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City Break Motivation: the Case of Dublin a Successful National Capital

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**City Break Motivation –
The Case of Dublin, A Successful National Capital**

INTRODUCTION

In Europe, city break travel has become one of the key drivers of outbound tourism growth in recent years. According to IPK International's European Travel Monitor, European city tourism grew by 20% in 2005, compared to an increase of just 3% in sun and beach holidays (Freitag, 2006). This growth has helped to popularise and regenerate several European cities and has assisted in offsetting the seasonality problems encountered by many urban destinations. Unsurprisingly therefore, the city break market's significance and economic value is increasingly being acknowledged by city managers and administrators. However, our knowledge of this important market segment remains relatively poor. Little empirical data specifically relating to city break trip-taking currently exists. In particular, information that sheds light on why people take such holidays is lacking. This study attempts to address this deficiency by investigating the motives of city break travellers. A case study approach is used, with Dublin city being the main focus of the investigation. The findings from personal interviews, carried out with 40 city break visitors, are presented and discussed. As a framework for analysis, comparisons are made between respondents' city break motives and the motives that influenced their last main holiday. From this comparison, it is possible to interpret more clearly, the distinctive characteristics of city break motivation. However, in order to set the context for this study, the paper first explores what is meant by city break tourism and investigates the principal reasons for its growth. In addition, Dublin, as one of the most successful tourism capitals in Europe, is also examined.

CITY BREAK TOURISM

One of the difficulties encountered when examining the development of city break tourism is the fact that no commonly recognised definition of what constitutes a city break, currently exists. However, Trew and Cockerell (2002: 86) point out that the most widely used definition of a city break is, “a short leisure trip to one city or town, with no overnight stay at any other destination during the trip.” This definition is a useful one, and importantly, makes the distinction of the trip being ‘city only’ as opposed to a city visit which is part of a wider holiday. Although it is generally agreed that city breaks consist of leisure trips, the issue of whether this should include Visiting Friends and Relations (VFR) traffic, is less clear. VFR trips often involve no commercial accommodation and therefore need to be distinguished from commercial city breaks. However such distinctions are not always clear in city tourism statistics. In fact, one of the main problems in researching the city break market is the paucity of statistics in general on the subject. As Blank (1994: 181) points out, “every city has tourism, but relatively few cities have definitive information about the nature of their tourism industry.”

Characteristics of City Break Travel

One of the most common characteristics associated with city breaks is the short stay nature of the trips. Most last between one and three nights. However, according to Trew and Cockerell (2002), city breaks are growing in length, with trips of 4-5 nights or longer growing faster than average. In addition, the length of the city break seems to vary considerably by nationality. For example research shows that Germans tend to take longer city breaks than their European counterparts while the British have a tendency towards shorter trips (Mintel, 2002).

Another characteristic of city breaks is the secondary nature of the trips, i.e., they are often taken in addition to a person's main holiday. It is important to distinguish between secondary trips and main holidays, as the characteristics of each are often quite different. A main holiday can be described as the principal trip a person takes in a year or within a certain timeframe. They are frequently taken in summer months and are often an established annual ritual. By contrast secondary trips tend to be discretionary in nature, commonly seen as complementing the main holiday. Trew and Cockerell (2002) point out that, in Europe, the total number of trips taken per market continues to grow, as people opt for two or more leisure breaks a year in addition to their main annual holiday. Page (2002) indicates a number of structural changes among the European travelling population that have contributed to the rise in secondary trip taking to urban destinations. These include;

- a) increased holiday and leave entitlements;
- b) the availability of public and national holidays which encourage 'long weekends' that are ideal for short breaks;
- c) rising prosperity from double income families with greater disposable income;
- d) changing perceptions of travel with relative reductions in price convenience and the availability of transport options, making it a social, psychological and recreational necessity; and
- e) time-space compression, where improvements in transport technology (e.g. the advent of high speed trains and the development of regional air services outside of the main national gateway) have made access to destinations for short breaks a reality, avoiding multiple-travel options to national airports.

In addition, Page, along with most commentators acknowledges the huge influence that low cost airlines have played in the growth of urban secondary trips.

