

Paper for Tourism Recreation Research

Salute to the Sun: an Exploration of UK Yoga Tourist Profiles

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Bios

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Abstract

This paper focuses on exploring yoga tourism as an under researched area where little has been written to date (Ali-Knight, 2009; Lehto, Brown, Chen & Morrison, 2006). Yoga tourism is an emergent niche tourism market (Novelli, 2005) that can be viewed as a subset of wellness or holistic tourism. It reflects consumers' desire for self-improvement and concern for society when choosing a holiday destination (Trauer, 2006) and involves active participation, sharing common functional characteristics in travel motivations and social values related to improving an individual's quality of life (Lehto et al., 2006).

The research was carried out using an on-line survey to members of UK membership based Yoga Associations including YogaScotland and the British Wheel of Yoga. The initial stages of this research, involved an exploratory on-line web search, which revealed that in terms of supply, there are a great variety of destinations, yoga tourism providers, price ranges and activities that are available. The limited literature on the subject provides some information on the profile of these visitors, however a gap has been identified on how the primary motivation for travel affects the choice of destination, type of accommodation, activities and the overall experience of the yoga traveller. Therefore, the results of this study aim to fill this inherent gap and establish an enhanced visitor profile and explore the motivational factors that affect yoga practitioners to participate in yoga tourism activities.

Keywords: Yoga, niche tourism, wellness, marketing, visitor profiles, destination development

Introduction

As little has been written to date about yoga tourism (Smith & Kelly, 2006) this paper provides exploratory research to elicit and identify the essential attributes of this new form of consumer activity and examine UK based yoga tourist behaviour. Smith and Puczko comment on how 'relatively little research has been undertaken about the profiles and

motivations of the so-called health visitors' (Smith & Puczko, 2009, p.132). The yoga tourist is revealed to be a 'special interest person, whose motivation and decision making are primarily determined by their interest in yoga' (Ali-Knight, 2009, p.89). Previous research by Ali-Knight (2009) also identified customer motivations, mapped against McIntosh and Goeldner (1986) and Plog's (1972) tourist typologies, as a key contribution to understanding yoga tourist motivation and building up a greater understanding of yoga tourist profiles.

Several authors also point out the sparse research on the motivations and experiences of tourists participating in alternative forms of tourism, such as yoga tourism (Kelly, 2012; Smith and Puczko, 2009; Gerritsma, 2009; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005). It is equally important for tourism providers as well as destination marketers to understand what motivates tourists to participate in a special form of niche tourism and the relationship between the tourists' profile and the type of vacation they are likely to purchase.

This paper therefore aims to make an active contribution to this under explored, but growing area of work and advance knowledge in areas identified by Lehto et al.'s (2006) research into the yoga tourist. The rise in popularity of yoga based activities will be explored, in particular its relationship with lifestyle and societal pressures, and how this has led to the increased demand for yoga-based holidays and specific tour packages to destinations. Consumer behaviour of UK based yoga tourists, in particular, will be examined.

Yoga tourism within the realm of other types of tourism

Yoga tourism is a new topic in the academic literature and there are only a few studies especially dedicated to exploring this contemporary phenomenon (Ali-Knight, 2009; Lehto et al., 2006; Aggarwal, Guglani & Goel, 2008; Gerritsma, 2008). There is no official organization to promote this form of tourism and limited statistical data is available. Ali-Knight (2009, p.87) explores yoga tourism in the context of wellness and

cultural tourism and suggests the following definition: “travel to a destination to engage in the practice of Yoga and in related activities that will enhance the physical, mental or spiritual wellbeing of the tourist”. The author discusses the potential of yoga tourism to create high yield niche markets that are financially lucrative and enhance destination image. In 2013, the Fitness and Mind & Body sector was worth over \$446 billion (Global Spa & Wellness Economy Monitor, 2014) and in 2016 the ‘Yoga in America’ Study conducted by Yoga Journal and Yoga Alliance revealed yoga practitioners spending over \$16 billion on yoga clothing, equipment, classes and accessories in the last year, up from \$10 billion in 2012. Smith and Puczko (2014) also report that the money spent on yoga tourism activities in Hungary was on average 104 Euros domestically with up to 2100 Euros for overseas trips.

A review of the literature suggests that yoga tourism has been predominantly regarded as a subset of health and wellness tourism, holistic tourism, special interest tourism (SIT), niche tourism, spiritual tourism and cultural tourism (Smith & Puczko, 2009; Smith & Kelly, 2006; Lehto et al., 2006). Recent trends in customer behaviour and lifestyle suggest that there is an increased demand for such alternative and niche forms of tourism (Wellness Tourism Worldwide, 2011) and results suggest that there is enough evidence from a supply, as well as a demand perspective, for this form of tourism to be a subject of independent research.

A considerable body of research exists on wellness tourism. Smith and Puczko (2009) point out that it is rather challenging to clearly define what it entails because terms such as wellness, health, medical and spa are often used interchangeably. Wellness can also mean different things in different countries. For example, in Germany, Switzerland, and Hungary, which are famous for their thermal waters and world famous spa resorts, wellness is mostly associated with body and physical wellbeing. In contrast, in Asian countries, wellness is related to spiritual activities, such as yoga, meditation, and massage, which are integrated into everyday life. However, there is a recent trend towards globalization and hybridization of wellness activities. There is an increased demand for alternative and Eastern medicines from Western societies and some Eastern

philosophies and practices, such as yoga, are a key component of Western wellness products (Yeoman, 2008; Smith & Puczko, 2009; Wellness Tourism Worldwide, 2011).

