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## The Motivations of International Coach Tourists to Visit the Shannon Region (Ireland)

Annie Cowhey,  
Dr Sinéad O'Leary,  
Dr Noëlle O'Connor

*HTMi, Hotel & Tourism Management Institute, Sörenberg, 6174 Luzern, Switzerland*

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### Abstract

Coach tourism is a huge part of the Irish tourism industry. Coach tourism in the Shannon region (Counties Clare, Limerick, North Tipperary, North Kerry and South Offaly) appears to be a lucrative sector. However, the reality is that the industry has witnessed a rapid decline in visitor numbers since the industry high in 2006. It was clear something needed to be done to understand coach tourists and the reasons for the decline in the sector. The aim of this research was to uncover the motivations of international coach tourists to visit the Shannon region, the Shannon region takes in the counties of Clare, Limerick, North Tipperary and Offaly. Perhaps by understanding what motivates coach tourists to visit the region may help ensure future sustainability to the Shannon region. The research was carried out through a mixed methodology approach, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Initially, secondary research was conducted in the form of a literature review. It involved carrying out a detailed review of all documents such as journals, Fáilte Ireland reports, newspaper articles and books. It examined coach tourism, characteristics of a coach tourist, the key international coach tourist markets, and motivations of tourists to travel, coach tourism in the Shannon region and reasons for the decline in the sector. Findings were then taken from the literature review and examined further, through primary research. Two interviews were conducted with coach tour operators and one hundred surveys were completed by coach tourists to the Shannon region. This research also looks at reasons for the decline in the sector and ways to make it a sustainable industry in the Shannon region. Each objective set out was answered and it is now clear coach tourists visit the Shannon region for a holiday and to visit places of cultural and historical importance. The underlying motivation for their trip is to relax and seek new experiences.

*Keywords:* Coach tourism; Irish tourism industry; Shannon region

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### 1. Introduction

Coach tours are a very popular means of exploring the Shannon region, with an estimated 33% of all coach tourists to Ireland (Fáilte Ireland 2010a), partaking in a coach tour of the region. Although appearing to be a lucrative business, the reality is that of a struggling sector with an estimated drop of 25 % in visitor numbers since an all-time high of 2006 (Fáilte Ireland 2010 a).

Identifying what motivates an international coach tourist to come on a coach tour of the Shannon region could be key in helping the sector to recover from the high drop in demand. A gap was apparent in the literature available on coach tourists. A vast amount of information was in existence regarding tourist's motivations and pushes and pulls factors, but no literature regarding the motivations of an international coach tourist to visit the Shannon region was available. It was clear further research regarding the motivations of coach tourists to the region was needed; an

aim and a number of objectives were drawn up in order to address the research question.

This paper outlines and examines firstly, tourist motivations and secondly, coach tourists to the Shannon region. It is concerned with looking at the vast amount of literature available on the topics of motivations and coach tourism. The research which will be specifically addressed in this paper is as follows;

- An outline of coach tourism.
- Characteristics of a coach tourist.
- Key international tourist markets to Ireland.
- Motivations of tourists.
- Reasons for tourism in the Shannon region.
- Decline in coach tourism.

### 2. Literature review

#### *2.1. Coach Tourism*

Costa (2009 pg 179) describes a coach tour as a guided bus tour for a group of holiday makers that follows a predetermined schedule, he goes on to define it as, “a form of commerce based on the movement of people from one area to another”. Coach tourism consists of a tourist coming to a particular region in order to partake in an organised tour through the area visiting different attractions by coach. Many coach tour operators run services in the Shannon region, offering tour packages to see the main visitor attractions which takes in the areas of Clare, Limerick, North Tipperary and Offaly (Shannon Development 2010 a).

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Britain	148	154	117	111	92
N America	124	151	110	88	115
M Europe	63	86	70	61	67
Other Areas	22	12	30	17	26
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>300</b>

Figure 1: Overseas Coach Tourists 2006-2010 (000)

According to Fáilte Ireland (2010 a) and shown in Table1, 300,000 coach tourists visited Ireland in 2010, accounting for an estimated €180 million to the Irish economy. Thirty three % of coach tourists to Ireland visited the Shannon region which accounted for 17 % of all tourists visiting the region (Fáilte Ireland 2010 b). Coach tourism is a huge sector of Irish tourism, however, in recent years it has seen a rapid drop in visitor numbers (shown in Table.1) down an estimated forty % since an all-time high seen in 2007.

## 2.2. Characteristics of a Coach Tourist

According to Fáilte Ireland (2010 a) one of the most common characteristics associated with coach tourism is the nature of stay. Most tours last between three to 13 days averaging eight nights. The length of stay for coach tourists seems to vary by nationality, take for example American tourists who stay an average 9 nights while other countries from mainland Europe stay seven nights (Fáilte Ireland 2010 a). A key trend seems to be that tourists from long haul destinations stay an average three nights longer than the British traveller (Fáilte Ireland 2010 a). Another important characteristic of coach tourism is the accommodation used by the tourists, 86% of coach tourists stay in hotel accommodation while partaking in an overnight coach tour. Fáilte Ireland (2010 a) identified that 33% of coach tourists to Ireland are over the age of sixty five, the number of coach tourists visiting the region decrease with age with only 7% under the age of 25. Forty % are on a coach tour as a couple, a further 34 % are in a group with 14% travelling alone. The majority of the tourists are also white collar professionals with no dependents. Ninety-one % of tourists partaking in a coach tour do so to visit places of cultural and historical importance and seventy four % are visiting for the first time. Seventy four % heard about coach tourism in the region from a travel agent, a further 3. % discovered it on the internet. The final obvious characteristic of a coach tour is the busiest month for arrivals which, according to Fáilte Ireland (2010 a) is August, when twenty three % of all coach tours occurring in Ireland take place.

## 2.3. Key International Markets

Ryan and Deegan (2010) argue that Irish tourism was at an all-time record high until the global economic recession resulted in a severe downturn; despite this, tourism is still one of Ireland’s most important economic sectors. In order to compete effectively in the market and “weather” the downturn, it is important the Irish tourism industry is aware of the key international markets it attracts in order to correctly target potential visitors thus helping to shape the future of Irish tourism activities.

Countries throughout Europe are becoming more competitive in terms of attracting tourists to their region. Tourism Ireland (2011) has identified ‘sightseers’ and ‘culture seekers’ as the best prospects in terms of visitors from North America, Great Britain, France and Germany; they have also identified ‘scenic relaxers’ as key target markets in Great Britain, and work hard to promote different types of tourism throughout Ireland to the key international markets.