City Breaks and Low Cost Air Travel

The rapid expansion of low cost airline traffic in Europe has continued unabated over the past 10 years. Original low cost carriers such as Ryanair and Easyjet have been joined by a plethora of new entrants into the market - all eager to share in European air transport's premier growth sector. According to the World Travel Market Report 2005, the UK is the most important market in Europe in terms of low fare air trips (18 million in 2004). Table 1 shows the rankings for selected markets and the respective shares of low-fare airline trips to total air volume. The figures show this share to be highest in Ireland and Spain, reflecting the importance of the low cost air sector in these countries. The low cost air phenomenon has resulted in much more affordable

TABLE 1. Low Fare Airline Trips as a Share of Total Air Trip Volume 2004

Low-fare trip volume rank	Market	Low-fare share as % of total trip volume
1	UK	40
2	Germany	21
3	France	22
4	Italy	37
5	Netherlands	18
6	Spain	47
7	Russia	14
8	Czech Republic	34
9	Ireland	47

Source IPK International – World Travel Market 2005

air transport being available to the public, providing a serious alternative to competing forms of transport for international travel. City break travel has benefited particularly from this, as the short stay nature of these trips makes quick access a crucial factor in the success of urban destinations. Low cost air access has helped put many new cities onto the tourist map, resulting in a whole range of new city break destinations for

potential travellers. Indeed, the presence of a low-cost carrier such as Ryanair or Easyjet can often guarantee an injection of new visitors and new routes into a city or region on a scale that most scheduled airlines could never deliver. Charleroi airport for example, has seen passenger numbers increase almost tenfold to 2 million between 2000 and 2004, largely due to Ryanair's presence (Brussels South Charleroi Airport Statistics, 2006). Not surprising therefore that many local governments have actively tried to attract low cost airlines into their localities, sometimes providing extremely appealing operating conditions.

Internet Usage

Another factor contributing to the expansion of city break travel, and one that is strongly linked to the low cost airline phenomenon, is the relentless growth of internet usage in the tourism industry. The increasing ease with which the public can access information and make bookings through the internet has greatly facilitated city break travel. The uncomplicated nature of most city break trips reduces the risk factor associated with holiday bookings. Most consist of just two components, transport and accommodation, both of which can easily be booked via the internet. This trend is likely to continue given the increased confidence people are gaining in terms of internet bookings. Transport operators and accommodation providers have been quick to capitalise on this with an increasing drive to grow direct bookings via their own websites or through a host of electronic intermediaries. The introduction of dynamic packaging has further facilitated the ease with which people can package and purchase city breaks online.

DUBLIN

Dublin as a city is relatively small when compared to other European capitals. It occupies a total land area of 117.8 square kilometres and is home to 495,000 people (CSO, 2003). Over the past decade and a half, Dublin has prospered as the city has become increasingly connected into global flows of technology, capital and people. During this time the city has experienced strong increases in visitor arrivals. In fact only a drop in 2001 interrupted a sequence of year on year growth in overseas visitor numbers that goes back to 1989. Official figures for 2004 show that overseas tourists to Dublin, including non leisure visitors, totalled 3.68 million, contributing over €1.16 billion in tourism revenue. When this figure is broken down further (see Table 2), we can see that the number of actual holidaymakers to Dublin totalled 2.06 million – with the British market providing almost half of this total. According to a recent report by

TABLE 2. Holidaymakers to Dublin by Origin 2004

	<i>Total overseas visitors</i> (000s)	<i>Total overseas holidaymakers</i> (000s)
Britain	1,819 (49.5%)	922 (44.8%)
Mainland Europe	965 (26.2%)	524 (25.4%)
N. America	644 (17.5%)	472 (22.8%)
Other areas	252 (6.8%)	144 (6.9%)
Total	3,680	2,062

Source: Fáilte Ireland (2005)

Deloitte, Dublin ranks third in Europe behind London and Paris in terms of overnights achieved. The statistics, which were supplied by European Cities Tourism, show that in 2003 Dublin achieved over 18.5 million overnights (see Table 3). This is an

impressive performance, particularly given the city's size and marketing resources compared to many of the other major urban capitals, and justifiably allows Dublin to

TABLE 3. Overnights Achieved

	City	1990	2003	% Change
1	London	91.30	114.80	25.7
2	Paris	31.16	30.87	(0.9)
3	Dublin	15.35	18.63	21.3
4	Rome	12.91	14.46	12.0
5	Berlin	7.24	11.32	56.4

Source: European Cities Tourism cited in Deloitte Report (2005)

rank itself as one of the premier tourism cities in Europe. The reasons behind this impressive tourism performance are varied but include the following factors.

