Emerging Green Tourists: Their Behaviours and Attitudes

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Introduction

Global concern about environmental sustainability and climate change has exploded in recent years and is now one of the most widespread political and social issues in Australia. The concern about the quality of life for future generations has taken hold and is affecting the way consumers behave. Increasing awareness of the impacts of the use of household products, car emissions, long haul travel and over-development is, in many communities, encouraging consumers to be more cautious about the type of products and services they purchase. There is anecdotal evidence that suggests this behaviour is also transferring to the purchase of tourism products.

For some time the debate about the existence of a Green Consumer has prevailed. The Green Consumer has been described as an individual looking to protect themselves and their world through the power of purchasing decisions (Ottman, 1992). Although Mintel (1994) spoke of a widespread participation in green consumerism this was challenged by Witherspoon (1994) on the basis that around one half of those who claimed to have green values did not translate these into actual purchases. Witherspoon also stated that that very few consumers were consistently environmentally friendly. A problem with much of the research about green consumerism is the complexity surrounding consumer behaviour; the enormity of the range of influences on consumers; and the way these affect individuals over time (Sharpley in Font, 2001). For instance, green consumerism is driven by a number of factors, encompassing cost, purpose, availability, and alternative options.

As the existence of the green consumer is questioned so is the existence of the green tourist (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007). Despite this doubt it is accepted that some tourists have stronger views than others about environmental issues and are also more active in addressing these concerns with regard to how they live their lives. Swarbrooke and Horner (2007) highlight that whilst the idea of green consumers/tourists is acceptable they should not be seen as an homogenous group. Researchers (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2007; McDonald, Oates, Alevizou, Young & Hwang, 2006) have talked about green consumers in terms of shades of green – from 'very dark green' to 'no green at all'. McDonald et al (2006) in their typology of green consumers have distinguished three groups – Translators, Exceptors and Selectors, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Typologies of Green Consumers

Translators	Exceptors	Selectors
For this group, awareness usually translates into action: • They feel very guilty about not doing it before • They gradually include more and more activities • Their concern is often at the level of products rather than companies or industries • They are prepared to make some sacrifices and are open to change if they can see the impact of their actions • Their information seeking is largely passive • Word of mouth and opinion leaders are important to this group • They are uncritical of information sources	Sustainability is a priority. This group have a complex understanding of a wide range of interdependent sustainability ideas: • They are change-seeking • Their information seeking is active, company level and very critical • They are comfortable with non-mainstream outlets, products and information sources BUT: There is one exception to their green lifestyle: • This is usually a conscious exception • It is usually a 'small' exception • During the purchase process for this item they will completely ignore their usual green and/or ethical criteria • They will have a specific justification for this purchase which allows them to be happy with their decision	This group are green or ethical in one aspect of sustainability only - Greenpeace OR recycling OR green energy OR organic: • Probably the most common group • This would explain why green marketing fails and green marketing research can give conflicting results • Support for Peattie's notion of a context dependent portfolio of (possibly inconsistent) purchases • Could be a starting point for the other groups • Information seeking is selective, ad hoc and can be active, depending on the issue

Source: Swarbrooke and Horner, 2007; McDonald, Oates, Alevizou, Young & Hwang, 2006

The different shades or typologies indicate differences in consumers and tourists with regard to awareness and knowledge of green issues, general attitudes towards the environment and priorities in life - such as their health, how they make a living, family commitments and household practices. However, even the dark green consumer only considers green or ethical elements 'for some of their purchases, some of the time' (McDonald et al, 2006)

A key issue for the tourism industry is how the green concerns of consumers correlate to tourists and how the concerns convert to travel or holiday related action. Although many in the tourism industry question whether the environmental concerns of tourists influence decision making there is evidence that some tourists may choose an airline based on their environmental management practices. They may also boycott events involving animal cruelty (for example bull-fights) or campaign against tourism development that destroys wildlife habitats. The level of change varies according to the shades of green mentioned earlier. The very dark green consumers may convert

their beliefs into action by not taking holidays away from home so as to prevent harm to the environment and in doing so do not become tourists. On the other hand the 'not green at all' tourist is likely to show only a passing interest by reading about the environmental issues caused by tourism (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2007).

Green behaviour is determined by a number of factors – information obtained from the media and pressure groups, the amount of disposable income and employment (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2007 and Miller 2003). Green Tourists can be concerned about a range of issues which are summarised in the model shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Issues that May Concern a Green Tourist
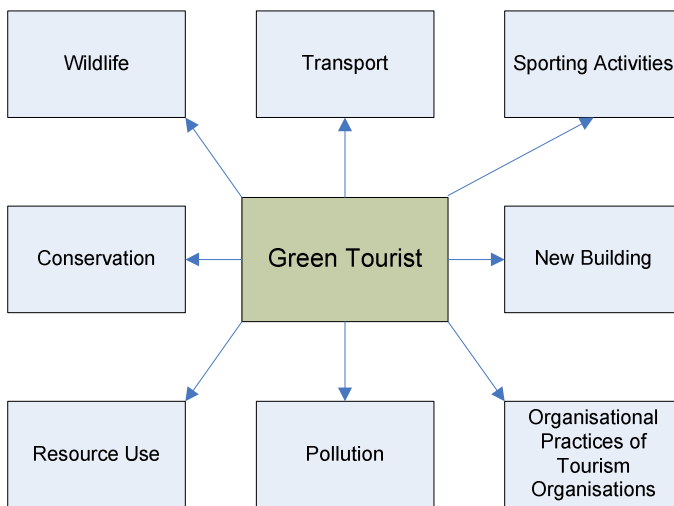
Source: Swarbrooke and Horner, 2007

The concerns are varied and are not necessarily important to all tourists and the influence they have on sustaining the industry is unknown. For years the tourism industry has used a number of mechanisms in an attempt to green operators. There are a range of award schemes and accreditation and certification schemes relating to environmental performance in the tourism industry. These are commonly referred to as 'ecolabels'. Buckley (2002) describes an ecolabel as "one whose content refers principally to the environment". According to Bendell and Font (2004), there has been a huge increase in the last ten years in the range of programmes certifying to sustainability standards. They consider that such programmes are "acknowledged as a valuable tool to define and communicate sustainable and responsible business practice" (Bendell and Font 2004, p.143). However, a counter-argument is put forward by Carrigan and Attalla (2001) who believe that too much information can detract from choice. It is possible that the green tourists (and in particular, those similar to the Selector type) are unable to be focused in their environmental information seeking but that other tourists, such as the Translator type, could be so concerned

about the environment that they cease travel althogether. The specific aims of the study are, therefore, to:

- Test and refine a scale to identify green tourists;

- Develop a profile of Green Tourists with a focus on behaviours and attitudes; and

- Identify how the industry may harness this market.