Most authors agree that wellness tourism is about prevention and promotion of one's health and wellbeing; it requires a holistic approach and should be examined in the triadic relationship between body, mind and spirit. In defining wellness different authors adopt different approaches. Smith and Puczko (2009) stress the complexity of wellness. In their definition equal value is given to the physical, mental, spiritual and social dimension of wellness. Wellness tourism is defined as the leisure pursuit for the purpose of preventing and enhancing one's psychological, spiritual and emotional wellbeing. Muller and Kaufman (2001) point out that wellness tourism requires a comprehensive service package, consisting of physical care, relaxation and mental activities as well as specialized accommodation with trained staff. Smith and Kelly (2006) define wellness as a form of tourism where tourists are purposefully driven by the desire to actively seek enhanced wellness. Thus, they stress the importance of people's proactive approach in participating in such activities.

According to Mintel's (2009) report on the Health and Wellness Holiday market in the UK, wellness activities encompass "fitness, mental and physical relaxation, medical treatments, spa visit, mineral and thermal baths, health farms and surgical recuperation" (Mintel, 2009, p.1). It is evident that the spiritual element is lacking, however further in the report as an example of a UK wellness holiday provider a yoga holiday tour operator is presented. The significant potential for development of these types of holidays was revealed. Key consumers were identified as middle-aged women with high incomes. It was also predicted that with a consumer trend embracing a preoccupation with health, a growth in single parents and in the concept of "me time" the demand for wellness tourism will expand. However, it is still a small-scale niche product.

Wellness Tourism Worldwide (2011) reveals that the opportunity to travel regularly is almost as important to one's quality of life as friends or income. In line with the growing levels of stress that has a negative impact on health, travel can be one tool that can have

a beneficial influence to one's wellbeing. Unfortunately, as pointed in the report, to date there is very little research regarding the relationship between travel, quality of life and wellbeing. In-depth case studies on 12 countries show that in 10 of them wellness is mostly linked with spas, spa/resort, thermal baths or other water based treatment offerings. In Western developed countries, such as Austria, Canada, Hungary, wellness tourism tends to be primary domestic, while in developing countries, such as India and Indonesia it involves international tourists. The report also shows that there is a significant difference between the wellness tourism offering in the representative countries. For example, South Africa promotes wellness as a unique African experience - a massage in the bush or vino therapy, while Indonesia focuses on promoting large and luxury spa resorts and India has been traditionally associated with spiritual and yoga practices. The authors of the report contribute to expanding the definition of wellness tourism to include the authentic/location factor:

“Wellness tourism involves people who travel to a different place to proactively pursue activities that maintain or enhance their personal health and wellbeing, and who are seeking unique, authentic or location-based experiences/therapies not available at home” (Global Spa Summit, 2011, p.20).

Another trend is the further disintegration of wellness tourism into different subsectors such as holistic tourism, yoga and meditation, spa tourism, new age tourism, spiritual tourism etc. (Smith & Puczko, 2009; Wellness Tourism Worldwide, 2011; Global Spa Summit, 2011). Holistic tourism is a journey into greater-self-awareness; it is about escapism and relaxation (Kelly & Smith, 2009). Holistic tourism providers are usually retreat centres where one can immerse oneself into a wide range of activities aimed at developing, maintaining and improving the body, mind. These usually include body pampering and physical activities such as spa treatments, yoga, tai chi, in combination with life coaching or NLP sessions as well as more spiritual activities such as meditation. Holistic or retreat holidays focus on “the self”, but location and environment are also important (Kelly & Smith, 2009). For example, one of the major holistic holiday providers, Skyros Holidays (Skyros, 2015), gives an opportunity for visitors to explore the ancient Greek holistic approach to life while on the island. It is about balancing the needs of the

body with the spiritual, intellectual, cultural, social needs of the individual (Skyros, 2015). Participants can take a range of individual and group courses during their stay and are encouraged to engage in community meetings and open group discussions (ibid.). As Lehto et al. (2006) suggest yoga and wellness tourism share common functional characteristics in travel motivations and social values related to improving an individual's quality of life and involve active participation.

Yoga tourism is also associated with niche tourism and special interest tourism. Niche tourism according to Novelli (2005) is an alternative to mass tourism, which requires a more sophisticated set of practices that distinguish and differentiate tourists. Niche tourism can be special interests, culture and/or activity based trips involving small number of tourists and authentic settings. It can also be defined by where people go.

The attempt to achieve better health while holidaying, through activities such as yoga and meditation, has been taken to a new level with the distinct niche in the tourist industry of medical tourism (Connell, 2005). Defined as 'travel often long distances to overseas countries to obtain medical, dental and surgical care, while simultaneously being holidaymakers' (Connell, 2005, p. 1094) tourism also often involves relatives rather than themselves but most patients are able to sample tourist experiences pre or post treatment. Medical tourism grew dramatically as a result of the high cost of treatments in some developed countries; long waiting lists; cultural, family and language reasons; restrictive regulatory structures in the generating countries and the relative affordability of air travel, accommodation and treatment at the host country which is often a relatively exotic destination, particularly in Asian countries such as India, Thailand and Singapore where medical care has been linked to tourism and nearby beaches and attractions (Hall, 2011). A recent report (Youngman, 2016) however shows that global medical tourism is static and shows few signs of growth. What is changing rapidly is each country's share of the total, and the type of medical tourist they are attracting, Domestic medical tourism is increasing, while health and wellness tourism is growing each year as there is further demand for an understanding of health that focuses on wellness and prevention as well as curing illness (Hall, 2011).

Some authors also explore yoga tourism in the context of spiritual tourism. Smith and Puczko (2009) point out that spiritual tourism is a quest for enlightenment with or without a religious affiliation. However, it often includes rituals, ceremonies, and traditions that derive from different religions. Visitors with non-religious motivations can attend courses such as yoga, meditation, chanting which can lead to a spiritual enlightenment. Smith and Puczko (2009) blend yoga with meditation tourism and define it as a sub-sector of holistic tourism but also spiritual tourism. The authors note that yoga is more of a spiritual practice than a fitness routine that can lead to self-knowledge and create harmony. They make a distinction between a yoga holiday and a spiritual retreat, the first being more enjoyable and relaxed and the latter being more intense and “hard core”. Sharpley and Sundaram (2005) argue that tourism can be considered as a modern spiritual experience and a sacred journey. In their study on motivations and experiences of tourists visiting an ashram in India, they reveal that regardless of the initial motives for visit: spiritual enlightenment, cultural interests, curiosity or yoga and meditation practice, the Ashram had provided some spiritual experience or fulfilment for all of them. Aggarwal et al. (2008) likewise explored the motivations and experiences of foreign visitors in Rishikesh, India – “the yoga capital of the world”. Their findings confirm that there is a continuum of spirituality inherent in tourism, which is related to tourists’ experiences rather than initial motivations.