Fáilte Ireland (2010 b) estimated (see Figure 1) over 700,000 overseas tourists visited the Shannon region in 2010. Thirty three % of these tourists visited the region to engage in coach tourism.



Figure 2: Overseas Visitors to Shannon 2010

From Fáilte Ireland’s (2010 b) research into key international tourist markets to the Shannon region it is clear that the main international tourist to the region comes from Britain and mainland Europe, both at 34%, followed by the North American tourist at thirty %. Ryan and Deegan (2010) state that the North American coach tourist provides interesting opportunities for the Irish tourism economy; however, a gap is apparent in literature and surveys available regarding the type of North American coach tourist who visits the region. Similarly little research is available on British and European tourists who collectively make up 68% of all tourists to the region.

It is clear from research carried out by Fáilte Ireland (2010 a, b and e) ‘Coach Tourism in Ireland 2010’, ‘Overseas visitors to Shannon 2010’ and ‘Tourism Facts 2010’ (shown in Table 2) that the main international coach tourist markets appear to be the same as the overseas visitors to the Shannon region. A conclusion can now be drawn from these findings that the main international coach tourist to the Shannon region predominantly originates from North America, Mainland Europe, Britain and other countries such as Australia and New Zealand.

Overseas tourists to Ireland 2010	Overseas Coach Tourists to Ireland 2010	Overseas visitor to Shannon Region 2010	Overseas Coach Tourist to Shannon Region 2010
Britain: 2,708,000	Britain: 92,000	Britain: 250,000	Britain: 9,200
North American: 853,000	North American: 115,000	North American: 216,000	North America: 56,350
Mainland Europe: 1,985,000	Mainland Europe: 67,000	Mainland Europe: 34,000	Mainland Europe: 22,110
Other: 322,000	Other: 26,000	Other: 16,000	Other: 10,920

**Figure 3:** International Tourist Numbers and Coach Tourism Numbers 2010

#### 2.4. Motivations of Tourists

Dunne, Flanagan and Buckley (2007) argue that motivations can be described as a driving force behind everything a person does. It is a tremendously important factor in terms of understanding why a tourist goes on holidays and will be a key factor in understanding coach tourists. Dann (1977) initially studied tourist motivation as the need to escape, Crompton (1979) evolved Dann's study and looked at the different motivations of travel a tourist may have. Dann (1977) divided the concept of motivation into two theories, the first are internal psychological forces which creates a 'need' within a tourist to travel. The second he identified as external attributes of a particular destination which gives tourists a 'want' to travel. Tourist motivations are still an unclear concept. The following section is broken into three areas for discussion, the first identifying motivation, the second motivations of tourists to travel and thirdly the push-pull concept.

##### 2.4.1. Identifying Motivation

Ryan et al (1998) identify a holiday as a period of escape, understanding what motivates or the force behind a tourists need to escape on holiday is a crucial aspect in solving the age old question of motivation. Liu et al (2011) recognise studying motivation is important in order to attain an understanding of travel needs and tourist travelling related behaviours. They continue with acknowledging that the awareness of travel motivations could be the key to successful tourism marketing programs.

Jungeun (2011) identifies motivation as one of the most important topics of tourism; using Crompton's (1979) (cited in Jungeun 2011) argument it's easy to understand where a tourist goes and when they may go but understanding why a tourist travels, and what are the main motivational factors is a challenge. The author also uses the argument that motivation is behind everything a person does; it is hard to identify what exactly this force is. Pearce (2005) claims that motivation is the initial point of studying tourist behaviour; he identifies the difficulty associated with studying motivation as opposed to purposeful travel for example 'business or pleasure' which he determines as very much self-explanatory. Through research Pearce (2005) also finds motivations reflect an individual's private needs and wants, for example 'escape from mundane life', he argues the wide range of human needs make recognizing motivations to travel impossible. It is clear that tourist motivation is an important concept and one

which is widely researched but with little conclusions drawn in order to understand what exactly the force behind a tourist's motivation to travel is. The author goes on to suggest that where a tourist chooses to go on holidays and the different activities they participate in have been directly influenced by the tourist's background and motives. More research is needed in order to understand motivations. Pearce (2005) states understanding motivations is fundamental for tourism studies and tourism development, he puts in place seven key elements (see Table 3) for a sound theory of motivation to be used in further research.

Pearce (2005) put in place a theory that if all researchers studying motivation use the seven steps he identified (see Table 3) a universal wide explanation of tourist motivation could be identified and adopted. Guzman et al (2006) identify that motives start within the tourist decision making process; in their analysis of motivations they discovered that a motive often leads to a tourist's motivations and that understanding motivations helps managers of tourist operations to better position themselves within the market by identifying strengths, opportunities and ensuring tourist satisfaction.

Element	Explanation
1. The role of theory	Must be able to integrate existing tourist needs, reorganise the need and provide a new orientation for future research.
2. Ownership and Appeal of Theory	Must appeal to specialist researchers; be useful in tourism industry setting and credible to marketers and consumers.
3. Ease of communication	Must be relevant, easy to explain to potential users and be universal (not country specific) in its application.
4. Ability to measure travel motivation	Must be amenable to empirical study. The idea can be translated into questions and responses for assessment purpose.
5. A multi motive versus single trait approach	Must consider view that travellers may seek to satisfy several needs at once. Must be able to model pattern of traveller's needs, not just consider one need.

**Figure 4:** Key Elements for a Sound Theory of Tourist Motivations

Must be able to consider that travellers are variously motivated by intrinsic, self-satisfying goals and at other times motivated by extrinsic socially controlled rewards.

Crompton (1997) identifies tourist motivations as internal psychological factors which generate tensions within a person to satisfy a need or want. Gnoth (1997) argues tourist behaviour needs to be studied in psychological terms; McCabe (2000) agrees by stating that tourist behaviour is a mixture of cognitive and behavioural, and studies need to be carried out on both factors to determine what exactly motivation is.

Crompton (1997) states not enough research has been done to understand tourist motivations. Gnoth (1997) contradicts Crompton (1997) claiming a vast amount of literature and studies are available on the topic, however the research is unclear to what exactly tourist motivations are. A general understanding of motivations can be drawn that it is in fact a force behind every decision a person makes or action one carries out. Gnoth (1997) gives an understanding that a motive is a reasoning of a person doing something he uses the explanation "I am going where the sun keeps shining" to explain a tourist's motive behind a sun holiday, he cites that a motive usually leads to motivation. "Motives turn into motivations when coupled with both situations and the tourist value system" (Gnoth 1997 pg 299).