Dublin as Capital

Dublin, as the national capital, encourages a predictable stream of visitors to its government and national institutions. The city is the main focus for the affairs of state and is the country's principal business and financial centre. Dublin, as capital, is also home to Ireland's main cultural institutions including the National Museum, the National Gallery, the National Library, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the Chester Beatty Library, and the National Concert Hall. These form a formidable block of cultural attractions that are clearly very popular with visitors to the city. In fact six of the top ten visitor attractions in Dublin represent national cultural institutions (see Table 4). Dublin, having served as the nation's capital since medieval times, is also

Table 4. Dublin's Top Attractions

Top ten Dublin attractions by attendance 2003		
1	Dublin Zoo	772,322
2	Guinness Storehouse	738,000
3	* The National Gallery of Ireland	706,000
4	Trinity College / Book of Kells	467,513
5	* Irish Museum of modern Art	309,000
6	St Patrick's Cathedral	275,922
7	* National Museum of Archaeology & History	260,000
8	* National Museum of Decorative Arts	136,868
9	* Chester Beatty Library	134,161
10	* Natural History Museum	118,705

Source: Adapted from Fáilte Ireland statistics

home to most of the country's architecturally important and impressive built environment, including, stately homes, historic houses and Georgian streetscapes. In addition, the city holds a number of clear advantages in terms of its cultural past. As the main centre of learning in the state throughout its history, Dublin possesses a rich literary tradition, a fact that now forms a central role in the city's marketing and branding.

As the capital city, Dublin is also the principal transport node for the country and as such, acts as a gateway and the principal point of access for international visitors. As Table 5 shows, Dublin airport far exceeds the two other major airports, Cork and Shannon, in terms of passenger numbers. Importantly for the city an increasing proportion of these passengers are visiting Dublin only, as opposed to those just passing through. As McManus (2001: 104) points out "in the past, it was common for arriving tourists to leave the city almost immediately in search of the much-promoted

green idyll. However, increasingly tourist arrivals are staying longer in the Capital and may not travel elsewhere.” Dublin sees itself as a stand alone place product,

TABLE 5. Passenger Numbers at Ireland’s Three Main Airports

Airport	2005	2004	% Change
Dublin	18.5 m	17.1 m	+ 8%
Shannon	3.3 m	2.4 m	+ 38%
Cork	2.7 m	2.3 m	+ 21%
Total	24.5 m	21.8 m	+12%

Source: Dublin Airport Authority

increasingly competing with other European capital cities, rather than other regions of Ireland. Its compact core and its variety of entertainment and cultural pursuits make it an attractive tourist destination, worthy of visiting in its own right.

Changing Holiday Patterns

One of the main reasons for Dublin’s success over the past 10 years has been its ability to take advantage of the changing holiday pattern of European travellers. According to McManus (2001) changes in people’s preferences have seen a move from mass consumption of standardised holiday products towards more specialised niche-market holidays involving culture and heritage, active pursuits and festivals and events. In addition to this general trend towards niche products, there has been a noticeable move towards weekend and short break holidays. In this context, Dublin, along with many other similar cities in Europe, has benefited greatly, by positioning itself as an attractive destination for such trips.

Dublin as a Fashionable Destination

Dublin has also benefited from a perception that it is a fashionable place to visit. It is difficult to identify the exact cause of this but certainly factors such as the association

with U2, the success of Riverdance (and its spin offs), and the recognition of certain Irish films have all contributed in some way to a more vibrant image for the city. In addition, the hosting and staging of a number of high profile events over the past decade including, the MTV Europe Music awards, the Cutty Sark Tall Ships race and the Special Olympics has helped substantially in terms of the promotion and marketing of the city. The reinventing of the annual St. Patrick's Day parade as a five day festival with a much larger programme of events and activities has also attracted more visitors at a crucial time of the year.

