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Incentive travellers' proclivity to revisit an incentive destination

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Abstract

Incentive travel is a renowned motivator in talent management, and a gigantic victor for many tourism destinations. Destination marketing endeavours to leave a tourist with a positive and lasting impression, together with memorable experiences. Hoping that this will result in a return visit, recognised as more cost-effective than pursuing trial markets. However, the intricate nature of different constituents, and the strength of its influence involved, make incentive travel destination decision-making a complex process. Critical to destination marketers is knowledge concerning what constitutes a destination experience and the influence of this on specifically incentive travellers' proclivity to revisit an incentive destination. The focus of this paper is on incentive travellers and their proclivity of returning to an incentive destination at a later stage, at their own time and expense. A deeper understanding of the most and least likely constituents influencing incentive travellers' decision-making in this regard is required. A qualitative study with focus groups were undertaken to extract the expertise and experience of incentive travellers to facilitate insight and understanding of the complexities (feelings, thoughts and emotions) involved in the destination decision-making process. Deduced from the data obtained is that there are eight most likely (with accommodation as number one) and three least likely (health, personality and self-concept, and reference groups) constituents influencing the proclivity of returning to a destination visited as an incentive traveller. It is thus imperative for incentive destination planners and destination marketers to take cognisance of this when formulating their integrated marketing communication strategies to cultivate loyalty and the intention to return to a previously visited destination.

Keywords: incentive traveller, decision-making influences, experiences, incentive destinations

Introduction

Incentive travel is indubitably a lucrative tourism sector and international destination marketers endeavour to surpass each other in courting this treasure-trove. There are numerous types of rewards for those who achieve specific business goals and/or objectives, and travel is often a sought after reward (Kononenko, 2014; Kelly, 2016). Although an incentive travel experience spawns treasured recollections, the process of deciding whether to return to an incentive destination is in itself a multifaceted process with many constituents influencing this decision (Crouch, Perdue, Timmermans & Uysal, 2004). This is even more so in the case of an incentive destination because it is highly likely that an incentive traveller neither has a choice in selecting the incentive destination, nor being part of the decision-making unit. The core of any incentive travel program is the destination (Severt & Breiter, 2010), constituting a composition of products and services orchestrated into a memorable experience, as well as countless other influences having an impact on the possibility of considering a destination, as well as the proclivity to return to a previously visited incentive destination.

An understanding of the constituents and influences of an incentive destination is essential for destination marketers tasked with devising strategies and tactics to build destination image and create loyalty. This is especially important to destinations in Africa and South

Africa who are/or intent getting involved in the incentive industry. Destination marketing organisations regard repeat (loyal) visitors as a stable and cost-effective source of revenue (Huang & Hsu, 2009) and a general aim for businesses in this regard is to set a 25% return target (Peacock, 2013). In terms of tourism, returning to a destination is not always a rational decision and researchers are attempting to discover the evading reasons behind return intentions and behaviour, which is not an easy task because there are so many destinations available. This quest for knowledge is further complicated within the domain of incentive travel because these travellers are a selected few who is not really going on a holiday but are being rewarded and their situation is thus different from that of general tourists. A challenge in this line of research is obtaining access to the study subjects, top performers who are highly regarded and fiercely protected.

A distinction is drawn between incentive travellers and incentive travel planners for the purpose of this paper. Incentive travellers are employees rewarded/recognised for achieving or exceeding predetermined productivity levels with an 'all-expenses-paid' trip (Severt & Breiter, 2010; Kononenko, 2014; Kelly, 2016) whilst incentive travel planners are employees (or contracted external agents/consultants) tasked with planning and managing an incentive trip. This could, but does not always comprise accompanying the incentive group as tour manager. This paper takes a closer and deeper look at the domain of incentive travellers in South Africa and the insights obtained will be beneficial to incentive travel planners and incentive destination marketers alike as there is a need for knowledge and understanding in this regard.

Incentive travel, destination marketing, and constituents and its influence on the consumer decision-making process are all wide-ranging fields of study and cannot be confinable into one paper and the following objectives were instrumental in conceptualising this paper:

- To understand incentive travellers as participants in an incentive program.
- To understand the constituents incentive travellers consider as the most important for the selection of an incentive destination.
- To procure an indication of the constituents incentive travellers regard as the least influential on their proclivity to return to a previously visited incentive destination.

Obtaining insight into the realms of incentive travel and the proclivity to return to an incentive destination set the scene for this paper and following is a presentation of the theoretical basis underpinning this construct. The research method is presented and this is proceeded with a presentation of the research results obtained after a content analysis of the data, the managerial implications and recommendations. The paper then terminates with a conclusion.

Literature review

Internal marketing is one of the tools used to establish organisational culture (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011; Monger, 2014) and a report published by The Incentive Research Foundation (Severt & Breiter, 2010) specifically state that incentive travel is ideal for this purpose. Gee and Burke (2001) and Barrett (2014) avowed that a valuable asset worthy of treasuring is a highly motivated workforce. However, not many employees reach their maximum potential (Xiang & Formica, 2007) and Bakic, Hrabrovski-Tomic, Muhi and Kovacevic (2010) recommend that 'reward' incentive schemes should be used as stimulus to guide employees toward achieving organisational objectives. Monetary based incentives, to a large extent, lost popularity at the turn of the century according to Fisher, (2001) and Gee and Burke (2001) and such schemes (where still in use) do not necessarily yield desired levels of achievement. Purposive remuneration management thus needs to enter the playing field.

Remuneration management is a crucial element of managing humans (Nel, Wener, du Plessis, Ngalo, Poisat & Sono, 2011) as a resource, also referred to as human capital management and/or talent management. Compensation management (as cited by Deb,

2009) is the process used by organisations to reward employees for their work, performance and contributions either financially and/or non-financially. There are two different forms of rewards: intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Intrinsic rewards, according to Deb (2009), refers to self-administered rewards (the feeling of doing a job well) and extrinsic rewards are external and encompasses external motivators such as compensation; promotion; and interpersonal rewards. All incentive schemes (rewards), whether short-term or long-term in nature, should reward employees effectively (Singh, 2007; Severt & Breiter, 2010) and should make it worthwhile for employees (Armstrong, 2008) to endeavour.