McCabe (2000) proposes that a distinction exists between tourist motives and motivations; he looks at motives on the one hand as tourist disposition regularly re-occurring and motivations as the tourist preferences, the author agrees with Gnoth's (1997) analysis that a motive often leads to motivation. Crompton (1979) uses the argument that a motive often leads to motivation but he states tourist motivation is not the direct result of just a single motive its very likely to be multiple motives which lead to a tourists motivation.

#### 2.4.2. Motivation to Travel

Gnoth (1997) identifies the decision making process as a key factor in order to get an understanding of tourist motivation. The process looks at motive factors such as the where, the when and the how, referring to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs as the basic theory of motivation. Gnoth (1997) argues that after one need has been met it leads a person to become motivated in order to move up the hierarchy and meet another need. Ryan et al (1998) also identifies Maslow's motivational theory as forming a basis to understanding motivation. Crompton (1997) states no single theory could be used to explain tourist behaviour answering the age old question of motivation, he uses three main frameworks in order to gauge an understanding: Iso-Ahola Escape-Seeking, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and the Conceptual Push Pull factors (Dann1977).

Dunne (N.D) uses McIntosh, Goeldner and Ritchie (1995) (cited in Dunne N.D) approach of dividing travel motivations into four categories; Physical Motivators: Factors associated with refreshment, linked with activities which will reduce tension; Cultural Motivators: Tourists desire for knowledge of other countries and places; Interpersonal Motivators: The desire to meet new people, escape from routine and visit friends or family; Status and Prestige Motivators: Factors which draw attention to the tourist self-image.

He argues the classification can be useful for giving an understanding of the different types of motivations which surround a tourist decision to take a trip, although he criticises the categories as very general and open to argument, as most approaches to answer the question of tourist motivations are.

Through Gnoth's (1997) research he refers to eight motivations of travel; 'to switch off', 'recreate', 'get away from everyday life', 'change of environment', 'to reflect', 'time to think', 'experience different things' and 'expand horizons'. On the other hand, McCabe (2000) identifies the two main motivations of travel as; 'need to escape' and 'seek new experience'. Ryan et al (1998) offer an explanation of tourist motivation; they identify a holiday as being a period of escape and the motivation behind a person going on holiday as escaping from everyday life. Through their research Ryan et al (1998) compile a list of motivations they have discovered through sampling tourist's, they are 'to relax mentally', 'discover new places and things', 'avoid the bustle of daily life', 'be in a calm atmosphere', 'increase knowledge' and 'have a good time with friends'. Crompton (1997) identified

seven socio-psychological motivations as 'novelty', 'socialization', 'prestige', 'relax', 'educate value/ intellectual enrichment', and 'enhance kinship and regression'. Ryan et al (1998), Gnoth (1997), McCabe (2000) all identify a common themes in tourist motivations (see Figure 2) the main one as escape from everyday life and seeking something new. McCabe (2000) draws the conclusion that motivations do not stop during the travel process, it remains on on-going factor in tourist behaviour, even though a tourist has travelled to their destination something new is now motivating them; for example, a particular place. Motivation is an ever revolving concept in terms of a tourist travelling.

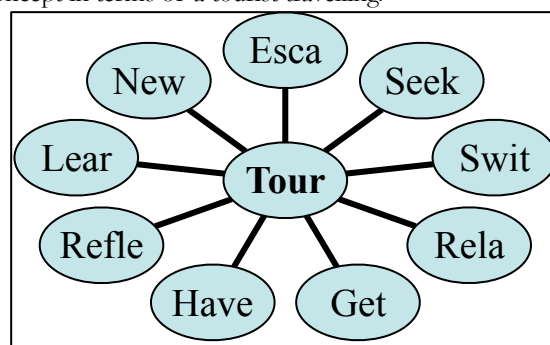


Figure 5: Motivations of Tourists to Travel (Gnoth, 1997; McCabe, 2000 and Ryan et al., 1998)

#### 2.4.3. Push- Pull Concept

Dunne et al (2007) states that researchers have been studying why people travel for many years. An approach in understanding motivations which has been prevalent throughout this research is the 'Push and Pull' concept. Dann (1977), Crompton (1979), Gnoth (1997), Ryan et al (1998), McCabe (2000), Klenosky (2002) and Dunne et al (2007) have identified motivations of tourists as escape and seeking, the escape being the push factor and the seeking being the pull factor.

Dann (1977) and Crompton (1979) based their research on the push and pull framework. Dann (1977) initially divided tourists need to escape into two factors, firstly the internal psychological forces which he determined gave the tourist the need to travel which he called the push factors. Secondly, he identified the external attributes a destination may have that would lure a tourist there like a nice beach. Crompton (1979) based his study on the different motivational factors a tourist may have to travel, he used the push and pull concept and established the push factors as internal desire and tourist emotion, such as the need to get away and relax, and the pull factors as the destination attributes he used the example of a tourist visiting a nostalgic place. Many authors have used this framework to examine motivational theories.

Using this concept Dunne et al (2007) describes the push factors as the tourist's desire to travel and the pull factors to explain the destination choice. Klenosky (2002) uses the push-pull concept throughout his research; he argues the framework provides a simple approach in order to explain the motivations underlying tourist behaviours. Liu et al (2011) acknowledge the concept as a very useful approach to study

tourist motivation. They explain that the theory behind the push and pull concept as why people travel and where they go, provides insights into tourists travel decisions, they suggest push factors as motives and pull factors are the attractions that draw a tourist to a region. Through research the authors draw the conclusion that push motivations are directly linked with the tourist demographic such as age, birth place and profession. Klenosky (2002) also questions whether or not the push and pull concepts are two separate entities. He looks at push factors as the tourist questioning whether to go and the pull factors as the tourist questioning where to go, he argues that push factors precede pull factors and operate independently as entirely separate entities, i.e. a tourist first makes the decision to travel before deciding where to travel to. Crompton (1979) identifies nine motivations of leisure travel, seven push motivations and two pull motivational factors. Dunne et al (2007) adapted these factors and use the push and pull framework throughout their research (see Table 4). This framework is still commonly used in modern day research.