In addition, Dublin's recent economic prosperity with its consequent employment opportunities has acted as a magnet for a new generation of Irish youth. This has resulted in what Lennon and Seaton (1998: 150) describe as, "a capital with a predominantly youthful profile that reinforces its fashionability and vibrancy in areas such as music and style." There is no doubt that this has added, in a positive way, to the image of the city.

Criticism of Dublin as a Tourism Destination

All these factors have contributed to the increased popularity of Dublin as a destination, and in particular as a stand alone destination, separate from Ireland. However the city has also received a certain amount of criticism in recent years. One of the main concerns at present is the perceived high costs associated with holidaying in the city. Successive surveys in recent years have shown high prices as being one of the key negative perceptions of the city by visitors (Flanagan and Dunne 2003, 2005). This is a problem that the city marketers and planners are aware of and remains a key issue facing the sustainability of Dublin as a tourist destination. Another criticism that the city has received concerns its perceived domination of the inbound tourism market at the expense of other parts of the country. Ireland's Regional Tourism Authorities,

particularly those along the western seaboard, have voiced serious concerns regarding the changing trip-taking behaviour of visitors which has resulted in the growth of short breaks over more traditional longer stay holidays. As already mentioned, this trend has invariably benefited Dublin, but it does so, at the expense of other parts of the country (ITIC, 2005).

However as popular as city breaks have become, there is still relatively little information on why so many people take these kinds of trips. Much of the commentary on this topic tends to be based on anecdotal experience rather than empirical evidence. This research addresses this by specifically examining the issue of city break motives and exploring the reasons behind people's decision to take such trips.

MOTIVATION AND CITY BREAK TRAVEL

Tourism researchers have been tackling the question of why people travel for many years. However the approach that is probably most commonly agreed upon and used in relation to travel motivations is the 'push' and 'pull' concept (Crompton, 1979; Chon, 1989; Pyo, Mihalik & Uysal, 1989; Cha, McCleary & Uysal, 1995; Jang & Cai, 2002). Push factors have generally been thought useful for explaining the desire for travel while pull motives have been used to explain the actual destination choice. Crompton (1979) empirically identified nine motivations of leisure travelers. He classified seven as socio-psychological or push motives and two as cultural or pull motives. The seven push motives were, escape from a perceived mundane environment, exploration and evaluation of self, relaxation, prestige, regression, enhancement of kinship relationships, and facilitation of social interaction. The pull motives were novelty and education. In other tourist motivation research, Iso-Ahola

(1980, 1982) focused on the social-psychological aspects of trip taking, including the approach-avoidance dimension of the travel decision. He put forward two motivational forces that simultaneously influence tourist behaviour: *approach* (seeking recreational opportunities for certain intrinsic rewards) and *avoidance* (escaping of routine and stressful environments). He further concluded that tourism represents more of an escape-oriented than an approach-oriented activity for most people under most conditions. Interestingly, the author points to the trend toward more frequent, but shorter holiday taking as being indicative of how the escape dimension is a more important motivational force than the seeking aspect. Another useful study was Teare's (1994) examination of peoples' motives for purchasing hotel leisure breaks in the UK. From his research he derived a six-part classification of primary motives. These were as follows:

1. To coincide with attending a pre-arranged event
2. In response to the need for a break from family/domestic commitments
routine problems/employment-related pressures
3. In response to a desire to relax/recover in different/comfortable surroundings.
4. In response to a desire to visit a particular town/region/hotel/somewhere new.
5. To compensate for a missed summer (main) holiday opportunity.
6. For the specific benefits derived from taking short breaks on a regular/seasonal basis.