Yoga Tourism Supply

Vivekananda laid the groundworks for Yoga in the West at the end of the 19th century, but piqued academic curiosity more so than general interest. It took until the mid 20th century for Yoga to become generally popular, accompanied by rising general interest in Eastern cultures. Though still regarded by some as a somewhat marginal and unusual pursuit, the practice of Modern Yoga has achieved widespread popularity (Singleton & Byrne, 2008)

Currently over 300 million people practice yoga, accounting for 4% of the worldwide population (Shift, 2016) and in Britain, up to half a million people regularly practice yoga, according to the British Wheel of Yoga, the discipline's governing body. New studios are opening all the time and the number of teachers is growing by at least 10% a year (The Independent, 2009). Originally an ancient Indian belief system, yoga has now become part of Britain's mainstream health and fitness sector. The growing popularity of yoga as a gentle and holistic way to exercise, relax and disengage from working life has stimulated demand for industry services in recent years and has pushed the industry's activities into mainstream society (IBISWorld, 2016). This growth can also be attributed to a number of reasons (Shift, 2016). Yogis (people who practice yoga) are incredibly passionate about their cause, eager to get as many people involved as possible. Healthy lifestyles have become a recent trend. With the rise of veganism, gluten and dairy free diets, organic cafes and the like popping up all over the country, yoga fits perfectly into this new trend. IBISWorld's market research report also highlights the growth of yoga studios in the UK as 2.3% annual growth from 2012 onwards. With over 15 000 people working in the industry, the majority of organisations are small owner-operated businesses, mainly due to the inherent nature of the products and services provided. There are low barriers to entering the Yoga Studios industry, with anyone that is appropriately trained in the field able to provide classes as long as they have a client base. Jonathan Satin, manager of Triyoga at Primrose Hill in London – the biggest yoga centre in the UK, confirms that the interest in yoga has been growing steadily. "When we started we had roughly 65-70 classes a week. Now we have over a 100. ...we believe the growth will continue. If you look to the American market, yoga is increasing year on year by 25% -- a phenomenal growth rate." (Fox, 2005).

In parallel to the interest and growth in yoga has been the diversity and different forms of yoga that are emerging. Some of the most common styles of yoga include Iyengar (with a focus on correct alignment in the poses); Asthanga (a more rigorous form of yoga which follows a set sequence of poses practiced in class or traditionally alone in Mysore style); Hatha (physical practice of yoga often in a gentler format), Kundalini (designed to awaken energy in the spine) and Yin Yoga (a more restorative style where

poses can be held for up to 10 minutes). Many hybrid forms of yoga have also emerged as a response to Western demand and include coupling other activities with asanas to bring additional agility, endurance, and fun. Common hybrids include Aerial Yoga executing poses whilst suspended from a cloth hammock ; Yoga Sculpt incorporating weight bearing exercises and Hot Yoga combining heat of up to 105 degrees with a vinyasa flow class. Maddox (2015) questions the authenticity as many of these hybrids are creations of Western post modernity and do not conform to the traditional dictates of yoga allowing students to experience authenticity, health and wholeness.

Pritchard et al. (2011) stated that there is an unfortunate dearth of academic writing in this area, particularly one that challenges 'the complex emotional and passionate geographies from the knowledge worlds created in the field' (p.12.). Little has also been debated about the transformative power of yoga tourism, especially how the communities they visit and engage with influence tourists and how their combined travel experiences and yoga practice stimulates metaphysical change in both themselves and their surroundings (Ponder & Holladay, 2013). Yoga has the capacity to change this suppression of the emotional in tourism and to act as a catalyst for open-mindedness helping to build psychological and spiritual capital generating the yoga travellers desire to engage their social networks in transformative practices. The transformative power of yoga tourism can manifest itself in a desire to actively engage in the building of Bourdieu's (1986) positive capitals (psychological, emotional and spiritual). Ryan and Deci (2000) comment how Yoga Tourists seeking 'self' gravitate towards destinations that can help to fulfil what they feel is missing from their lives and fill it with a 'higher level of consciousness' and to engage with creative communities and like minded people (Florida, 2003). Yoga tourism can help one to connect the mind-spirit-body nexus and look at oneself holistically (Kelly & Smith, 2009).

Stebbins (2004) shows that leisure can range from casual, fleeting engagements, to intensive short term projects and to more serious lifetime commitments that require a great deal of time, money, and energy. Indeed, Stebbins shows that leisure is anything but "trivial" to the more serious and devoted participants of, for example, yoga. Using Stebbin's (2004) continuum from 'casual' to 'serious' leisure – the committed, serious

yoga aficionados can visit various spiritual yoga retreats or ashrams where they can improve their technique or enhance their spirituality (Smith & Puczko, 2009). There are innumerable ashrams in India ranging from the home of a guru to large purpose built establishments, which attract a significant number of yoga devotees. Rishikesh has been promoted as a “the getaway to the spiritual hearth of India” (Le Hunte, 2004) and it is a popular destination to study classical Indian yoga and Hinduism. The town is packed with ashrams to house the many visiting pilgrims where students need to commit to a visit of at least fifteen days or more and participate in compulsory yoga and meditation classes (Smith & Puczko, 2009). Rishikesh also hosts an International Yoga Festival where visitors can learn more about yoga through a programme of workshops, lectures, and live demonstrations. Gerritsma (2009) also talks about the growing demand for yoga activities in other markets such as the Netherlands. For example, yoga weekends or yoga retreats to countries like Spain, Greece and Indonesia have been actively promoted by specialized Dutch wellness tour operators and have become a continuous lifestyle choice beyond fitness centres and yoga schools.

