitors (Table 3). A higher percentage of domestic travelers (43%) stayed overnight in the region while only 33% of the international travelers stayed overnight. Of those in the sample that stayed overnight, 78% of the domestic tourists stayed for two or more nights, while only 56% of the international tourists stayed 2 or more nights.

Table 4. domestic and international tourists length of stay and accommodation

		Origin			
		Domestic	(%)	International	(%)
Length of stay	One night	55	22%	212	44%
	Two nights	99	39%	187	39%
	Three nights	41	16%	34	7%
	More than three nights	57	23%	44	9%
Type of accommodation	4/5 Star Hotel/Resort	54	20%	32	7%
	Eco-Lodge	30	11%	30	6%
	Budget hotel or motel	51	18%	77	16%
	Cottage	7	3%	18	4%
	Cabin	5	2%	7	1%
	Hostel/Backpackers	13	5%	99	21%
	Renting local accommodation (Airbnb)	20	7%	19	4%
	Friend's or relative's property	23	8%	12	3%
	Caravan or camping site	30	11%	52	11%

There were as also differences between the accommodation used by international and domestic visitors (Table 4). Most of the international visitors tended to stay in low-cost accommodations. Hostel/Backpackers had become the most popular accommodation among the international visitors, followed by budget hotel or motel and caravan or camping site. Meanwhile, there were only a few domestic travelers who stayed in hostel/backpackers. Most of them prefer to stay in a budget hotel or motel and four or five-star hotel/resort during their visit to the region.

Expenditure

Respondents were asked to provide an estimation of their expenditure for different components during their trip (Figures 2 & 3). Only responses above \$0.00 were taken into consideration. The results show that the domestic traveler spent more money in the region than international travelers, particularly on accommodation and food and beverages in the region. On the other hand, international travelers spent more on entertainment and on both land and coastal activities.

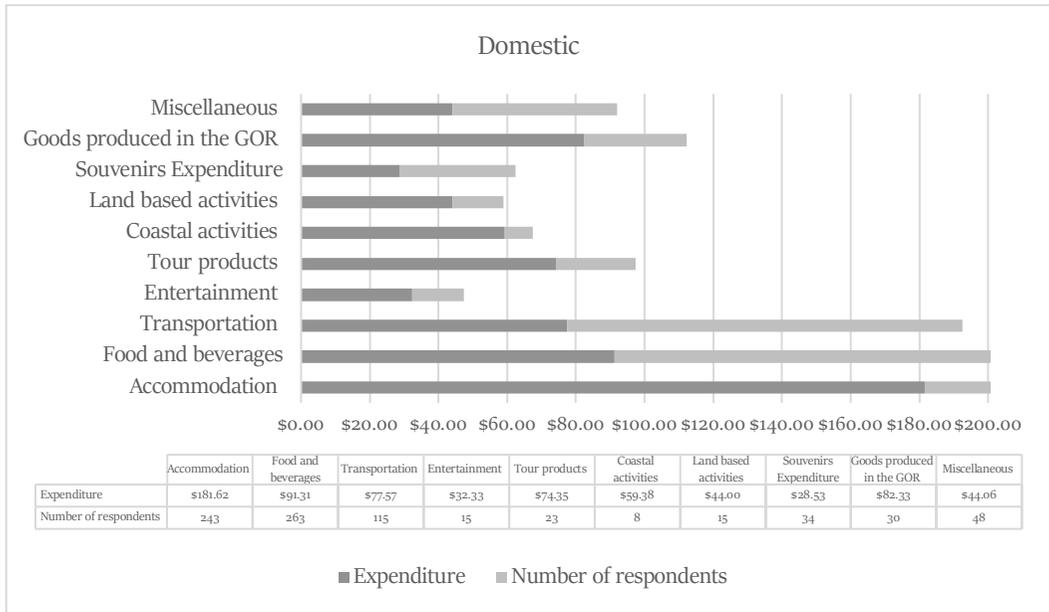


Figure 2. Domestic visitors' expenditure

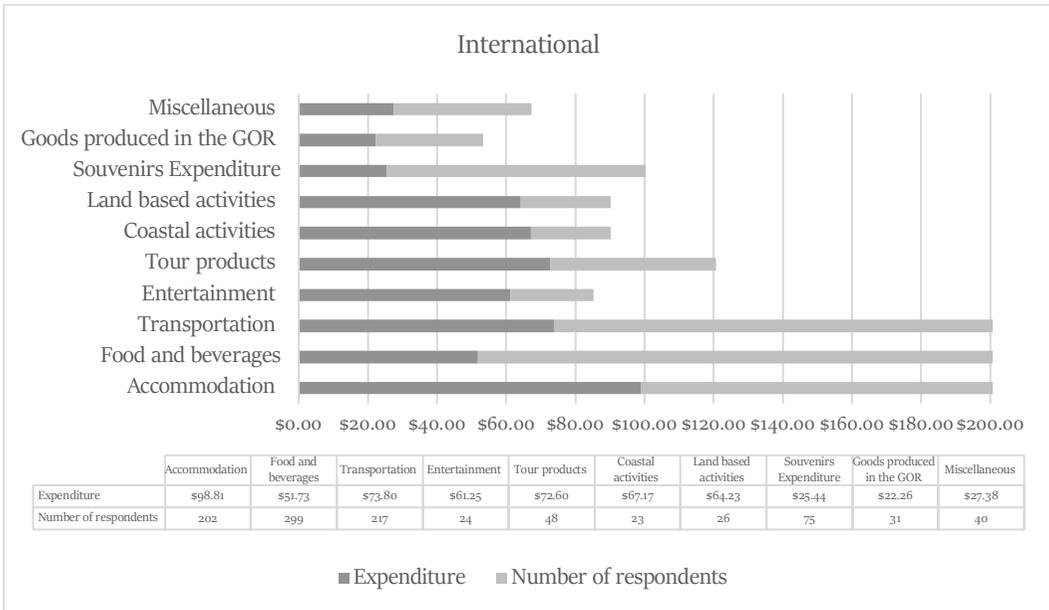


Figure 3. International visitors' expenditure

Dispersal

The Great Ocean Road region encompasses many townships that stretching along the coastline and inland toward the hinterland area. This section was designed to gather insight on patterns of