The Society of Incentive Travel Executives (SITE, 2010) revealed that 61.6% of employees interviewed indicated travel as an incentive is preferred to merchandise. SITE's August 2011 survey (SITE, 2013) indicated once again that respondents rated motivational travel as more favourable than cash rewards. Confirming this fact was a study conducted by Jeffrey, Dickinson and Einarsson (2013). Thus, travel as an incentive is a highly regarded reward and an effective motivator.

Incentive travel houses are specialised agencies who construct incentive travel programmes in conjunction with a designated staff member at a business enterprise (Juchia, 1997) and the five key characteristics of a successful incentive program are the 'who, what, when, where and how'. The destination, in most cases, is the cornerstone of any incentive program and Boniface and Cooper (2009) state that destination is the central element of the tourism system. A 'tourism destination' is regarded by researchers such as Pike (2008), Dmitrovic, Cvelbar, Kolar, Brencic, Ograjensek and Zabkar (2009), Middleton, Fyall and Morgan (2009), Tkaczynski and Rundle-Thiele (2010), George (2014) and Kozak and Baloglu (2011) as a fusion of constituents; such as attractions, infrastructure, transportation, hospitality and services. This is taken a step further by Alegre and Garau (2010) who profess that an incentive travel destination is an individual's life-long 'dream'. Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2006) advocate that the only element of importance to an incentive participant is the perceived value of the incentive destination. Once an incentive traveller visited an incentive destination, such a participant's experiences will then influence the proclivity to return to/and or to provide word-of-mouth recommendations, according to Kozak (2001). Destination experiences are commonly attained by means of contact with constituents such as the natural environment, the weather, local people, facilities provided, and the activities available. The nature of these experiences are reflected in the ambience of the destination, the personality and the experiences of the staff member (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001).

Several antecedents of return intention have been identified and can be found in numerous studies such as that of Kozak (2001), Yoon and Uysal (2005), and Jang and Feng (2007). Some of these antecedents include satisfaction, past vacation experiences, perceived value and destination image. Assaker, Vinzi and O'Conner (2012) also examined the effect of novelty seeking on repeat visitation. As pointed out by Gitelson and Crompton (1984) and Jang and Feng (2007), many travel destinations rely on repeat visitors. Thus, understanding why travellers decide to return to previously visited destinations have been the focus of some research studies, such as those conducted by Kozak (2001), Hong, Lee, Lee and Jang (2009), Som and Badarneh (2011), Marcussen (2011), as well as the study of Som, Marzuki, Yousefi and Abukhalifeh (2012). However, these studies are based on tourists and not necessarily the intentions of incentive travellers.

Tourism destinations have become more accessible and competitive in recent years, according to Matos, Mendes and Valle (2012), especially given the increasing number of destination choices nowadays available to tourists, and also to incentive planners. It is thus detrimental for tourism destinations competing in the global area to obtain and maintain a competitive advantage, especially within the high-spending incentive industry. Dugulan, Balaur, Popescu and Veghes (2010) are of the opinion that tourism destination competitiveness is the ability to attract tourists, increase tourism expenditure and – most

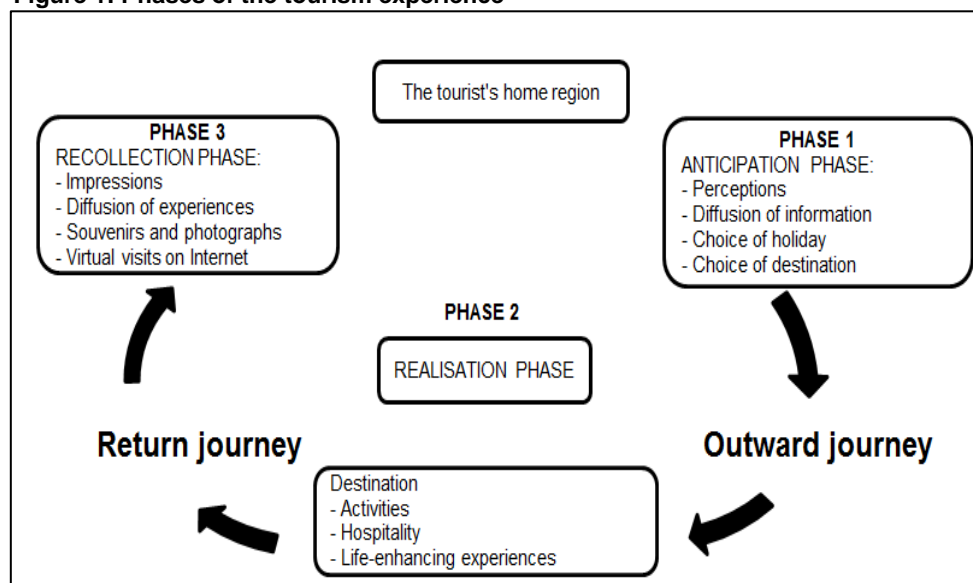
importantly – providing tourists with satisfying and memorable experiences. A tourism destination provides the input for these experiences and is in many cases the *'raison d'être'* for tourism, as described by Kozak and Baloglu (2011) and Morrison (2013).

An incentive tourism destination, in turn, should consist of a number of key components suitable for the incentive market, as emphasised by Kastenholtz (2010). In the realm of travel incentive schemes, Alegre and Garau (2010) envision that an incentive destination may be an individual's life-long dream come true and this implies that destinations should live up to expectations. The reason for this is that incentive travellers are the 'cream of a company's crop' whom might have high expectations. Lubbe (2000) and Pike (2008) points out that an incentive destination should be well known, have a highly developed infrastructure, a good mixture of accessible attractions, and preferably be in the mature phase of its product life cycle – but, does this also apply to incentive travellers?. However, this depends on the experience envisaged; it could also be that rustic adventure is pursued, but luxury and status is customarily associated with incentive travel as a reward.