One of the main difficulties with many of the principal classification models of tourism motivation is the fact that they are so general. The truth is, no widely recognized format exists for categorizing the main motivating factors in tourism. The

type of trip a person takes, in terms of its core characteristics, e.g., main holiday, activity holiday, city break, VFR trip, etc., is rarely highlighted when analysing tourism motivation. The fact that people's personal motivations may differ according to the nature of the trip they take is seldom addressed by researchers. Bloy (2000) highlights this fact when he comments on 'the paucity of current tourist motivational research in being able to accommodate a dynamic model of intra-personal motivation.' He points out that most studies tend to make the assumption that a person has one set of motivations and seeks one type of holiday to satisfy them. He therefore highlights the need for 'applied research to be undertaken within the tourism field in order to test the hypothesis that an individual's motives can vary over a number of holidays.'

This notion of motivational heterogeneity across leisure trips is an important point and one that has significant relevance to this research. The factors that motivate people to take a city break have rarely been examined, particularly in the context of trying to determine if such motives are different or distinctive from those of other types of holidays.

METHODOLOGY

In order to gain comprehensive and detailed 'insights' into city break motivation, a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis was adopted. Forty in-depth interviews were conducted with visitors to Dublin who were identified as being on a city break holiday. To be eligible for an interview, participants had to be out of state leisure visitors who were visiting Dublin city, with no overnight stay at any other destination during the trip. In-depth interviewing was chosen because it provided a data gathering tool which enabled a 'focusing' of the research effort to take place. It

allowed the freedom to probe the topic of travel motives to such an extent that real insights could emerge. This was deemed crucial, as travel motivation is one of the most complex and misunderstood topics in tourism research. The study sought to provide insights from ‘thick descriptions,’ in the visitors’ own words, about their motives. These thick descriptions, as outlined by Geertz (1973), consist of detailed information about the process being examined from the viewpoints of the participants in the process. Previous research carried out by the authors established a profile of the city break market into Dublin (Dunne, Buckley & Flanagan, 2006). Drawing on data from this study, it was possible to develop an accurate sampling frame relating to the characteristics of city break visitors to Dublin. The interviews were carried out at three locations around the city, at different times of the year, and at different times of the week. Interviews lasted between 25 minutes and 1 hour and were tape-recorded. They were later transcribed and subsequently analysed using a qualitative approach involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). From this, a number of themes relating to people’s travel motives emerged. The detailed information collected from the interviews consisted of, not just respondents’ city break motives, but also the motives which influenced their last main holiday. In order to provide a more meaningful analysis of the findings, it was decided to compare and contrast both of these sets of motives using the push and pull model. Such a comparison proved insightful as it allowed city break motives to be analysed in the context of a different type of trip.

FINDINGS

During the interviews, respondents were asked to explain how the idea of taking a trip to Dublin first came into their mind. From this, the main motives for the trip were

teased out and probed. In addition the same respondents were asked to think back to their last main holiday and explain the motives involved in that decision. The results revealed are illustrated in two tables (6 & 7) and show the principal push and pull factors for each type of trip. The motives in each table are listed in order of prevalence in the research findings, that is, how often the motives were cited as a reason for taking the trip. The categories were formed by applying a traditional cut and paste technique, with the exact labels being assigned to each category according to their relevance and concurrence with previous motivational studies.

Table 6. City Break Push and Pull Factors

Push Factors		Pull Factors	
Escape	38%	Convenience / Ease of Access	35%
Socialise (internal)	33%	Cost of travel	33%
Self Esteem (gift giving)	15%	Fun destination image	23%
Fun / Excitement	13%	Pre arranged event	23%
Socialise (external)	10%	Friendly image	13%
Relax	10%	Previous visit	10%
		Tourist sites	5%
		Security / Familiarity	5%

Table 7. Main Holiday Push and Pull Factors

Push		Pull	
Relax	35%	Sun, sand, sea	38%
Social	25%	Positive/Fun Image	20%
Escape	20%	Quality of facilities	15%
Fun/ Excitement	10%	Cost of trip	10%
Prestige	8%	Previous visit	10%
Education	8%	VFR	8%

Although the findings from this research show many similarities to other studies on tourism motivation in terms of the actual push and pull motives revealed, interesting variations emerged when these motives were analysed on the basis of type of trip. Some clear differences between the reasons respondents travelled to Dublin on a city break and the reasons they went on a main holiday were discovered. These are now examined under the headings of push and pull motives.