visitation that would outline the level of dispersal to each township in the region. Respondents were asked whether they had visited or planned to go to the various townships as part of their trip. The results (see Figure 3) indicate that the dispersal of domestic tourists was slightly more evenly distributed to inland towns than the international visitors. The contrasts are largest for Apollo Bay and Port Campbell. The results also indicate that the townships located in the southern coastal area (Torquay to Port Campbell), which are also close to iconic Twelve Apostles attractions were the most visited township by domestic and international tourists. In contrast, only a small percentage of the sample visited townships located in the hinterland area (Camperdown to Colac).

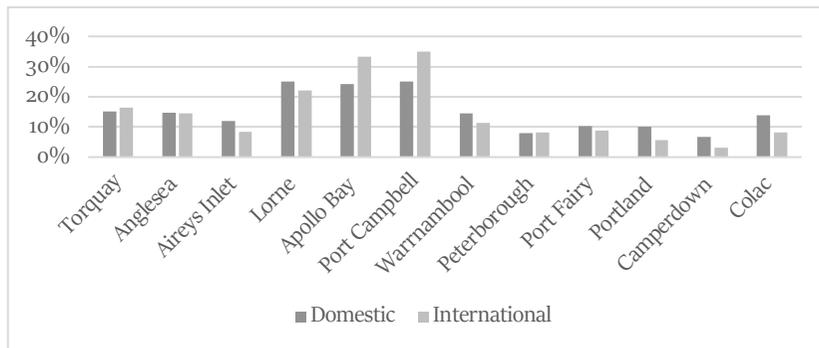


Figure 4. Dispersal to townships by domestic and international tourist

DISCUSSION

This study has tried to provide a better understanding of tourist demographic profiles, behaviors, and dispersal within the Great Ocean Road region. Several questions that delineate these elements were asked to domestic and international tourists visiting the region. Some of the findings are noteworthy and are worth considering by the government, policy makers and future researchers.

Firstly, China dominated the international visitors, followed by the UK and Germany. The importance of tourists from Asia is further strengthened when considering that Malaysia, Singapore, India, Taiwan, and Hong Kong were all in the top ten market sources of international visitors in the region.

Secondly, there are also interesting comparisons of domestic and international tourists' behavior. In terms of similarity, both of the segments have similar results for the purpose of visit, travel party, and direction of travel. Most tourists visit the Great Ocean Road region from the east (Melbourne/Geelong) intending to have a vacation and are accompanied by one or more other people. However, there are differences between the domestic and international tourists. These include their mode of transport and trip booking. While the domestic tourists mostly use their car and travel without an itinerary to visit the region, the international tourists prefer to rent a car or book the tour package via a travel agency.

However, the most interesting difference between the domestic and international tourists are their overnight visitation patterns. More domestic tourists stay overnight and those stay for more nights than international tourists. In terms of expenditure, the domestic tourists spend more money than international tourists across most categories, particularly on accommodation and food and

beverages. Thus, the results suggest that the average domestic tourist will contribute more to the local economy than the average international tourist.

Lastly, the result of the tourists' dispersal confirms that there is a low geographical dispersal happening in the region. Some of the townships appear on more tourist itineraries than others, with Port Campbell being the most popular, followed by Apollo Bay and Lorne. Hence, this study confirms that there are visitor pressures along the coastline and low visitor dispersal in the hinterland area of the region.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This descriptive study reveals that there are a number of differences in the behavior of domestic and international tourists visiting the Great Ocean Road region. One of the essential findings is the disparity of spending habits and length of stay between the two segments. Despite the smaller number, the overnight domestic tourists in the region spend more than their international counterparts. The domestic tourists tend to stay longer, spend more, and spread further inland than international tourists. If average spend and dispersion is a meaningful measure of quality, then the domestic tourists could be characterized as higher quality than the international tourists. As such, tourist quality influences on the economic contribution to the region. While the number of the quality domestic tourists may be low, the growth of lower quality day-trippers has not translated to an equivalent rise in visitor expenditure, but has placed pressure on infrastructure and the environment, ultimately resulting in a significant economic loss to the region (GORRT, 2015). This growth in low quality tourists is even more critical when we examine tourist dispersal. If short-stay low quality tourists only visit the coast, the chance of economic benefits of tourism spreading to inland parts of the region is limited.

This study concludes that attracting high quality tourists is a viable strategy to develop tourism in the Great Ocean Road Region. Many destinations are shifting their focus towards quality tourists rather than relying on mass tourism. The important objective is how to attract tourists that stay longer and spend more in the region. Improving the quality of accommodation and other supporting amenities is one of the ways to encourage them to stay longer in the region. Moreover, the region can create collaboration and partnership with travel agencies and tour operators to provide bundled packages of tour activities and overnight stay to increase the overnight visitors.

This study also suggests that in combating the low tourist dispersal, improving the tourists' awareness, particularly in the townships with low visitation in the hinterland area, could be one of the best ways to spread tourists across the region. Having an iconic attraction is worthy, but it can create a dispersal imbalance in the region. However, if the region can enhance and diversify its tourism product offerings, it can potentially attract tourists to visit other areas outside the current popular routes. Ultimately, these strategies can boost the tourists' yield and maximize the economic contribution to regional tourism development.

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