A tourism experience is internally produced by a tourist, based on his/her background, values, attitude and beliefs, as described by Jurowski (2009). Manthiou, Lee and Tang (2011), Matos *et al.* (2012) and Luring (2013) all agree that tourist's physical, intellectual and emotional engagement are key ingredients in shaping their tourism experience. Jurowski (2009) maintains that tourism experiences are created through a process of visiting, learning and enjoying activities at a tourism destination. The tourism experience, as declared by Kozak and Baloglu (2011), should therefore take into account both the rational and emotional expectations created for and by a tourism destination.

Given the interactive nature of the tourism experience, Boniface and Cooper (2009) grouped tourism experiences into three phases, each with its own unique characteristics. Illustrated in Figure 1 are these suggested phases.

Figure 1: Phases of the tourism experience



Source: Boniface and Cooper (2009)

The *first phase* is the anticipation phase and this is a precursor to the trip. During this phase, the perception or mental image of the destination will have a substantial influence on the selection of the tourism destination. However, note should be taken that incentive travellers generally seldom have any influence over the choice of the incentive destination, as this is the decision of the sponsoring company and/or incentive travel planner. The *second phase* – realisation – represents the intention of the trip and embraces essentially the tourism

experiences occurring at the destination. The impressions of the outward and return trip, as part of the overall travel experience, constitute very important parts of this phase. Lastly, *phase three* is the recollection phase, which takes place after the trip. This phase is also the focus of this paper: the incentive traveller now compares the extent to which the tourism experience at a destination meets the expectations as per phase one and this leads to either satisfaction (enabling the proclivity of returning in future) with the incentive destination, or to dissatisfaction.

For the purpose of incentive travellers, interest is awakened by the announcement or launch of an incentive (the pre-trip stage), which in turn stimulates interest in an incentive destination. The incentive traveller's actual visit or on-site experience, as well as the post-trip evaluation, are equally important, because both these experiences may directly influence the proclivity to revisit such a destination (Li, Cheng, Kim & Petrick, 2008). In other words, the decision to return to an incentive destination is based on experiences obtained during a trip, as well as during the post-trip phase where evaluation, memory storing, reflection and enrichment occur.

Ultimately, a desirable experience at a tourism destination has been found to influence tourists' returning intention behaviour, as stated in studies by Rodriguez Del Bosque, Sam Martin, Collado and Dek Mar Garcia De Los Salmones (2009), Assaker, Vinzi and Ó Connor (2012), and Osti, Disegna and Brida (2012). With this in mind, a number of studies have also highlighted that the proclivity to return to a destination has important competitive and economic advantages (Brunner, Stocklin & Opwis, 2008; Page, 2009 Assaker *et al.*, 2012; Som *et al.*, 2012). These authors all agree that the retention of previous customers is more cost-effective than procuring new ones. However, it remains unclear why people undertake repeat visits and which kinds of characteristics repeat tourists share. A number of studies have focused on the factors that influence the intention to return to a destination in an attempt to understand why tourists make repeat visits. As the primary objective of this study is to investigate whether or not destination experiences will influence the decision to return to an incentive destination, and subsequently to determine which factors influence this decision, it is necessary to explore the constituents which influence the proclivity to return.

Generally, most researchers agree that repeat visitation is affected by factors such as perceived value, familiarity with a particular destination, as well as a destination's image. Most often, it appears that satisfaction with a destination is identified as a significant factor, when evaluating the proclivity of returning to a destination. Overall, satisfaction with a tourism destination is directly influenced by the quality of an experience at a given tourism destination (Cole & Chancellor, 2009), which in turn could influence return proclivity.

This is supported by Pantouvakis (2013), who stated that satisfaction with a destination's experience will lead to repeat visits, positive recommendations, as well as a favourable tourism destination image. Shipway and Fyall (2012) describe satisfaction as a post-purchase evaluative judgement of the tourism experience where expectations are compared to the actual experience. Jang and Feng (2007) further assert that satisfaction with a tourism destination is the result of the subjective evaluation of whether or not a given destination meets or exceeds expectations.

In addition, Hong *et al.* (2009) pointed out that there are numerous factors or limitations regarded as barriers to travel, and Meng and Xu (2012) support this. Chen and Wu (2009) refer to these barriers as travel constraints. These travel constraints comprise a subset of reasons that may prevent a decision maker from engaging in a particular behaviour, or may result in inhibited activity at a tourism destination, or even limited satisfaction, as explained by Kattiyapornpong and Miller (2009). Hong *et al.* (2009) maintain that these constraints are also known to affect the selection of a tourism destination.

The hierarchical model proposed by Crawford, Jackson and Godbey (1991) is referred to in an attempt to identify the influences that travel constraints may have on the proclivity to return to a destination. This model is still popular in many tourism studies (Chisck & Dong, 2003; Silva & Correia, 2008; White, 2008; Chen & Wu, 2009; Marzo-Navarro & Pedraja-Iglesias, 2009; Hung & Petrick, 2012; Kimmm, 2012) and categorises travel constraints into three dimensions: *intrapersonal* constraints, *interpersonal* constraints and *structural* constraints. Intrapersonal constraints affect leisure preferences and this occurs first (Hung & Petrick, 2012). Interpersonal constraints then takes place and influences interpersonal compatibility. Finally, participation or non-participation depends on the confluence of the intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural constraints.

Based on the review of related literature, it is evident that many factors influence the choice of a destination and this choice is determined by a set of criteria preferred by a tourist (Li, 2014), not to mention the complexity involved in the decision to return to a previously visited incentive destination. Yet, the more it is attempted to understand travel behaviour when reselecting a tourism destination the more it is recognised how much there is that is not understood. However, an incentive traveller's proclivity to revisit an incentive destination has not yet been fully explored in past research and this fissure in knowledge creates a superfluity of research opportunities.