PUSH MOTIVES

Escape

The findings reveal that the 'escape' motive was the most frequently mentioned reason for taking a city break. 'Escape' refers to what Crompton (1979) calls, "a temporary change of environment" which is "physically and socially different from the environment in which one normally lives." For many respondents, the city break provided an ideal vehicle to escape from the humdrum of the home environment: "*A city is good for a break. There is lots to do and see. You can do nothing or do lots, it's up to yourself. We decided to just get away, sample a bit of life in a different city.*" (Beverly, Leeds).

The escape was not always just a break from a mundane environment either - many people were using the city break as a respite from the pressures of parenting: "*We have a young son - he's one and a half and he's into everything at the moment. Jane's mother took him for these few days. It's great to just get the break.*" (Brian, Nottingham). This is consistent with Teare's (1994) findings on hotel leisure break motivation in the UK. One of the six primary motives he discovered concerns people's need for a break from family or domestic commitments.

Interestingly 'escape' was cited far less frequently as a motive for the respondents' main holidays. It ranked third, well behind the motive of 'relaxing', which was found to be the principal reason for people taking a main holiday. Most respondents felt that their main holiday was all about "chilling out," "unwinding," and "recharging the batteries." In contrast the city break was considered more as a 'doing' holiday, getting out and about and seeing things. People did not perceive such trips as an opportunity to laze around a hotel room or catch up on sleep. The difference between the two types of holidays is apparent from the following response from a visitor when he compared his previous city break trips to a recent main holiday to the Caribbean: "*I think that Dublin, London, Edinburgh, Paris, Lyon or whatever, is a city break. In you go, do it in a short amount of time, 3, 4, 5 days max – no beach, no sun. The Caribbean on the other hand, I want to do nothing - lie on a beach, get some sun and that's it*" (Paul, Bath).

Social

The second most popular motive for taking a city break involved the desire to satisfy a social need. This again is a common push motive found in many motivational studies. Crompton divides the social motive into two main categories, enhancement of kinship relationships and facilitation of social interaction. The former refers to the desire to enhance or enrich family relationships, while the latter represents a need to "meet new people in different locations." The findings for Dublin indicate the presence of both of these motives and these are classified as 'internal,' for socialising within the travel party, and 'external' for socialising outside the travel party (see Table 6). For city break trips, the desire to enhance relationships was found to be, primarily, in the context of partners, spouses or other adults and rarely involved families with children. Many of these trips had a romantic element: "*It is a good*

chance for us to have a good time alone, together, in a nice...atmosphere” (Philippe, Paris). Where children were present it was often the case that they were older: “a lot of the motivation was to get a break with my daughter because she is away at university, it’s her first year away” (Diane, London). Many city breakers also cited the desire to socialise with friends as an important motivating factor. This included respondents who were part of stag/hen parties or groups of friends just getting away for a break together: “I suppose it was a good chance to get away with some mates, have some fun and enjoy a different setting” Michael, Surrey).

The other social element that Crompton refers to - the desire to meet with other people at the destination - was also evident for city breakers. Dublin was perceived by some respondents as being a place where they could easily interact with locals and this was, in certain cases, a key motivating factor: *“I think listening to music in pubs and meeting and talking to people – this is important to me in Dublin. Irish people like to talk and so, I think, it is easy” (Maria, Italy).*

Interestingly, although the social need was also found to be important in the main holiday travel decision, the specifics of the motives involved were quite different. For example the enhancement of relationships in most cases included a wider family unit, which usually involved children, indicating a desire for people to use the main holiday as a chance to come together and spend “quality time” as a family unit. In addition, the other social element of meeting with locals at the destination hardly figured at all for main holidays.

Gift giving

One of the most interesting findings in relation to the city break travel decision was the way in which some trips were bought as a gift to mark some event or occasion. Six interviewees were on a city break that they had either purchased or had received

as a gift (birthdays and anniversaries were the main reasons involved). The ultimate motivation behind such gift giving was interesting to observe. On one level the trips were purchased for quite altruistic motives: *“the reason we came this time was Kev had a 50th birthday, and this was my birthday present to him”* (Paula, Birmingham), but on another level self esteem motives were also evident, i.e. the giving of a city break as a present made people feel good about themselves. It would seem from the findings that city breaks are quite suited as gift products, possibly because of the novelty aspect but also due to the relative low cost and generally uncomplicated nature of the trips compared to other forms of travel.