As previously mentioned, not only is place important for wellness tourism but also the destination. Destination literature on yoga tourism tends to focus on the following key areas – meditation tourism; holistic tourism; spa/health tourism and medical tourism (Ponder & Holladay, 2013). Authenticity, traditions, lifestyle and natural assets shape the wellness tourism product and services (Wellness Tourism Worldwide, 2011). India, as the previous examples reveal, with its ancient healing practices, alternative therapies, spiritual and yoga traditions, combined with exotic climate, has become a hotspot for holistic and spiritual tourism. A recent study on wellness tourism in Kerala revealed that the city has the potential to become a Global Wellness Hub based on its authenticity, rich Ayurvedic heritage and multifaceted attractions (U & Joseph, 2012). Goa, which has been traditionally famous for its beach resorts, has also started to promote yoga, medical and pilgrimage tourism in order to diversify its portfolio and attract more responsible travellers (De Abreu, 2008). Yoga tourism offers a unique marketing opportunity for India, and other destinations, to establish high yield niche markets and extend the touristic season (Ali-Knight, 2009).

Yoga Tourism Demand

There are a number of factors that underlie the diversification of tourism and the rise of new forms such as yoga tourism. In order to better understand people's motivations in participating in this type of holiday, it is important to look at the lifestyle changes that affect contemporary tourism demand.

There is a general agreement in the tourism literature that the modern tourist is looking for an experience-based vacation that involves active participation and opportunities for personal development (Douglas, Douglas & Derrett, 2001; Trauer, 2006; Lehto et al., 2006; FutureFoundation, 2012). Modern tourists not only look for escapism and relaxation while on holiday, but they also want to rethink, recharge and engage in an educational experience (Ali-Knight, 2009). As tourists are becoming more experienced, better-educated and informed, special interest holidays and themed vacations are becoming increasingly popular. In this context, yoga tourism provides opportunities for people to pursue their interest beyond the studio or gym and explore different cultures and places while practicing yoga.

Additionally, in line with global trends in Western societies such as an aging population, growing levels of stress causing sleeping disorders and obesity, lack of physical movement in the work place, people are becoming more concerned about their health and are looking for alternative methods to improve their wellbeing and it is the medical benefits of yoga including increased flexibility and strength; boosted immunity; a lowering of blood pressure and the heart rate and released and reduced tension and stress that has become increasingly recognised (Yeoman, 2008). As Smith and Puczko (2009) point out, nowadays people are prepared to travel long haul to experience different forms of health and wellness activities, such as yoga and ayurveda.

Media attention is another major factor for increased demand for yoga tourism. Douglas et al. (2001) mention about an element of fashion or trendsetting in consumers

motivations for special interest tourism. Trauer (2006) explains in more detail the triangular relationship of supply, demand and media when conceptualizing Special interest tourism. She argues that tourism brochures, magazines, books, film and TV, create images of what is fashionable and modern so tourists envisage themselves in place and action. Smith and Puczko (2009) discuss the celebrity factor in yoga tourism and how famous people such as Madonna and Sting have become ambassadors of eastern religions and practices. The movie adaptation of the international bestseller “Eat, Pray, Love” by Elisabeth Gilbert inspired many westerners to embark on a journey of self-discovery to India and Bali and follow in the footsteps of the author. The movie and the novel had a great impact on the number of tourists coming to Bali to practice yoga and meditation (Time, 2010). Gerritsma (2009) also reveals that yoga has become a lifestyle product in the Netherlands under the influence of new media and advertisements.

Yoga Tourists’ Motivations

Several authors point out the sparse research on the motivations and experiences of tourists participating in alternative forms of tourism (Kelly, 2012; Smith & Puczko, 2009; Gerritsma, 2009; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005). It is equally important for tourism providers as well as destination marketers to understand what motivates tourists to participate in a special form of niche tourism and the relationship between the tourists’ profile and the type of vacation they are likely to buy. Market segmentation is essential to gain knowledge about existing and potential visitors and will facilitate the choice of marketing tools and channels to attract target markets (Swarbrooke & Horner, 1999).

Before exploring the tourism literature on the topic, it is worth looking at what motivates people to practice yoga in the first place. In a qualitative study on yoga practitioners in Germany, Henrichsen-Schrembs and Versteeg (2011) developed a typology for understanding and categorizing the motivations of participants in yoga practice. Four different types of students were identified: *the pragmatist* – people who practice yoga to remain physically fit, for relaxation, and for stress reduction; *the explorer* – people who practice yoga not only for physical and mental wellness but also to foster self-

development and self-exploration; *the self-helper* – people who practice yoga in a therapeutic way as a result of negative life events; and *the mystic* – people who have subscribed to yoga as a worldview or as a form of spirituality, and who often become yoga teachers themselves. Connecting these typologies with the two main types of yoga tourism, one can assume that the pragmatist will be more likely to participate in a yoga holiday while that mystic will be fascinated by a yoga retreat or an ashram in India. Conversely, Sharpley and Sundaram (2005) revealed that the majority of visitors to an Indian ashram were not real “devotees” but rather tourist trail followers who were visiting out of curiosity or media influence.

Lehto et al. (2006) used quantitative methods to assess yoga tourists’ motivations and to develop a profile of the typical yoga tourist. They discovered that the motivations for participating in yoga holidays are multidimensional with the top five being:

- to renew myself
- to relax
- to be more flexible in body and mind
- to let go of stress from a busy life
- to help me gain a sense of balance

The study results also proved that there is a direct correlation between levels of involvement with yoga and people’s propensity to travel as yoga tourists. As the involvement level increases, tourists are more likely to travel for yoga as a primary purpose for trip. Finally, the research shows the typical yoga tourist as being predominantly professional females, aged 35-54, with high levels of education and higher than average income. They tend to be spiritual but not religious, interested in vegetarianism and organic food as well as alternative medicines.