Research method

The research process, from conceptualisation to collecting and presenting the findings, is aimed at obtaining insight and an understanding of the research topic in an as real as possible manner where the meanings and realities expressed are dependent on the participants' interpretation, referred to as social constructionism by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016). A mono method qualitative study was undertaken due to its ability to acquire a richness of information, as explained by Carreira, Patricio, Jorge, Magee and Van Eikema Hommes (2013), and this research method furthermore facilitated attaining intricate detail about complexities, such as feelings, thoughts and emotions, influencing incentive travellers' proclivity to return to an incentive destination. This, however, is generally difficult to extract or learn more about through for example quantitative methods, which is not ideal in this case due to the inaccessibility to sufficiently large enough numbers of incentive travellers.

Qualitative research participant selection has a profound effect on the ultimate quality of a study, as stated by Teddlie and Yu (2007), because there are no clearly defined rules governing sample size (Saunders *et al.*, 2016) and researchers usually rely on small numbers with a focus on seeking richness of data about a particular phenomenon. Due to the importance placed on confidentiality and viewing incentive travellers anonymously (being the 'cream of the crop' of organisations), as well as the limitations of finances and the impossibility of obtaining and/or constructing an all-inclusive sample frame (list) of incentive travellers, purposive and convenience sampling was undertaken. The reason being that only organisations permitting access to their incentive travellers and incentive travellers willing to partake in this survey at their own cost and time without any remuneration could be involved.

An a priori content analysis, as recommended by Adams and Lawrence (2015), was followed during the literature review to identify previously researched constituents and these were then used as bases for constructing a semi-structured interview guide to guide the development and direction of the intended focus group discussions.

Focus groups with incentive travellers facilitated extracting an understanding of their destination-related decisions based on previous experiences at incentive destinations, as well as the most and least likely constituents influencing their proclivity to revisit such destinations. The incentive travel planners of two organisations (one in banking and one in

the cosmetics industry) agreed to participate in this study and invited some of their incentive travellers, entirely at their own discretion, to participate in a focus group discussion. The focus group discussions consisted of 4 participants at a time. Krueger (cited by Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech & Zoran, 2009) and Saunders *et al.* (2016) endorse the use of 'mini focus groups' when participants have shared common characteristics and expert knowledge or experience in a field of research. The incentive travellers were then invited to participate in a focus group, taking into consideration their status as top performers, their workload and the value they place on their time. Ultimately, participants had to meet selection criteria; they must recently have been on an international incentive trip, understand the purpose of this research, be willing to share their destination experiences, and express their perspectives on which destination constituents would most likely and/or least likely influence their proclivity to return to an incentive destination.

The focus groups were conducted at the organisations' premises and the researcher (also the moderator during the focus groups) and commenced the discussion by explained the purpose of the study. Mutual trust and openness is essential and reassurances of anonymity was ensured, and the value of their opinions were emphasised. The moderator followed the predetermined semi-structured interview guide and purposefully directed the open discussions and probed when necessary to obtain more information. The discussions ended with discussing their intention to return to an incentive destination. A final summary question was then directed at every participant to obtain concluding remarks before appreciation was expressed for their participation and time. The same themes emerged during the second focus group discussion and no further focus group discussions were undertaken.

The primary qualitative data collected during the focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed as soon as possible after the focus group and before the following focus group was scheduled. A framework analysis was followed as it provides an orderly and logical way to analyse the data acquired into rich descriptions and explanations as themes emerge. The purpose is to link emerging themes to the theory and constituents identified during the literature review for the benefit of destination marketers and incentive planners. Following is a presentation of the results that emanated from the data analysis together with a selection of opinions that were expressed during the focus group discussions as it is not practical to present all the qualitative data acquired.

Research results

The transcribed comments from the incentive travellers provide a deeper and richer understanding of the way in which experiences at an incentive destination are regarded as influences on their return proclivity. The data obtained was integrated into emergent categories, as suggested by Kwortnik (2004) and Saunders *et al.* (2016), and recurring themes were identified to unify the perspectives of all the participants.

Table 1 presents a synopsis of how incentive travel planners describe incentive travellers.

Table 1: Description of incentive travellers

Demographic descriptor	Explanatory statement
1. Age	<i>"...now with the younger people making a lot of headway the age range from probably 28 to 60."</i>
	<i>"A very wide age range from 25 up to 55, mostly with dependents."</i>
2. Educational level	<i>"Generally speaking they are definitely educated."</i>
3. Income grouping	<i>"...you must remember we are incentivising the top performers so these are the guys that are seen to be at the top of their game."</i>
	<i>"...our delegates are in the financial position to return to a destination."</i>
4. Beliefs and attitudes	<i>"...when they do get a trip they are generally quite excited and they would make exceptions to be able to travel."</i>

What is noticeable is that a much younger incentive traveller is emerging and their age bracket starts at a young age of 25 and stretches up to over 60 years, they have some level of tertiary education, and are financially able to return to an incentive destination. It was also mentioned that it should be kept in mind that an incentive trip should not be regarded as a 'free tip', because incentive travellers do work very hard for it and will make exceptions to be able to travel. The participants in this study have on average been on three or more incentive trips and are regarded as top achievers who are experienced in incentive travelling.

As explained earlier, the tourism experience is grouped into three stages or phases (see Figure 1), according to Boniface and Cooper (2009): the anticipation phase, the realisation phase, and lastly the recollection phase. These phases were incorporated into the focus group discussions and Table 2 outlines the key themes of each phase that emanated from the data analysis.