Such gift giving behaviour was not evident with main holiday motives, although this is hardly surprising given the cost of many of these trips. However a motive which was evident here and which is particularly associated with more expensive and exotic main holidays was “prestige.” This relates to what Fodness (1994) calls the ‘value expressive function of leisure travel’ where the trip represents a combination of both symbolism and self-expression. This is evident in the following response, where one of the interviewees was explaining his motives for visiting Singapore on his last main holiday: *“well it’s very exotic, somewhere not everyone goes to - it’s different. It’s nice, I suppose, to be able to say you have had afternoon tea in Raffles hotel, isn’t it?”* (Simon, London). No such motives were evident for city break trip taking – probably because of the relative familiarity of the destination, and possibly, as Crompton points out, “as travel has become more frequent, it is perceived to be less prestigious.”

Fun / Excitement

The final push motive revealed for city breaks is termed “fun / excitement” and relates to the pleasure seeking desire of travellers. This motive was prevalent not just among

the hedonistic stag and hen party respondents but also a number of others who came to Dublin to get away and have some fun: “*We just came here to kick back and have a blast. My husband Phil and my friend Beth’s husband Tom went away earlier this year on a golfing vacation to Florida - so we decided we needed to have some quality girl time, and here we are*” (Sandy, New York). This is similar to what Fodness describes as the ‘utilitarian function of leisure travel,’ where people are escaping on the one hand but are doing so with some clear leisure goal in mind, or as he puts it “an escape to recreational or fun activities.”

PULL MOTIVES

Ease of Access & Cost

When pull motives were examined in relation to city breaks, two factors in particular emerged as being crucial - cheap flights and convenient access. This can be attributed to what could be termed the ‘Ryanair effect.’ There is no doubt that the presence of Ryanair has had a significant impact on the success of Dublin as a city break destination: “*it was cheaper to come here than what it is to go to my work, and it was quicker. I mean it takes me an hour and a half to go to my work, whereas I mean I couldn’t believe it, it was 50 minutes. We left home at 7 o’clock in the morning and arrived here at 7.52. I mean it’s incredible, I couldn’t believe it for 70p each way - I mean that’s much less than I pay going to work. Although I know the taxes bring it up but still it’s amazing.*” (Ruth, Glasgow).

More than two thirds of all respondents travelled on a Ryanair flight, and almost all of those lived within an hour of an airport served by Ryanair. This convenience was a crucial factor for many in the decision to come to Dublin. Some people for example specifically examined the low cost airline routes served by their nearest airport and

made their destination choice on this basis: *“it basically came down to Edinburgh or Dublin – and I had been to Edinburgh two years ago. We actually fancied going to Valencia originally, but there weren’t any flights there,”* (James, Luton). Where the choice was between two or more easily accessible cities, cost frequently emerged as the deciding factor: *“I’ve always wanted to come to Dublin but at first we actually looked at Prague. And I had a few days off work and I was looking at the prices of Prague and they had gone up, and then we thought what about Dublin and that’s how it came about, ...it was more reasonable for two nights in Dublin than what it was to go to Prague”* (Chris, Newcastle).

Interestingly the importance of ease of access and convenience was not really evident in relation to main holidays. Of much more relevance in that decision was the allure of sun, sand and sea. Such heliotropic tendencies are understandable for main holidays given the family nature of most trips and the keen desire to relax while on holiday.

Fun Image

The image of Dublin as a fun destination also proved to be a significant motive for some city breakers. They referred to the city as “lively” and commonly described it as having an upbeat atmosphere. Some respondents also mentioned the phenomenon of “having the craic” (having a good time) as an attractive characteristic of the city. Most people expressed a positive “feeling” for the city, although for many this was difficult to articulate. The city seemed to engender a stronger ‘emotional’ connection with visitors, than a physical or visual one. This is probably related to the way Dublin is marketed. The city is intentionally depicted as a fun and fashionable destination with a convivial and hospitable host population.