Push Factors	Pull Factors
1. Escape from perceived mundane environment	1. Novelty
2. Exploration and evaluation of self	2. Education
3. Relaxation	
4. Prestige	
5. Regression	
6. Enhancement of kinship relationship	
7. Facilitation of social interaction	

Figure 6: Push and Pull Motivational Factors (Cited by Crompton, 1979 adapted by Dunne et al., 2007)

2.5.Coach Tourism in 'The Shannon Region'

Shannon Development (2011 a) is the tourism authority in the Shannon region; its role is to develop tourism in the areas of Limerick, Clare, North Tipperary and Offaly, through enhancing visitor facilities and promoting tourism growth and tourism in the area “Shannon Development's primary role is to initiate and support tourism development as a key element in the achievement of overall economic growth throughout the Shannon region.” (Shannon Development 2011 a).

The region has a local population of 431,888 (CSO 2006), it encourages a predictable stream of international visitors accounting for 516,000 in 2010 (Fáilte Ireland 2010 b). According to Fáilte Ireland (2010 a and d) the main attraction for tourists to the region is visiting places with cultural and historical importance. Liu et al (2011 pg 5214) defines culture and heritage as;

“Results of human interaction with the environment and one another. The outcome of these interactions is reflected in a number of ways divided up into tangible (e.g. buildings and sites) and intangible (e.g. language and folk lore)”.

Top Ten Shannon Region Attractions by Attendance 2010		
1.	Cliffs of Moher	720,574
2.	Bunratty Castle and Folk Park	263,336
3.	Holy Cross Abbey	240,000
4.	O'Brien's Tower	82,884
5.	Curraghchase Forest Park	80,000
6.	Glór- Irish Music Centre	50,726
7.	Ballyhoura- Mountain Bike Trials	50,000
8.	Kilkee Water World	34,000
9.	Birr Castle Demesne and Irelands Historical Science Centre	33,500
10.	Foynes Flying Boat Museum	32,000

Figure 7:- Top Ten Shannon Region Attractions by Attendance 2010 (Adapted from Fáilte Ireland, 2010 c)

It is clear the region is rich in sites of culture; heritage and historical importance (see Table 5). According to research carried out by Fáilte Ireland (2010 a) a key characteristic of a coach tourist is the majority partake in a coach tour in order to visit a site of cultural importance. Perhaps a conclusion could be drawn from the research carried out by Fáilte Ireland (2010 a) that the reason thirty three % of all coach tourists to Ireland visit the Shannon region is to visit sites of culture of historical importance.

2.5.1. Decline of Coach Tourism in Ireland

As previously seen, coach tourism in Ireland saw a small growth in passenger numbers from 278,000 to 300,000 in 2010, but has seen a rapid decline of 25 % since 2007 (see Table 2.1) Fáilte Ireland (2010 a). O'Connor (2011) argues that passenger numbers through Shannon airport are at a low which has not been experienced in the past twenty years, he identifies this as a reason for the drop in demand for tourist operators in the Shannon region. O'Connor (2011) highlights the airport is struggling with a 52 % drop in passenger numbers since its peak in 2006. Deegan (2011) also identified a major factor causing the downfall of visitor numbers for tourist operators in the Shannon region as the loss in passenger numbers using Shannon airport. The airport is the gateway to the Shannon region and is set to lose eight million euro by the end of 2011. With the potential downgrading of the airport this will cause a devastating blow to the region. The decrease in international visitors passing through the airport is having a direct effect on visitor numbers of coach tourists to the Shannon region and other visitor attractions.

Shannon Development (2011 b) recognises the airport as a vital part of the Shannon region allowing tourists to travel directly; they highlight the importance of the airport to the

coach tourism market. O'Connor (2011) identifies that the main international tourist markets to Ireland have seen a dramatic drop in numbers, from research carried out by Shannon Airport (2010). Figure 2.3 shows that transatlantic passengers through the airport have fallen by twenty one % since 2006, the airport gives the explanation that carriers have reduced capacity purely because of the economic crisis. It also shows that other crucial coach tour international markets such as, the United Kingdom is down 28 % and mainland Europe has fallen 64 %.



**Figure 8:** Shannon Airport International Passengers Traffic 2006-2010. Source: Shannon Airport Traffic figures 2010

According to the Coach Tourism Transport Council (CTTC 2011), a fall in demand is mainly down to the high cost of diesel faced by coach tour operators, which in turn is driving up costs for potential coach tourists to Ireland, making it an unattractive destination for visitors. The United Kingdom is Ireland's main competitor in terms of coach tourism. Legislation in the UK allows coach tour operators running services in their region claim back all VAT paid on diesel and fuel consumed in the process. This in turn cuts costs of providing the service, savings are then passed onto the consumer making the UK a cheaper and therefore more appealing destination to coach tourists in terms of value for money (Pope 2011). Shannon Development (2011 b) acknowledges that coach tourism is a lucrative market to the Shannon region. The tourism authority has launched an initiative with the CTTC to further promote the region as a coach tour destination; by arranging familiarisation trips for coach tour operators and enhancing product offering. Shannon Development hope to grow the number of coach tourists who will visit the Shannon region, in order to ensure a future for the sector in the Shannon region.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Primary data collection

Collins (2010 pg124) defines primary data collection as "researchers collecting data themselves using methods such as interviews and surveys". The literature review carried out in the previous paper realised the extent to which the secondary data available was able to answer the research question and objectives. It was clear primary research would need to be adopted and a pilot study for primary research undertaken to try and address the remaining research questions of the research.

#### 3.2. Mixed Methodology

Primary research can be a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research. A mixed methodology approach was

used to carry out the research and to meet the aim of the research. Fidel (2008 pg265) identifies the mixed methodology approach as "a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods". He describes the mixed approach as perfect for studying social and behavioural research such as tourist motivations.

Strauss and Corbin (1998 pg10) define qualitative research as "any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification", the research is based on a person's life, experiences, behaviours, emotions and feelings. Interviews and observation techniques were identified as the best means of conducting this research. Qualitative research is used to examine areas where either little is known about a topic or a mass of information is available but further research is needed to gauge an understanding, such as, tourist motivations, emotions and feelings. Vogt (2007) identifies quantitative research methods as examining mainly statistical facts and figures, Jha (2008 pg7) determines "quantitative as research method used when one begins with a theory and aims to prove or disprove." It is mainly concerned with statistical procedures.