Table 2: Outline of key themes of the tourism experience phases

Phase	Key theme
Anticipation phase	Destination image Awakening of interest in the incentive destination
Realisation phase	Attractions Accommodation Friendliness of local people Accessibility Culture Food
Recollection phase	Impression of the incentive destination after visitation

The first phase of the tourism experience, the Anticipation phase, occurs before a trip seeing that the mental image of a destination do have a significant influence on the tourism destination expectations.

A summary of the responses obtained during the focus group discussions is indicted in Table 3. What is noticeable is that all the incentive travellers who participated in this study were excited about incentive destinations long before an incentive trip commences. This is further enhanced by means of a good communication plan which the incentive travel planner needs to continuously execute.

Table 3: Anticipation phase – summarised responses

Theme	Exploratory statement
1. Destination image	<i>"I would say excitement was my initially thought".</i>
	<i>"It generally is a surprise for us what destination is next..."</i>
	<i>"Our next trip is Greece and just thinking of Santorini and Mikonos, you just want to see it."</i>
	<i>"Very excited."</i>
2. Awareness of an incentive destination	<i>"...the way they present the images of the destination that creates the bubbling excitement."</i>
	<i>"...communication I feel is kept up right through the year..."</i>
	<i>"...the images they provide us during the initial launch function helps..."</i>
	<i>"...you don't know what to expect but when you see the video clip or the short movie it's all fun and excitement."</i>

(1) Destination image

Respondents were asked to describe any images they have of incentive destinations before their trips. Three respondents indicated that they were very excited about an incentive destination beforehand and some responses obtained are: *"It generally is a surprise for us what destination is next"* and *"Our next trip is Greece and just thinking of Santorini and Mikonos, you just want to see it. I don't want to miss out."*

Further probing into the image of an incentive destination during this phase revealed that the organisation's incentive travel planner plays a significant role in creating awareness of a incentive destination. Participants from both organisations indicated that formal functions at which the incentive destination is launched is usual. In addition, respondents mention that incentive travel organisers utilise various communication tools, such as SMSs, emails and articles published in internal monthly newsletters about incentive destinations. One participant said: *"I feel it's the way they present the images of the destination that creates the bubbling excitement. Then, in our monthly newsletter only for consultants, they show all those lovely picture of the white houses in Greece and I already want to go to Greece. I'm not even awake in the morning and I will be sent an SMS message saying 'Looking forward to drinking coffee with you on the beach' or 'You are already on your way to Greece'."* and another said: *"This communication, I feel, is kept up right through the year, about the incentive destination and what to look forward to."*

It is derived from this discussion that an incentive travel planner needs to execute a good communication plan continuously, this is a key contributor to creating mental images in the minds of incentive travellers of an incentive destination during the anticipation stage. This finding is in concurrence with the importance placed on the image of a destination a discussed in the literature review.

The incentive travellers participating in this study were then probed in an effort to explore the second phase: the Realisation phase.

The realisation phase of incentive travellers' tourism experiences includes the dimensions of the tourism experience that occur during an incentive trip. Respondents were asked to share any experiences at incentive destinations, with specific reference to five specific identified destination experiences. The aim was to try and determine if any of these destination experiences could influence their proclivity to return to a previously visited incentive destination. Table 4 provides a synopsis of the responses obtained.

Table 4: Realisation phase – summarised responses

Destination component	Exploratory statement
1. Attractions	<i>"...for this trip we only concentrated on a specific section of Portugal rather than trying to see the whole country."</i>
	<i>"... I like to come back and say I have seen Portugal, not just parts of Portugal."</i>
	<i>"I enjoyed the landscape a lot and the beauty of the Turkish landscape."</i>
	<i>"I enjoyed the contrast between the ultra-modern and antique or old Israel."</i>
2. Accommodation	<i>"We always stayed at the most exquisite hotels in each destination."</i>
	<i>"It was such a 'Wow' experience staying at these fancy hotels."</i>
	<i>"On my incentive trip I experienced a variety of accommodation."</i>
3. Friendliness of local people	<i>"Some of the locals I experienced to be extremely rude."</i>
	<i>"I feel we sometimes experienced the two extreme opposites from over friendliness to overly rudeness."</i>
	<i>"...personally, in Greece I found the Greek males to be very impolite."</i>
4. Accessibility	<i>"We flew economy class and I found their service to be of an excellent quality."</i>
	<i>"...just as long as I can get into [sic] an aeroplane and travel abroad."</i>
5. Culture and food	<i>"Culturally, the Portuguese people, I found them to be friendlier."</i>
	<i>"...in Turkey we experienced some spiritual event..."</i>
	<i>"I found this experience a bit disturbing because it was like a spiritual moment..."</i>
	<i>"I found tasting every traditional dish very unique."</i>
	<i>"I enjoyed the fact that during the incentive trip we were introduced to the local cuisine to a certain extent."</i>
	<i>"In Vietnam I found the food a challenge."</i>

An elaboration of the listed destination components follows.

(1) Attractions

Two respondents provided contradicting views regarding this destination component and one felt that only selected parts of an incentive destination should be visited and explains that: *“Portugal is literally such a long country, we for this trip only concentrated on a specific section, like the southern part of Portugal, of the country rather than trying to see the whole country and this I enjoyed very much.”*

However, another respondent disagreed and feels that an incentive trip should encompass as much of a destination as possible and remarked: *“Here I have to disagree as I like to see as much as possible when visiting a foreign country, even if it means having to travel by plane to different parts. I like to come back and say I have seen Portugal, not just certain parts of Portugal. If that’s the case, I will have this feeling of a job not done or a job half done. Maybe some delegates may find this a motivational tool because now I can work to see another part of the country, yet personally I feel different.”*

In contrast, other respondents only have praise for the attractions visited during their incentive trips and opined: *“...I enjoyed the landscape a lot and the beauty of the Turkish landscape I enjoyed.”* Another said: *“Also I found Israel to be a clean country and every local displays pride in being there and being able to work there, that is what gives the country such a great vibe. I also enjoyed the contrast between the ultra-modern and antique or old Israel.”*