Kelly and Smith (2009) describe the profile of the typical holistic tourist based on a research on over 500 holistic centres, surveys with practitioners and tourists, and participant observation. The most common motivations for holistic tourism were “to unwind and distress, to improve health, and to improve [their holistic] practice” (Kelly & Smith, 2009, p.80). They confirm Lehto et al.’s (2006) findings showing that holistic

tourists are most commonly professional females aged 30-50, highly educated with a salary to match.

Ali-Knight (2009) identified through discussions with yoga tourism operators the following customer motivations: *physical motivators* such as losing weight or improving flexibility; *cultural motivators* related to engaging with the principles of Yoga and experiencing different cultures; *interpersonal motivators* such as desire to meet new people, desire for escapism or spiritual healing; and status and prestige – yoga is fashionable, it is an individualistic, personal experience. Results from a recent study on retreat visitors experiences and motivations suggests that there is a significant difference between retreat visitors and general visitors in terms of what are often the very personal experiences encountered (Kelly, 2012).

Yoga tourism could be viewed as a stage on the journey to self-actualization or fulfilment (Maslow, 1943) and could also be placed along Pine and Gilmore's (1999) experience economy continuum as an immersive and fulfilling experience. They discuss how educational events, like studying yoga, involve more active participation but participants are still more outside the event than totally immersed in the experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Whilst travelling in the tourism destination the yoga tourists develop a heightened awareness, experience and knowledge (Ponder & Holladay, 2013). This can lead to searching out escapist experiences, which although they can entertain and teach just as well as educational events can, also involve greater customer immersion leading to enhanced engagement.

A gap in the research has been identified on how the primary motivation for travel affects the choice of destination, type of accommodation, activities and the overall experience of the yoga traveller. Therefore, this study will aim to fill this gap and explore in-depth the motivational factors that affect yoga practitioners in their decisions to participate in yoga tourism activities.

Research approach

The consumer behaviour of yoga tourists was examined to see how motivations and expectations are being met at the host destination and to try and establish a yoga tourist visitor profile. The initial stages of this research, involved an exploratory on-line web search in December 2015 using the keywords yoga AND holiday which returned over 14,000,000 results and revealed a number of international and domestic tour operators who promote yoga holidays and retreats revealing the breadth and diversity of the product. A sample of these tourism products that are characteristic of the type of operators and offerings being promoted on-line are discussed within the findings.

The limited academic and practitioner based research in this area however has led to a focus on primary research methods. A quantitative research approach was decided for in order to reach a wider sample of yoga tourists and generate the ability to ask a series of questions relating to the quality, impacts and perceptions of respondents as suggested by Fox, Gouthro, Morakabati, and Brackstone (2004). It was decided to use an on-line survey and in designing the questionnaire the authors looked to the key findings in the literature review to help frame questions and inform the flow and structure of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into different sections examining the respondents demographic profile; the length of time and frequency of yoga practice; where they had attended a yoga trip; a series of questions highlighting the importance of yoga in their life; their main motivations for taking a yoga trip; the importance of key factors such as climate, safety, location, activities and health when travelling; their travel habits (i.e. travelling independently or as part of a group) and any constraints to engaging in yoga tourism activity. Examining the value and meaning of the holiday to the yoga tourist is critical and the questions also aimed to better understand their travel philosophies and segment the market so that specific commentaries could be observed (Smith, 2012). Finally, respondents were asked if they would be interested in engaging in future research by participating in an in depth interview at a later date.

The questionnaire was pilot tested with 8 participants of one of the authors' yoga class and then any suggested amendments to improve the readability and understanding were

made. As one of the authors is an active member of UK based yoga associations, collaboration with YogaScotland and the British Wheel of Yoga enabled the dissemination of the on line survey to their members. Members of these two organisations formed the majority of the questionnaire respondents (53% and 36% respectively). Other UK based yoga associations, such as the Yoga Alliance, Independent Yoga Network and the Association of Yoga Studies were also contacted but as there were no personal affiliations to these organisations there was a lower response rate (11%). The dominance of respondents from Scotland was a research limitation and could have biased the sample, however although living in Scotland many respondents had also engaged in yoga tourism activities elsewhere in the UK and overseas, as discussed later.

One hundred and seventy responses were gained and an in depth statistical analysis of the survey data was completed using SPSS version 20. This analysis mainly employed two-sided Pearson's correlations comparing frequencies across variables and where appropriate two sided Fischer's Exact tests.

Research Findings

Overview

After collating and analysing the data, the main trends and findings that emerged were that the majority of the respondents saw yoga as being an essential aspect of their life and that those who practised more regularly were more likely to have participated in a yoga trip. For these participants yoga was seen as being the absolutely central feature to their yoga tourism experience and that good and experienced yoga teachers were a prerequisite when choosing a yoga trip.