Decrop (2000) notes qualitative research is mainly used in market research, but in recent years tourism researchers have been turning to this approach. He adds that in previous years the sector was dependent on structured survey and quantitative research, but in the modern day a mixed approach can be used to create a circular process. Decrop (2000) argues this method is the best approach in carrying out tourism research. A triangulation approach was also used to ensure maximum validity of the research. Decrop (2000) identifies triangulation as a vital tool in research, he recognises it as looking at a research question from more than one source. In order to utilise this approach information was taken from secondary research which was performed through a literature review in the previous paper and primary research which will take the shape of two semi structured interviews, and a survey.

#### 3.3. Semi Structured Interview

Hauge (2004) establishes that an interview is dialogue between two or more people; a list of questions shall be asked and answered. A structured interview is a formal interview which is limited to predetermined questions. Saunders et al (2007 pg611) defines a semi structured interview as;

"a wide ranging category of interview in which the interviewer commences with a set of interview themes but is prepared to vary the order in which the questions are asked and to ask new questions in the context of the research question."

A semi structured interview is flexible in that it allows for the development of questions through conversations with the interviewee. This method was used in order to capture the meaning of a coach tour in the participant's words and also allow for the development of new issues.

A semi structured interview was conducted with the owner of the Paddywagon coach tour company, Cathal O'Connell. Altogether fifteen coach tour operators in the Shannon region were contacted and asked to contribute to the study, all except Paddywagon failed to respond. The interview took place on the cold winter morning of the 19th December 2011 at Paddywagon Headquarters in Dublin. An interview schedule was drawn up and followed focusing on ten issues such as a definition of a coach tour, key markets, motivations of participants and recommendations for the future. The interview lasted just under an hour and all issues set out were addressed, further issues not previously identified were also examined.

A second semi structured interview was conducted with Stephanie O'Toole Marketing Manager of Culture and Heritage tours. Culture and Heritage tours were targeted for an interview because the market they attract differs from Paddywagon, and the Marketing Manager was due to give a guest lecture. A semi structured interview schedule similar to the one used with Paddywagon was drawn up and followed. The interview took place the 19th January 2012 in the student canteen in the Limerick Institute of Technology.

#### Advantages of carrying out a semi structured interview

There are many advantages in carrying out a semi structured interview. Firstly, this type of interviewing technique is flexible. Any question asked can help develop the conversation further. This means the conversation is not limited to answering the interviewer's initial question and identifies relevant topics not predetermined by the researcher. Semi structured interviews also allow the interviewer to express their true beliefs and opinions openly.

#### 3.4. Disadvantages of carrying out a semi structured interview

The main disadvantage of a semi structured interview is the lack of control over the informant. New irrelevant topics may be discussed as the interviewee is allowed elaborate on answers given. Also the technique used to record the interview can cause difficulty to the researcher. The interview in question was taped. It was then difficult and time consuming to transcribe into written words as the information had no clear format.

#### 3.5. Survey

A survey was also developed, it was two pages long printed on single sides and stapled together at the top left hand corner. Saunders et al (2007) identify a survey as a way in which people are asked to respond to the same set of questions in a particular order. The first section comprised of an introduction to the survey and a background as to why participants were filling it out. Thirteen questions were asked in total. Questions one to four established characteristics of the tourist, questions five to eight looked at reasons the tourists choose the Shannon region, question nine looked at the motivations of tourists to come on a coach tour, the main motivational factors which were identified in the literature

review where listed and respondents were then asked out of the factors given to rank their top three. The aim of the survey was to gain an understanding into the motivations of international coach tourists who visit the Shannon region.

#### 3.6. Piloting Survey

Marshall and Rossman (2011) recognize piloting as a useful tool for trying out different research strategies such as surveys and interview schedules. Piloting is a small scale study which helps to remove barriers to research such as a poorly designed survey. It is an important research instrument as it demonstrates the researcher's ability to manage the process and inevitably strengthens the research. The survey was piloted on the 19th December 2011 at Paddywagon headquarters in Dublin. Ten tourists waiting to board a coach tour bound for all over Ireland where randomly targeted. This tour was used because it took in a day in the Shannon region. It was found from the piloted survey that not a single participant was aware what the Shannon region was or where it was situated. Another startling finding was that no North American or British tourists participated, coach tourists were mainly from Australia and Canada on backpacking holidays. The marital status varied greatly to take in transgender and civil partnerships, nine out of the ten tourists were travelling alone. It was clear to the researcher a broader frame of mind needed to be implemented in the survey. All tourists agreed that the survey was easy to read, laid out well but maybe a different variety of options where needed in certain parts and a greater explanation of what exactly the Shannon region is.

#### 3.7. Sampling

Marshall et al (2011) identify sampling as the process of selecting a group of individuals concerned with the study in order to carry out research. A representative sampling process was adapted for this survey. Strauss et al (1998) establishes a representative sample as a small quantity of customers, in this case coach tourists, whose characteristics represent the entire population. Through research carried out by Fáilte Ireland (2011) the main market for coach tourists to the Shannon region were identified and a sample from each taken (see Table 3.1).

##### 3.7.1. Advantages of Sampling Survey

By carrying out a representative sample to conduct research it ensured that the whole population is represented. It added validity to the study and the different conclusions drawn.

##### 3.7.2. Disadvantages of Sampling Survey

The coach tourist markets identified by Fáilte Ireland differed greatly to the actual tourist markets that were piloted. It raises concerns that it may be impossible to get a representative sample if very few North American or British tourists participate in the Paddywagon coach tours. The main

markets identified in the semi structured interview and through the process of piloting where Canadian and Australian.

3.8. Conducting the Survey

The survey was completed in Paddywagon headquarters on the morning of the 21st January 2012. One hundred coach tourists who were bound on different coach tours to the Shannon region participated in the survey. In order to ensure validity each tourist was asked of their own free will to participate. The questions and the reasoning behind conducting the research were explained. The right mixes of nationalities were present and willing to complete the surveys but the numbers needed to ensure it was representative differed. Therefore a convenience sample had to be taken in the end which lacks credibility and validity.

Table 6 A Representative Sample of Coach Tourists to the Shannon Region.

3.9. Limitations to Methodology

It is clear there were many limitations to the methodology used in answering the research objectives. Although the nationalities of coach tourists did not differ as previously thought, the numbers of each participating did. A representative sample was identified as the best way to get a clear and concise understanding of a typical coach tourist, their characteristics and motivations. However it was impossible to do this sample as the numbers of tourists needed for each nationality were not present. Through piloting the survey it was obvious that it was too vague and designed with a different market in mind, therefore a greater understanding of the Shannon region and more options were included in the survey when it was conducted. December and January were also recognised as the quietest months for coach tourism, having a huge effect on the results of the study as these months were used to carry out research. Ideally research on coach tourism should be carried out in the month of August.