It can be derived from the above that attractions may have an influence on the decision to revisit a destination, similarly to what was indicated by a number of research studies listed in the literature review. As was mentioned, visiting only certain sections of an incentive destination may motivate incentive travellers to return to the incentive destination in future to explore the rest of the country by a participant who alleged: *“Maybe some delegates may find this a motivational tool because now I can return to see another section of the country...”*

(2) Accommodation

It was noted from the responses that mostly 5-star accommodation is used on incentive trips. Various hotels are mentioned, such as Club Med, Sheraton and the Hilton. The effect of this is pointed out by the following remark: *“Even though we were told that accommodation would mostly consist of a 5-star quality I always thought ‘Yes, whatever’ until I actually went on an incentive trip and I was blown away. It was such a ‘Wow’ experience staying at these fancy hotels.”*

It became evident from the responses that incentive travellers enjoy a variety of accommodation establishments, for example: *“On my incentive trip I experienced a variety of accommodation establishments used on the incentive trip with some in hotels and even a night or two on a cruise ship.”*

The quality of the accommodation directly enhances the incentive experience, as per the following statement: *“We always stay at the most exquisite hotels in [sic] each destination. Truly a unique experience, we really feel like we are treated like royalty.”*

While accommodation was discussed, questions were also used to probe respondents' proclivity to return to an incentive destination, based on the type of accommodation that was provided at the incentive destination. A respondent noted that downgrading to less expensive accommodation was not a concern; on the other hand, the cost of the flights to the destination posed a real concern. A participant remarked: *“I won't mind staying in cheaper accommodation, that won't bother me. Staying in a cheaper style accommodation is not the issue but more the cost of the flight ticket which makes such a trip financially unaffordable for our big family.”*

(3) Friendliness of local people

Two respondents stated that local people are very rude. Below are examples of incidents that occurred during their incentive trips: *"I personally, in Greece, found the Greek males to be very impolite and they indicated that they did not approve of our company's delegates being independent and doing our own thing. Eventually, when he saw that trying to control us is a futile exercise he gave up but that caused me to only buy from female sellers."* and *"Some of the locals I experienced to be extremely rude. There where we stopped in Lisbon, we had an incident where our bus driver asked another driver to kindly move his vehicle just a bit so giving space for everybody in front of the hotel and there a bit of a commotion occurred between them, whereby the driver of the car point blank refused to move his vehicle."*

The following interesting observation was made in terms of dealing with local people: *"I also experienced some locals to be overly friendly, to such an extent that it borders on too much friendliness. For example, we had a waiter that just couldn't stop treating us South African travellers and serving us and going out of his way to provide us with extra attention. So I feel we sometimes experienced the two extreme opposites from overly friendliness to overly rudeness."*

The friendliness of local people seems to influence incentive travellers' return intention, as the above quotes show. However, this influence may be either positive or negative depending on each incentive traveller's unique experience at an incentive destination. It was stated that: *"If I can look past the negatives I feel I can return to this destination..."*

(4) Accessibility

Respondents are in agreement and they all indicated that they are satisfied with the international airlines that were used to reach the incentive destinations and a remark made was: *"Being international we flew with Emirates. I had a good experience..."*

Respondents seem quite indifferent to the fact that international travel may sometimes be prone to delays and inconvenience when it was remarked that: *"Just the idea of going overseas is enough to trigger anybody, be it Mauritius or Mozambique, just as long as I can get into an aeroplane and travel abroad."*

However, when probed about the influence of accessibility to an international incentive destination, the following opinion was raised: *"...doing a domestic trip is something that you will more likely be able to do on your own, whereas an overseas trip is more of a financial expense and more costly."*

Accessibility is thus a major influence for incentive travellers when considering returning to an incentive destination in their private capacity, but not to a lesser extent when they are on an incentive trip.

(5) Culture and food

Mixed views were expressed for this destination component. The culture and local food of an incentive destination can enhance the tourism experience, indicated by the following: *"Culturally, the Portuguese people, I found them to be friendlier. Just remembering that little old lady weaving her baskets and who couldn't speak our language but she had such a gentle, sweet nature about her."*

Alternatively it can be a deterrent, as was revealed by the following: *"In Turkey we experienced some spiritual event whereby people went into a trance-like state while turning around and*

around.” and “I found this experience a bit disturbing because it was like a spiritual moment they have during this dance whereby they try to connect with God in a trancelike state and what I didn’t like was the fact that you could not walk out as they closed all the doors and I felt trapped as we were forced to sit quietly and watch him in his trancelike state for 30 to 40 minutes.”

Respondents, however, acknowledged culture as a critical influencer when deciding to return to an incentive destination. A respondent again referred to a negative cultural experience during an incentive trip to Turkey. In addition, another respondent indicated that a return visit to Egypt is of no interest, purely because of the way of life at the destination: *“For me, Egypt and their way of doing things, their toilet habits is very different and for me very off-putting. I find Egypt very dirty and messy, and based on this, I feel I will not like to return to Egypt again.”*

Another respondent experienced Ireland’s culture as enjoyable and definitely worthy of a return visit. The respondent added that this is because: *“...you can walk into any place and there’s a joyful atmosphere where they are singing in the pubs and you feel like it’s a family gathering every day.”*

Similarly, local food also elicited mixed responses. Respondents enjoyed the educational experience of being shown how to make a traditional dish, as well as sampling some of the local cuisine. Some respondents expressed appreciation for the opportunity to have experienced something out of the ordinary: *“In South Africa, braai is very popular and here we were given the opportunity to experience food that is special to that specific country or destination we visited.”*

In contrast to the above, a respondent mentioned that enduring local cuisine is a bit of a struggle: *“In Vietnam I found the food a challenge. I really struggled to come to terms with all the weird animals that were dished up for us.”*

Food as a constituent to return to an incentive destination is dependent on every respondent’s personal experiences at an incentive destination.