Exploratory research via a web based search in December 2015 using the keywords yoga AND holiday returned over 14,000,000 results demonstrating the huge variation in offerings. The search reveals that yoga tourism activities were being offered across a wide range of geographic locations in both established tourism destinations and emerging

markets. A range of established international and domestic tour operators were offering yoga holidays and retreats as well as cruise operators and independent travel operators. They are also being offered across a range from 5* accommodation to more standard packages. This simple overview of the web information suggests that the yoga tourism product is not homogeneous; there is a significant variation in destinations, activities, price range and level of involvement. A yoga retreat is based on the group experience, which can often be rigorous and challenging. Alternatively, a yoga vacation is described as an “all-encompassing sensory experience”, where students spend plenty of time on the yoga matt but can also eat great food, explore the city, go hiking or do other outdoor activities. The schedule is more flexible and people have the opportunity to pursue their own personal interests. Experiences vary, Essential Escapes (2015) promote yoga vacations as a 5 star luxury experience in top resorts in the Seychelles, Mauritius, India, Thailand, Spain and Portugal. The price range varies between £2000 and £6000 for seven nights. The package usually includes ayurvedic and spa treatments, massages, water sports, consultations and yoga sessions. These types of packages are more personalized, adapted to one’s individual needs and taste, providing more flexibility and choice. Yoga can also be promoted in a package with other wellness, adventure, spiritual or luxury activities and products. In the Middle East and North Africa yoga holidays are combined with desert safaris and camps, camel rides, trekking with the Bedouins or surfing (Eat.Pray.Move, 2015; Boabab travel, 2015; Responsible travel, 2015; Errant surf, 2015). Combined packages are appealing to those who want to use yoga to relax or warm up for other sports. Recently, yoga themed cruises offered by luxury cruise lines such as Crystal Cruises and Star Clippers have become increasingly popular. Crystal’s Theme Cruises programme for 2016 include “Mind, Body & Spirit” itineraries in Australia, Indonesia and the Caribbean which feature yoga classes several times a day, dance classes, plus wellness lectures by celebrity speakers. Guests have full access to the ship’s facilities, including well-equipped fitness centres, personal trainers, low fat menu options and a luxury spa (Crystal Cruises, 2015).

Further details into the yoga tourist profile, attitudes and motivations will be discussed in the following sections.

Yoga retreat tourist's profile

The majority of respondents to the survey were female (89%) and this profile is in line with previous studies on wellness and spa tourists (Ispa 2001; Smith & Puckzo 2008; Lehto et al. 2006; Kelly & Smith, 2009). These previous studies have also suggested that retreat tourists are slightly skewed to the older age ranges and this again equates to the study responses which show a stronger weighting to these age ranges.

Table 1. Age profile of respondents

There was little variation in marital status with 49% of respondent's married, 51% single including 12% who were divorced, 3% widowed and 2% separated. In terms of working status the respondents profile was as follows. Surprisingly only 15% of respondents were retired or a Yoga Teacher with the majority in full time employment and a small number who were students (3.5%) This profile taken together with the gender split is consistent with Mintel's (2009) report on the Health and Wellness Holiday market and Lehto et al. (2006) and Kelly and Smith's (2006) research that all identified the key customers of Yoga tourism being middle aged women with high incomes.

Table 2. Working status of respondents

The data showed that there was a high level of long-term commitment to yoga practice among respondents with 61% having studied for over ten years. 73% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that yoga had become an essential aspect of their life and for 61% yoga was 'a central part of my life'. Employing Pearson's chi-square test also demonstrated that yoga teachers and the retired were more likely to have studied yoga for longer than students or working individuals. ($p = 0.00$). It is a limitation of this research that more detail was not captured on the working status of respondent to allow a more sophisticated analysis to take place.

Table 3. Length of time studying yoga

At the same time there was a strong commitment to regular yoga practice with 63% practicing three days a week or more, 23% practicing every day. Employing Pearson's chi-square test demonstrated a highly significant relationship, in that, the longer an individual had studied yoga the higher the frequency of their practice ($p = 0.000$).

Table 4. Frequency of yoga practice

Respondents also highlighted that yoga had become an essential aspect of their life as shown in table 5. As highlighted in the literature review previous research by Lehto et al. (2006) would suggest that those who have a high involvement with yoga, such as this sample, are more likely to travel as yoga tourists. This, taken alongside the fact that 15% of the sample were Yoga Teachers suggests that a significant number of respondent would be characterised by Henrichsen-Schrembs and Versteeg (2011) as mystics in that they are likely to have subscribed to yoga as a worldview or as a form of spirituality, and are likely to have become yoga teachers.

Table 5. Attitudes to yoga

53% of the respondents were also actively engaged in other exercise activities as shown in table 6. This reinforces the results of the web search, which revealed yoga holidays were often coupled with sports such as surfing, horse riding and cycling.

Table 6. Other exercise activities undertaken by respondents

60% of respondents had been on a Yoga retreat. A Chi-square test ($p = 0.005$) demonstrated that people who practiced more regularly were more likely to go on a yoga trip. However even within those who had not been on a retreat 90% indicated that they would consider taking a Yoga trip in the future. When asked across a range of factors what would be the main motivations for taking a yoga trip the highest responses

were 67% for 'increasing my yoga knowledge' and 64% for 'gaining a deeper understanding of yoga practice'. This emphasises the educational component of the yoga tourism experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) and the strong motivation amongst individuals to expand their knowledge and develop their practice through the yoga tourism experience (Lehto et al. 2006; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005)

Table 7. Motivations for taking a yoga trip

Respondents were then asked how important a range of factors were as key aspects of a yoga trip. The respondents with 86% strongly agreeing and the other 14% agreeing, overwhelming highlighted, that good and experienced teachers were the main factor when choosing a trip. The only other factor that came across strongly was healthy food with 95% strongly agreeing or agreeing (51% and 44% respectively) that this was a key factor. These two factors were some way ahead of a safe destination as a factor (38% strongly agreed and 47% agreed). This again links to the previous finding and stresses the importance of the yoga journey as one of enlightenment and engagement with knowledge, Henrichsen-Schrembs and Versteeg's (2011) yoga 'explorers'.

Table 8. Important factors in choosing a yoga trip

Responses were also asked about a number of factors related to the characteristics of a yoga trip. Several provided some contradictory responses. 95% were open to new experiences and destinations but at the same time 60% were either neutral or disagreed with the statement that they would prefer to visit new places. 79% preferred to have some freedom to do their own thing, however, 57% preferred an organised trip, while at the same time 66% were neutral or disagreed with the statement that they would prefer to travel in a group rather than on their own. A less contradictory result was gained when 71% indicated that they would like to interact with locals and learn about their culture. Finally a number of factors provided a consistent picture that yoga was absolutely central to their yoga tourism experience. 70% were neutral or disagreed with yoga only being an activity rather than the whole purpose of their trip while 68% agreed

or strongly agreed that their stay should be at an all-inclusive yoga retreat. Previous research has tended to concentrate on consumer motivations rather than exploring factors that have an impact on the choice of yoga trip. However the finding that 70% were neutral or disagreed with yoga only being an activity rather than the whole purpose of their trip is consistent with Kelly and Smith's (2009) finding that the most common motivation for holistic tourism was for participants to improve their holistic practice.