4. Survey RESULTS

This survey was completed by 100 international coach tourists to the Shannon region. The aim of the survey was to understand the motivations of international coach tourists who visit the Shannon region.

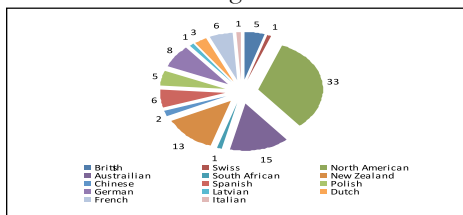


Figure 9: Participants Nationality

It is clear from the pie chart above, the nationality of coach tourists who participated varied greatly. North

Americans were the biggest nationality represented with 33 tourists taking part, 15 from Australia, 13 from New Zealand, eight from Germany, six from France, five from both Britain and Poland, three from the Netherlands, two from China and one tourist from Italy, South Africa and Switzerland. This clearly relates back to the literature review section, Table 2 (Fáilte Ireland 2010 a, b and e) which indicates the nationalities of coach tourists to the Shannon region, and highlights the North American market as the biggest coach tourist to the region. Mainland European countries rated second in Fáilte Ireland's findings (2010 a, b and e), which differed from the findings above. In this survey mainland Europe countries rated third highest, a strong presence of New Zealanders and Australians meant that 'other' countries rated second highest. The British coach tourist rated among the lowest which evidently relates back to Fáilte Ireland's (2010 a, b and e) where it showed the market was among the lowest. These figures combined shows that are the key international coach tourism market to the Shannon region.

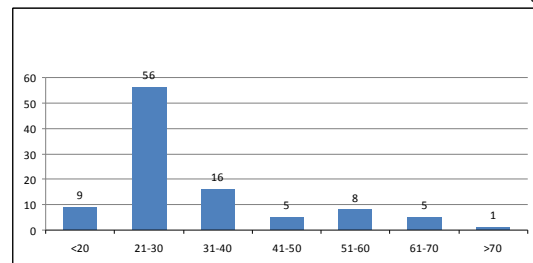


Figure 10: Tourists Age Profile

As evident from the above graph 56 out of 100 tourists who participated were between the age of 21-30. The second highest age bracket was 31-40 with 16 tourists, nine tourists indicated they were under 20, a further eight were between the ages of 51-60, five were between the ages of 41-50, a further five where between the age of 61-70, with one participant indicating they were over the age of 70. It is clear from the literature review section 2.3 Characteristics of a Coach Tourist, that the age profile greatly varies from Fáilte Ireland findings (2010 a), where they showed that 33% of all coach tourists were over the age of 65 and the market share decreased with age with only 7% of those surveyed under the age of 25. The tourist age profile findings from the survey completely contradict the the findings in the literature review section.

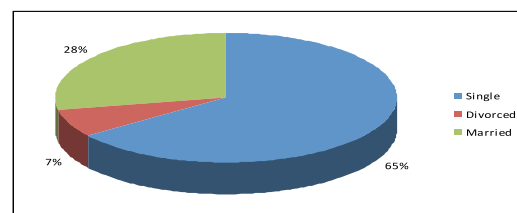


Figure 11: Participants Marital Status

From the figure above it is clear that 65 % of participants were single, a further 28% were married and 7% indicated they were divorced. This information was asked of participants because it was lacking from research carried out on coach tourists by Fáilte Ireland (2010 a). This shows the majority of coach tourists to the Shannon region are not married, perhaps this could be linked with the participants



age and had another coach tour operators' tourists been questioned the findings may differ.

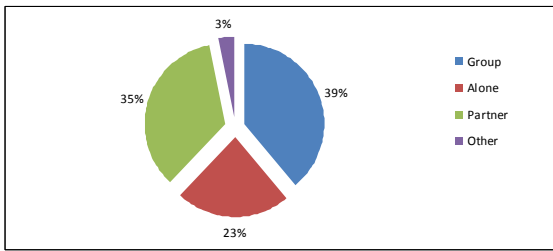


Figure 12: Party Composition

As is evident from the pie chart above it is clear that 39 % of participants are travelling as part of a group, 35% are travelling with a partner, and 23% are travelling alone. A small percentage of three stated other, when asked to specify they stated with family and friends. This is also evident in the literature mentioned earlier (2.3 Characteristics of a Coach Tourist), were a report from Fáilte Ireland (2010 a) indicates that 40% of coach tourists go on a coach tour as a couple, 34% go in a group, 14% travel alone and finally 12% travel with family and friends. The conclusion can now be drawn from both findings on the party composition of coach tourists to the Shannon region that the majority of tourists travel in a group or with a partner.

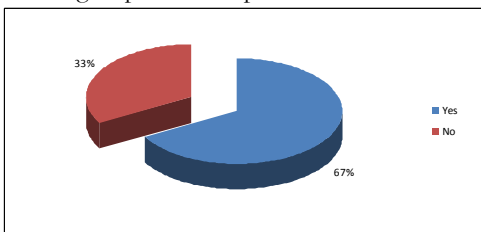


Figure 13: First Visit to Region

As seen from the above chart 67% of participants were first time visitors to the Shannon region, 33 % had already visited the region. These findings can be clearly linked back to the literature review section of this research where Fáilte Ireland (2010 a) findings showed that 74% of coach tourists, are first time visitors with the remainder (25%) being second time visitors. These figures clearly show the majority of coach tourists to the region are first time visitors to the area, which will link back to the second objective of profiling typical international coach tourists to the region.

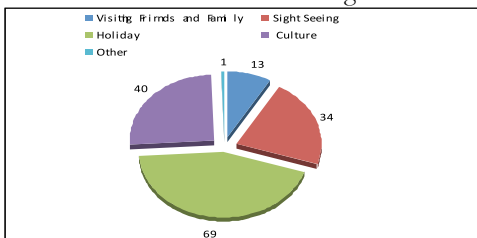


Figure 14: Reasons for Choosing a Coach Tour in the Shannon region

Respondents to the survey where asked to tick as many options as relevant to the reason they had chosen a coach tour of the Shannon region. It is clear from the pie chart above a holiday rated highest with 69 participants indicating this, visiting places of culture and historical importances rated second highest with 40 indicating this, sightseeing was rated 34 times, VFR (visiting friends and family) was

indicated 13 times by participants, and finally one participant indicated other reasons for their visit to the region when asked to specify this they cited they were “fourth generation Irish and where looking for the place in Co.Clare where they descended from” . These figures greatly differ from findings in the literature review, where it showed that 91% of coach tourists participated in a tour to see places of culture and historical importance. Although the option rated highly with 40 tourists indicating this, the main reason for partaking in a coach tour was a holiday. This clearly answers the fifth objective, the reason a coach tourist picks the Shannon region.