Respondents were then requested to reflect on their incentive trips by means of lasting impressions, to enable the exploration of the final phase: Recollection.

The recollection phase of the tourism experience takes place after an incentive trip, when incentive travellers compare the extent to which the tourism experience at the destination met their expectations. Referring back to the experiences acquired at incentive destinations, respondents were asked to recall and describe their overall impression of incentive destinations after visitation.

Five respondents indicate that their expectations and impression of their incentive destinations have been exceeded and their responses are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Incentive travellers’ destination impression after visitation

Summarised response
<i>“The people, the country, their culture, I really expected something different. My expectations I can truly say were exceeded.”</i>
<i>“The best for me is to say I have been there and I have experienced the country myself.”</i>
<i>“So, initially I felt very reluctant to go. Yet, upon my return I think to myself how silly I was to not look forward to the trip as I enjoyed it so much and I feel like my spirit have been revived and I feel ready to start working and have such a positive frame of mind and I feel ready to tackle all the difficulties.”</i>
<i>“I can honestly say I didn’t really know what to expect but the beauty I experienced and it seem to go on and on. I definitely also learned a little bit more about the Turkish people and their culture.”</i>
<i>“I could now listen to how those top sellers (whom I’ve always looked up to) do business. I am learning so much from them, given the fact that I had the opportunity to travel with them on an incentive trip.”</i>

It is noticeable that respondents are of the opinion that their incentive trips did not only spark interest in the incentive destination, their expectations were exceeded, and this links up with the importance of ensuring satisfaction with memorable experiences at a destination. With this in mind, the respondents' return intentions are explored in the subsequent section.

(4) Incentive travellers' return intention

The discussions with the focus groups were directed towards establishing their return proclivity, more specifically the most and least likely constituents influencing the possibility of revisitation. Interesting to note is that none of the respondents of either focus groups have since returned to previously visited incentive destinations in their private capacity. This then gave rise to the question 'Why not?'. A respondent made a critical comment regarding one of the barriers that prevents revisitation: *"On your own you will not be able to afford the luxury we received on our incentive trip."*

The themes indicated in Table 6 were highlighted to probe respondents about the criteria that may possibly influence their decision to revisit an incentive destination.

Table 6: Themes influencing possible return visitation

Theme	Return intention influencer	
	Most likely	Least likely
1. Income	X	
	X	
	X	
2. Time	X	
		X
3. Health	X	
		X
		X
4. Life-cycle	X	
	X	
5. Climate	X	
	X	
6. Personality and self- concept		X
		X
7. Reference groups		X
		X

(1) Income

In addition to a critical comment made by a respondent about not being able to afford such a luxurious trip, two other respondents agreed that income is a likely influence on revisiting an incentive destination.

One respondent commented that it is financially just not feasible to go on an international trip with four dependants: *"Financially I will definitely not be able to afford such a trip, given my current situation with four children."*

Another respondent elaborated on this theme by saying: *"The incentive travel organiser we use really negotiated an excellent rate for us and the best deals for a group where you as a family might not be able to do."*

(2) Time

Time, or the lack thereof, is a personal influence. Some younger respondents indicated that finding the time is difficult and this is thus regarded as a likely barrier to returning to an incentive destination by saying: *"I find that time play [sic] a key role in my choice to return. As*

previously mentioned, I am initially reluctant to partake in a trip that takes me away from my work responsibilities for 2 weeks; now having to take additional time is just not feasible for me."

In contrast, a more elderly respondent does not feel that a lack of time would influence the intention to return to the incentive destination and explains: *"Time doesn't play a role in my life, I have a person working for me so I can come and go as I please, so time is not an issue in my life."*

(3) Health

Three respondents gave mixed responses. A more senior respondent felt that health is not an influence at all: *"My health is of a good standard."*

Another respondent recalled an incentive trip where an active 80 year old incentive traveller joined a trip: *"Interesting enough we had an 80-something year old with us on our recent incentive trip and I was amazed at her level of energy."*

In contrast, a respondent remembered an incentive traveller who had to decline an incentive trip due to health constraints: *"I know of a delegate that, even though she qualified for the incentive trip, could not go with due to her hip problems."*

(4) Life-cycle

Two respondents indicated that having dependents is a huge influence on the decision to return to an incentive destination. One respondent emphasised the fact that children in turn might just not appreciate the value of an international trip given their specific ages: *"I have a five year old son and he, at this stage, will not appreciate a trip to Portugal even though he shows a lot of interest."*

The perspective of another respondent is: *"Kids I feel do not always really appreciate the value of an overseas trip."*

(5) Climate

Respondents were asked about climate as a likely influence on their return intention. Interestingly enough, a respondent displayed a negative perspective towards the climate of a specific incentive destination: *"I will never go back to Vietnam, because it was so hot."*

Another respondent's view of climate is: *"Definitely, climate plays a key factor for me; it mustn't be too hot or too cold. I think that's way I enjoyed Portugal so much, the climate was so temperate except for one day that it was rainy but even that I enjoyed."*

(6) Personality and self-concept

Personality and self-concept are rejected by all respondents as a likely influence. Interestingly enough, one respondent expressed a total opposite opinion and said: *"...getting out of my comfort zone is something that I enjoy tremendously."*

One respondent further added that destinations that are different and unique are preferred, and that this is intriguing and, if possible, will return to places such as Croatia and Vietnam.