Pre-arranged Event

Another interesting pull factor for city breaks was the occurrence of a pre-arranged event in the city. These events included rugby matches (2), cultural exhibitions (2), concerts (2) and stag and hen parties (3). In each of these cases the event was arranged outside the control of the respondent. Their decision ultimately concerned whether or not to take part. All respondents stated that the fact that the event was being held in Dublin added to the attractiveness of the trip: “*because it was in Dublin, it was a really special concert,*” (Christina, Rotterdam). However a trip to Dublin would probably not have occurred without the occurrence of the event at that particular time. This is consistent with Teare’s findings when he discovered one of the key motives for hotel leisure breaks was to coincide with attending a pre-arranged event. Again, this motive was very specific to city breaks and did not figure in the findings for the main holiday decision.

Other city break pull factors revealed in the findings included, Dublin’s *friendly image*, a *previous visit*, *feelings of security from familiarity*, and the city’s *tourist sites*. These motives varied in terms of their influence on respondent’s decision to visit. For example, the *tourist sites* motive figured surprisingly low (5%), as an influencing factor. Although many of Dublin’s sites were popular as visitor attractions, the findings show, they rarely featured as being influential in the initial motivation to visit. None, for instance, acted as a major draw in the mind of visitors, in the way that the Eiffel Tower in Paris or Big Ben in London inevitably do. A similar situation emerged when respondent’s image of Dublin was examined. Most first time visitors showed no strong visual image of the city prior to their visit. In fact, the majority of UK visitors perceived Dublin to be physically, “similar to home.” Again, no iconic image of the city emerged beyond a few references to Guinness and Temple Bar.

In terms of Dublin's capital status as a motivational factor, the findings suggest that, for short city breaks, the influence was felt in a more indirect manner. The fact that Dublin is a capital city did not, in itself, act as a specific pull factor. However its capital status nonetheless brought with it certain characteristics that inevitably added to the general attractiveness of the city as a whole. For example, as capital, Dublin was home to most of the country's national cultural institutions and major government buildings, many of which proved to be very popular with city break visitors. In addition, Dublin's status and size contributed greatly to its ability to host popular events such as major sports games, concerts, cultural exhibitions and festivals – all of which, as the findings indicate, acted as a significant draw for city break visitors.

CONCLUSION

The city break product is generally considered to be different from other holiday products, particularly in a spatial and temporal context. However marketing strategies targeting this important tourism niche continue to be based on extremely sparse research data. City breakers have rarely been clearly defined and separately analysed. This paper has addressed this neglect by examining the motivation involved in taking a city break trip and highlighting differences in comparison with a main holiday. The findings indicate that the principal push motives involved were, 'escape,' 'socialising,' and 'self esteem (gift giving).' City breaks were generally viewed as active or 'doing' holidays, with the 'relaxation' motive hardly featuring at all as a reason to visit. Travelling parties were found to rarely consist of children, with many trips being specifically utilised as a break from parenting duties. The findings also show that pull factors were particularly important in the city break travel decision. Factors such as, ease of access and, the availability of cheap flights, were not only

influential in determining the destination, but also acted, in a number of cases, as the main stimuli to take the trip. There is little doubt that these two factors have contributed greatly to Dublin's success in attracting international city break visitors. Other significant pull factors included, the image of the city as a fun destination, and the hosting of events such as, major sports games and concerts. The city's capital status was also found to be influential, but in a more implicit manner. Most respondents had visited at least some of the national cultural institutions or historical sites associated with the capital. These, along with the city's major social and entertainment infrastructure, clearly added to the attractiveness, and indeed, fashionability of Dublin as a city break destination. However, the exact extent to which this affected visitation is unclear and merits further investigation.

In conclusion, this study has set out to examine the growing phenomenon of city break travel, and in particular, to highlight the principal motivation behind such trips. The findings show that people's travel motives differ according to type of trip. This is a crucial point for destination marketing managers in particular. City breaks show a number of motivational characteristics that are distinctive from other leisure holidays. It's important for city tourism stakeholders to realise this and to respond appropriately in terms of their marketing strategies.

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