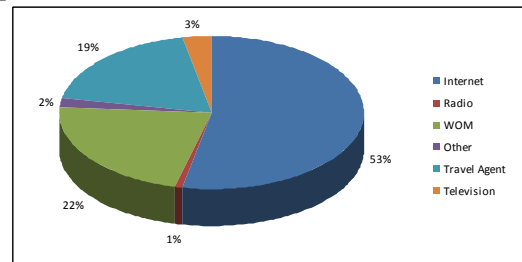


Figure 15: Discover Coach Tourism in the Shannon Region

As evident from the above chart the majority of participants (53%) first heard of coach tourism in the Shannon region through the internet. A further 22% heard through word of mouth, 19% learned about it through a travel agent, 3% learned about it through television, one % stated radio and two % said they heard through other means, when asked to specify they indicated they learned through literature the concierge in the hotel they were staying in gave them. This differs slightly from the literature where a report from Fáilte Ireland (2010 a) showed that 72% of tourists first heard about coach tourism in the region through their travel agent, although travel agents rated high among participants questioned for this research, the main source of information was the internet. This rated second in findings from Fáilte Ireland (2010 a). Word of Mouth did not even feature in Fáilte Ireland's findings. It is clear from analysing both sets of data, the internet, is a popular means of finding information, and the travel agent is still a well-liked way of booking.

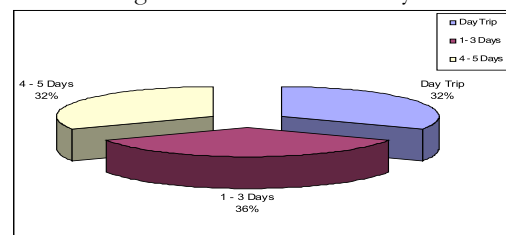


Figure 16: Length of Stay in the Region

As clear from the previous chart 35% of participants were staying in the region between one and three days, a further 33% where just on a day trip and 32% of coach tourists who filled in the survey where staying in the region for four to five days. These findings greatly varied from findings from Fáilte Ireland (2010 a) where it showed a coach tourist, depending on their origin, stayed an average of eight nights, with tours lasting between three to thirteen days. It is clear from the findings of the survey carried out the longest a coach tourist was staying on a tour was for five days. One third who

participated was only on a day trip. These findings link back to the second objective of profiling a typical coach tourist.

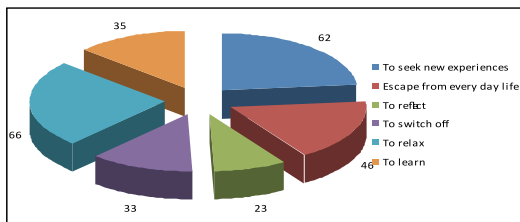


Figure 17: Motivational Factors

This question was put to coach tourists in order to gauge an understanding of what motivated them to partake in a tour. Participants were asked to rank the top three motivational factors which best matched the motives behind wanting to take a coach tour in the Shannon region. ‘To relax’ ranked the highest with 66 respondents noting this as one of the main motivations of participating in a coach tour of the region, ‘to seek new experience’ was the second highest with 62 tourists indicating this. ‘Escaping from everyday life’ ranked highly with 46 noting this as a reason behind their trip, 35 tourists selected to learn as a reason to partake in a coach tour of the region, ‘to switch off’ was indicated by 33 participants and finally 23 tourists partaking in the survey noted ‘to reflect’ as a contributing factor in motivations of taking a coach tour trip in the Shannon region. The motivational factors were adapted from the literature review section of this research. It is now clear the motivational factors selected in the literature review section and asked to participants of the survey were important, with each factor rating highly. Conclusions can therefore be drawn on the fourth objective of this research that the main motivations for a tourist to partaking on a coach tour in the Shannon region was a combination of all factors asked. ‘To relax and seek new experiences’, were rated the highest motivational factors among tourists who participated.

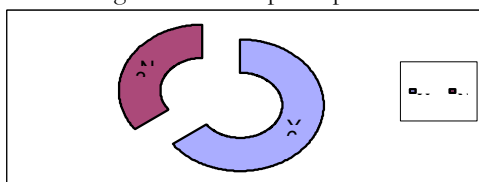


Figure 18: Plan to Visit Other Regions

It is evident from the above pie chart that the majority of tourist who participated in the tour planned to visit other regions (65%). When asked to specify the regions they wished to visit the tourists identified Belfast, Galway, Kerry, Kilkenny and Dublin. A further 35% of participants indicated that they would not be visiting any other regions. This question was put to participants as there was no information previously available regarding the issue. Information was widely available on the length of stay of coach tourists to the country, but none is available on regions they wished to visit as part of the stay. It is clear the majority of coach tourists visit other regions as part of their stay, many of the tourists who participated were on overnight tours which took in a number of regions.

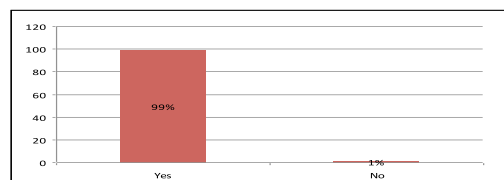


Figure 19: Satisfied with Experience

From the above bar chart it is apparent that 99 out of 100 tourists who participated in the survey were satisfied with their experience. The one tourist who indicated they were not satisfied was asked to specify a reason why, the participant indicated the journey was too long at their age. This is clearly a very positive result for the coach tour operator. The operator offers a range of trips, long and short so little change needs to be made to ensure coach tourists are satisfied with their experience, and in turn secures the sustainability of the coach tour sector in the Shannon region.

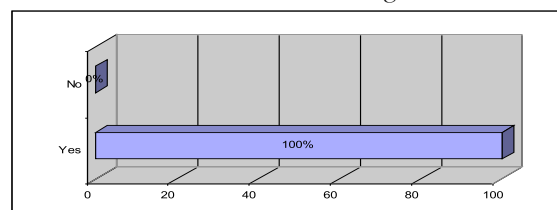


Figure 20: Return on a Coach Tour or Recommend to a Friend

All 100 participants agreed that they would either return on a coach tour in the Shannon region or recommend it to a friend. This is obviously a very positive result for the future sustainability of the coach tour sector in the Shannon region. If each participant was to either return on a tour or recommend the tour to a friend this would ensure a demand for the coach tour in the region in the future thus ensuring its sustainability.