Table 9. Key characteristics of a yoga trip

Respondents highlighted two major constraints that would restrict their engagement in any type of yoga tourism. These were finance identified by 80% and time identified by 55%.

Table 10. Constraints to engagement in yoga tourism

Pearson's chi-square tests were employed across a number of items on the survey to establish whether there were any significant relationships existing across participants' characteristics and their preferences in terms of a yoga experience.

Length of study and frequency of practice

The longer an individual has practiced yoga the less likely they are to see a wide range of activities as being important ($p = 0.022$). Individuals who had studied for over 10 years were more likely to see a secluded and unspoiled place as important ($p=0.015$) and individuals who practiced more regularly were significantly more likely to think that new places were not a key factor in a yoga tourism experience ($p = 0.003$). They were also less likely to see the comfort of the accommodation and facilities as being important. Ease of access, however was more important to them than those who had studied for a shorter period of time ($p = 0.020$). The core product of the yoga practice was obviously key here, rather than the ancillary tourism products at the destination.

Previous experience of a yoga trip.

Individuals who had previous experience of being on a yoga trip were significantly less likely to see cultural attractions as being very important or important ($p = 0.001$) and they were less likely to want to interact with locals and learn about their culture ($p = 0.010$). These individuals were also more likely to see yoga as the whole purpose of their trip rather than just an activity that was available ($p = 0.037$). They were also significantly less likely to prefer travelling in a group rather than on their own ($p = 0.001$). It is perhaps not surprising that some continuity is emerging from these findings given that it has already been established that the longer an individual has studied yoga the higher the frequency of their practice and that the more frequently an individual practices the more likely they are to have been on a yoga trip (Gerritsma, 2009). For these individuals yoga has become an essential aspect of their life and therefore appears to be the main focus of their motivation to participate and other factors related to the experience are of much less significance. This is consistent with the default position that any yoga trip has to have good and experienced teachers.

Some differences do emerge however based on working status and marital status.

Working status

To establish any significant trends related to working status two sided Fishers exact tests were employed. These tests demonstrated that retired individuals are more likely than others to see a popular yoga destination as being important or very important ($p = 0.008$), as well as, easy to access destination ($p = 0.011$). Retired individuals are also more likely to agree or strongly agree that they would prefer to stay in an all-inclusive yoga retreat ($p = 0.010$). Working individuals are more likely than others to agree or strongly agree that they are open to new experiences and destinations. ($p = 0.033$) They are also more likely to prefer visiting new places than repeat visiting the same place, whereas yoga teachers are less likely to prefer visiting new places ($p = 0.010$).

Marital status

Pearson's chi-square tests were employed to establish whether there were any significant relationships existing relating to marital status. Married individuals are more likely to see the comfort of the accommodation and facilities as important or very important ($p = 0.036$) and to see easy to access to the destination as important or very important. ($p = 0.019$). They are also more likely than singles to see staying in an all-inclusive yoga retreat as important or very important. ($p = 0.019$). Singles however are more likely to see being in contact with nature as important or very important. ($p = 0.022$) and are more likely to want to interact with locals and learn about their culture. ($p = 0.036$)

Conclusions

This research has shown that individuals who engage in yoga travel and holidays are a diverse group of tourists (Kelly, 2012). Previous findings have shown yoga tourists to be a subset of wellness tourism and mainly concerned with developing or maintaining a sense of wellbeing. In terms of demographics, Lehto et al.'s (2006) findings were validated with 50% of respondents being 35-54 years old. Findings suggests a progression in terms of yoga tourism activity and interest from a pure holiday and tourist experience with yoga being an ancillary motivation to a more immersive retreat type activity with yoga practice at the core (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Yoga tourists could be seen to progress along a continuum with the majority starting as a Yoga Novice, moving through to Yoga Developer and then a smaller number becoming Yoga Activists/Advocates.

Figure 1: Yoga Tourism Continuum

For the **Yoga Novice**, yoga is only one activity rather than the whole purpose of their trip. Predominantly they are looking for a holiday and travel experience in a typical tourist destination. Comfort in terms of location, accommodation and facilities is more important to them than the yoga practice. The **Yoga Developer** lies on a continuum

between the Yoga Novice and the Yoga Activist and can be equated to Henrichsen-Schrembs and Versteeg (2011) '*explorer*'. Although they may desire to learn more and immerse themselves in the yoga journey, this may be constrained due to family commitments and other time and financial pressures that mitigate against them being able to display a Yoga Activists profile. Finally, the **Yoga Activist/Advocate** sees yoga as an essential and important part of their life. These are Henrichsen-Schrembs and Versteeg (2011) '*Mystics*'. They are most likely to have previously been on a yoga trip and have studied and practiced yoga for longer. They see yoga as an essential component of the tourism activity and seek out secluded, unique and unspoilt locations to gain a deeper understanding of their practice. They often travel to seek spirituality and enhanced mental well-being (Lehto et al., 2006). Spiritual enlightenment is a key part of their yoga experience. This confirmed previous research (Ali-Knight, 2009; Maddox, 2015; Pritchard et al. 2011) showing individuals who are more committed to yoga are interested in attaining an authentic yoga experience and engaging with the local community. Seeking self-fulfilment is a key part of the tourism experience and a higher level of consciousness and change is sought through their involvement in yoga tourism, and their tourism experiences may also have transformative potential for the destination. These yogis invigorated by their experiences are more likely to share their experiences and knowledge within their social networks, once returning home (Ponder & Holiday, 2013).