(7) Reference groups

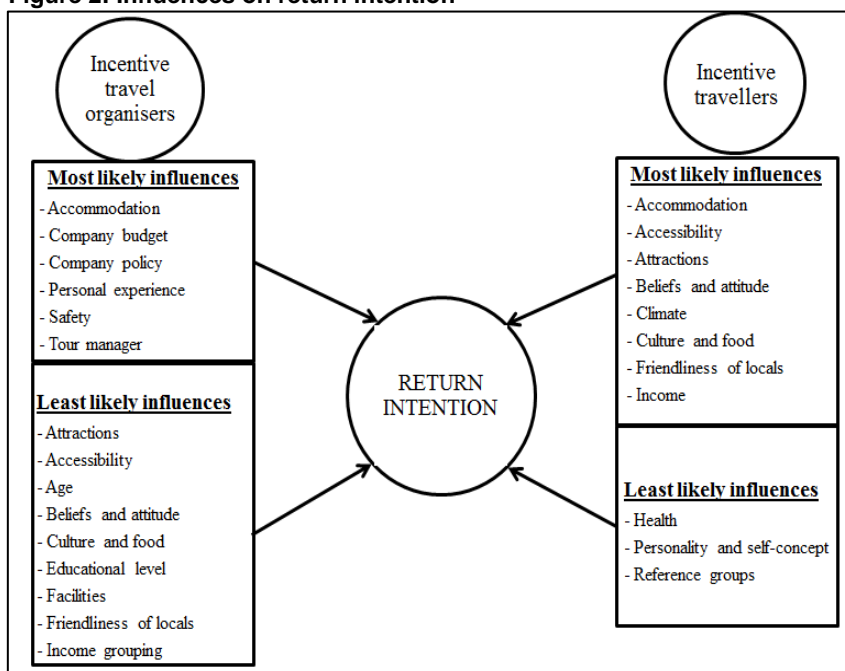
An analysis of the responses that were obtained from the focus group discussions indicated that reference groups are not regarded as likely influences on the decision to return. Both organisations offer their incentive travellers the option of a family member joining the incentive trip at an additional cost. One respondent prefers this option and said: *“I am such a type of person whereby I enjoy taking along someone that can share my experience with me.”*

Another also explained the benefit of having a family member joining an incentive trip as: *“This trip provides us with an opportunity to spend time together, which is not always possible given our hectic schedules.”*

The entire issue of how an incentive trip sparks initial interest in an incentive destination and how it may lead to possible further visits, surfaced during both focus groups. Most respondents agreed that an incentive trip ‘opened their eyes’ to a whole new world and, based on this life changing experience, they would want to return to some of the incentive destinations. It was remarked that *“I am adamant that I must return to Israel. Yet, I don’t know how and I don’t know when but I know I must go back.”*

The results presented above indicate that the findings of this study is in congruence with the findings of other studies presented in literature. What is noticeable is that price did not feature and an explanation for this is that incentive travellers are not accountable for payment, except for expenses of a personal nature. Some constituents are more likely to influence the proclivity of incentive travellers to return to an incentive destination while other constituents are not as likely to be regarded as a strong enough influence (referred to as limitations or barriers in literature). The importance incentive travellers place on the different destination constituents as influences on their proclivity to return an incentive destination initiated the proposal of a configuration to distinguish between influences regarded as most likely (the eight most likely constituents as illustrated in Figure 2) and those regarded as least likely. It should be noted that these constituents are not presented in order of priority or importance, but alphabetically as further intensive research is still required before this can be achieved. The proposed configuration is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Influences on return intention



Managerial implications

Incentive travel planners determine the selection of incentive destinations within the restrictions of company policy and budget, whilst incentive travellers have limited or mostly no influence in the final decision. Remaining up to now was the mystery of the proclivity that incentive travellers would consider returning to a destination previously visited for incentive purposes, especially if they are responsible for their own expenses and at their own time.

There is still no certainty that incentive travel planners would consider sending incentive travellers to a previously visited destination and this aspect was not included in this study. There are numerous other destinations deserving of consideration and this is where destination marketers need to devise focussed marketing strategies and relevant tactical plans to reach this specialised special interest target market.

Travel as a reward (or incentive) surfaced in this study as being a key motivational tool used for encouraging and improving business performance. The purpose of an incentive travel program is to motivate, reward or recognise employees for meeting, achieving or exceeding specific organisational goals. At the heart of any incentive travel program lays the incentive destination, to which an incentive traveller is envisioning the fulfilment of a life-long 'dream'. Hitherto, an incentive destination is not just an amalgam of products and services; it includes a series of constituents moulded into the mind and memory of every incentive traveller. Relevant literature reviewed for the purpose of this study suggest that the experiences gained at an incentive destination directly influence the decision to return to a destination. Return behavioural intention is not always rational and several researchers attempted to discover the reason behind tourists' return proclivity as this could be the key unlocking the secrets to understanding incentive travellers' proclivity to return to an incentive destination.

The qualitative method adopted for this study assisted in unravelling some of the complexities of this phenomenon, as well as ensuring deepness and richness of data regarding the most and least likely constituents influencing the decision to return to an incentive destination.

From the contextual analysis and inferences outlined in this paper, it is suggested that:

- Destination experiences do have an influence on the decision to return to an incentive destination.
- Incentive travel planners are advised to take the most and the least likely constituents into consideration as this could augment the perceived value of incentive trips and destinations as motivator.
- Destination marketers should take cognisance that there are specific constituents that will most likely influence a person's proclivity to return to a previously visited incentive destination in comparison to the least likely constituents. This directly influences destination marketing as the most likely constituents ought to be incorporated into all marketing communication material in an attempt to cultivate destination loyalty and revisit intention. The most likely constituents should also feature in the marketing material used by destination marketers in Africa and South Africa in their endeavours to lure the incentive industry to the magnificent destinations on the African continent.

Conclusion

One method of gaining a competitive advantage in today's global and highly competitive tourism market is through repeat visitation. The results of this study indicate that destination marketers and destination marketing organisations should devise awareness strategies focused on incentive houses and incentive travel planners firstly, and then to consider tempting incentive travellers with reasons for revisiting incentive destinations in their private capacity. Further research could ultimately result in valuable information for destination

marketing and incentive houses for product development purposes, for devising incentive-destination awareness strategies, and even for creating networks and building relationships with incentive travel planners and travellers to capitalise on the benefits of incentive travel and revisitation.

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