Developing an understanding of these profiles is important for destinations engaged in wellness and yoga tourism activities as well as for individual tour operators, such as those discussed earlier, looking to specialise in yoga holidays and retreats. Valuable information is revealed in terms of location, facilities, type of accommodation, yoga practice and additional activities. This information is important both in terms of future product development and tailoring holiday and retreat activities to meet the needs of their target market and also in terms of yoga tourism supply. The key markets identified above can be more effectively targeted through marketing and promotional activity that appeals to both the practical, psychological and spiritual needs of the tourist. The rise of digital marketing and especially the use of social media and blogs is a cost effective and powerful tool for yoga tourism providers (Brynn, 2016; Klein, 2010).

This research is limited however as the sample concerns individuals who are members of a yoga association so obviously have more of an investment, and are more engaged, in yoga activities. It would be useful to follow up the survey data with additional research involving in depth interviews across the 3 typologies and also with more casual yoga tourists.

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Table 1. Age profile of respondents

Age category	%
18 to 24	2.3
25 to 34	13.5
35 to 44	23.4
45 to 54	26.3
Older than 55	34.5

Source: Authors

Table 2. Working status of respondents

Working status	%
Student	3.5
Yoga teacher	15
Retired	15
In other employment	66.5

Source: Authors

Table 3. Length of time studying yoga

Years Practicing Yoga	%
0-2 years	11.63
3-5 years	11.63
5-10 years	15.12
More than 10 years	61.63

Source: Authors

Table 4. Frequency of yoga practice

Frequency of practice	%
1-3 days a week	37%
3-6 days a week	40%

Every day	23%
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Source: Authors

Table 5. Attitudes to yoga

	Strongly agree
Yoga has become an essential aspect of my life	73%
Yoga has added richness to my life	61%
I attach significant importance to spirituality and mental health	54%
I attach great importance to having a healthy lifestyle	52%
Yoga has enhanced my self-image	49%
I regularly attend yoga events, workshops to increase my knowledge of yoga	46%
Through perseverance, I have consistently managed to improve my yoga practice	45%
I share the same way of thinking with other yoga practitioners	28%
I practice yoga mainly as a way of taking care of my body	27%

Source: Authors

Table 6. Other exercise activities undertaken by respondents

Of those that engage in other exercise/activities these include:	% of respondents who responded positively to this question
Exercise Classes	39.78
Running	33.33
Pilates	24.73
Dance	22.58
Thai Chi	13.98
Team Sports	4.31
Martial Arts	3.23

Source: Authors

Table 7. Motivations for taking a yoga trip

To increase my yoga knowledge	68%
To have a deeper understanding of yoga practice	64%
To enhance mental well-being	48%

To interact with people with similar interests	47%
To let go of stress from a busy life	44%
To renew myself	42%
To seek an authentic yoga experience	40%
To engage in yoga philosophy	38%
To relax	37%
To get away from daily routine	35%
To gain a sense of balance	30%
To enjoy yoga as a fun activity	25%

Source: Authors

Table 8. Important factors in choosing a yoga trip

	Very important/important
Good and experienced teachers	100%
Healthy food	94%
Safe destination	86%
Be in contact with nature	78%
Beauty of location	77%
Comfort (accommodation, facilities etc.)	71%
Good weather	66%
Easy to access destination	65%
Secluded and unspoiled place	59%
Locally run	42%
Spas, alternative health treatments, detox	34%
Wide range of activities (hiking, cooking, diving, painting etc.)	25%
Cultural attractions (museums, galleries, historical buildings etc.)	21%
Popular yoga destination	10%

Source: Authors

Table 9. Key characteristics of a yoga trip

	Strongly agree/agree	Neutral/disagree
I am open to new experiences and destinations	95%	5%
I would prefer having some freedom to do my own thing	79%	21%

I would like to interact with locals and learn about their culture	71%	29%
I would stay in an all-inclusive yoga retreat	68%	32%
I would prefer an organized trip so I do not have to worry about anything	57%	43%
I would prefer visiting new places than repeating the same place	40%	60%
I would prefer travelling in a group than on my own	35%	66%
I would prefer yoga as an activity than the whole purpose of my trip	30%	70%

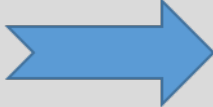
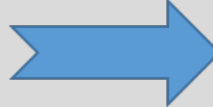
Source: Authors

Table 10. Constraints to engagement in yoga tourism

Finance	81%
Time	55%
Accommodating partner/children	24%
Travelling to destination	21%
Anticipated level of competence needed	18%
Psychological barriers/intimidated by the experience	8%
Health	6%

Source: Authors

Figure 1: Yoga Tourism Continuum

<p style="text-align: center;">Yoga Novice</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Yoga Developer</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Yoga Activist/ Advocate</p>
Less likely to have been on a Yoga trip	<p style="text-align: center;">We can speculate that these individuals lie on a continuum between the Yoga Novice and the Yoga Activist. Their journey to becoming a Yoga Activist may also be constrained due to family commitments and other time and financial pressures that mitigate against them being able to display a Yoga Activists profile.</p>	More likely to have been on a Yoga trip
More likely to see cultural attraction as being an important aspect of a Yoga trip		Practice Yoga more regularly
More likely to want to interact with locals		Have studied Yoga for longer
Yoga only one activity		See Yoga as an essential part of their life
Engage in other activities		See Yoga as the central purpose of any retreat
Yoga only an activity rather than whole purpose of the trip		A secluded and unspoilt location for the retreat is important
New locations are attractive		New and unique locations are not important
Comfort of accommodation and facilities is important		Aim to gain a deeper understanding of their practice
Looking for a holiday experience		Looking for a Yoga spiritual experience
Looking for a travel experience		Ease of access to the location is important
Prefer a holiday location		Prefer all-inclusive Yoga retreat