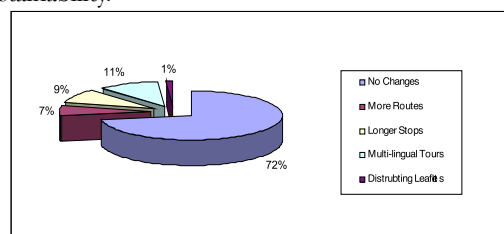


Figure 21: Changes to Coach Tours in the Shannon Region

This question was put to participants as an open question. As evident from the above pie chart 72% who participated in the survey indicated they would make no changes, a further 11 % specified that the trip could be improved if it was offered in a variety of languages, 9% of tourists thought the coach tour could be improved with longer stops in the region, one even indicated a twenty minute stop at Bunratty Castle was insufficient, seven % who partook stated more routes in the region could improve the tour and finally one % indicated distributing reading material on the tour and places of interest in the region could improve the tour. It is clear from the chart above that little change is needed on the coach tour to improve it, as previously seen, 99% of participants were satisfied with the tour. If the coach tour operators were to make the small improvement suggested and all tourists who partook were to either recommend it to a friend or themselves return on a coach tour of the region, this again

could ensure the sustainability of the sector, as the returning tourist would be satisfied their comments for improvement were taken on board and changes made, and may decide from that to recommend the tour again, or return on it themselves.

## 5. Emmerging Issues from Interviews

Interviews were conducted with Cathal O'Connell, owner of Paddywagon Coach Tours Dublin and Stephanie O'Toole Marketing Manager of Culture and Heritage tours Sligo. From these interviews a number of key issues were raised. The issues are outlined below and supported by information gathered from both participants.

### 5.1. Definition of a Coach Tour

Both key informants gave a clear definition for a coach tour that fits their business is. Both agreed it was about meeting new people and offering friendly service and assumed there was no definition of a coach tour in existence because it means a different thing to every tour operator.

Cathal indicated a coach tour was all about travelling to and experiencing Irish folklore, culture and heritage in certain part of the country. Stephanie on the other hand believed a coach tour was all about friendly comfortable travel, informing and engaging the participants through the tour. Conclusions can now be drawn from analysing the data collected, that a coach tour is a friendly way to travel that offers the participant the opportunity to engage and learn about their surroundings. This can be linked back to the literature (see 2.2 Coach Tourism) for a clear understanding of what coach tourism is. This confers 'that a coach tour is a guided bus tour for a group of holidaymakers that follows a planned itinerary'.

### 5.2. Key International Markets

Both informants recognised different nationalities as their key international market. Cathal indicated that his biggest market to date is the Australian market. This is not evident from Figure 9 where his tourists were questioned on their nationality and the majority of tourists were in fact North American. Australians however had a strong presence with 15 participants indicating this as their nationality. Stephanie indicated their biggest markets come from North America and mainland Europe; this ties in nicely with the literature review section of this paper where a report from Fáilte Ireland (2010 a) highlights the same markets as important. Through analysing the data collected it is now clear that North Americans, Europeans and other countries are the key international coach tourism market to the region.

### 5.3. Motivations of Tourists Participating in a Coach Tour

Both informants believed that the motivation behind a tourist participating in a coach tour was firstly the fact that everything was laid out for them. They need not worry about finding a place to stay and secondly the chance to meet new

people and make new friends. Cathal acknowledges this as a huge factor because of his product offering, the majority of his tourists are young and travel alone. Stephanie recognises the majority of tourists that partake in their tours do so for the opportunity to 'engage' and share an experience with new people, making friends for life.

### 5.4. Reasons for the Decline of the Sector Since 2007

Both informants had very different opinions as to the reasons for a decline in the coach tours sector since 2007. Cathal had not experienced any decline, and explained how by offering new products, and taking advantage of all Ireland had to offer he was experiencing growth. One of the main initiatives he offers is taking the tourist out of Dublin and bringing them to the Shannon region, he recognises the strain Shannon Airport is under and feels it is important to maintain links with the region. This supports (see 2.7 Decline of Coach Tourism in Ireland) O'Connor (2011) who highlights the huge decline in passenger numbers passing through the airport and Deegan (2011) who states the main reason for the tour operators drop in visitor numbers in the region as "the loss in passenger numbers in Shannon airport". Cathal also tries to keep the cost of tours very low by using his own properties for overnight coach tours.

Stephanie on the other hand highlighted the 'economic global recession' as the main reason for the decline in the coach tour sector. People are afraid to part with their 'hard earned cash' on luxuries such as coach tours as they are not certain what the future will bring. She also acknowledges the North American tourist as their main market and notes how they have been badly affected by the recession so there has been a drop in the number of coach tourists from that region. Understanding the reasons for decline in the sector, will give tour operators the chance to combat these factors and ensure its sustainability.

### 5.5. Effect of the Budget on the Coach Tour Operator

Both informants cited the increase in the cost of fuel in the last budget as the main effect on their coach tour operations. They both agreed they would have no choice but to pass the cost onto the consumer, making coach tours in Ireland unattractive and expensive. Stephanie highlighted that Britain was Ireland's main competitor in terms of coach tours, they can keep their price down by claiming back tax paid on fuel, making coach tours in Britain a lot cheaper than Ireland and as tourists are now becoming price sensitive they may be drawn to the cheaper offering. This issue was also discussed earlier where Pope (2011) highlighted that Ireland's main competitors can keep cost down offering tourists better value for money.

### 5.6. Opportunity for Growth in the Coach Tour Sector

Both informants recognised there was very different opportunity for growth in the coach tour sector. Stephanie and Cathal believe the future growth in the sector is looking

at alternative opportunities. Cathal believes his coach tour business has saturated the Irish coach tours market, but can see potential opportunities in other markets. He is looking at international opportunities and has been offered a contract with Euro 2012 bringing Irish fans to the Ukraine purely because of his marketing on his buses. Stephanie states that future growth opportunity is all about 'India' and looking for new emergent markets to tap into. As for the Shannon region and potential growth both informants believe it's all about getting the tourist out of Dublin and lifting barriers to access the Shannon region.

#### *5.7. Government Support for Coach Tour Operators*

Both informants agreed there was no real government support for the coach tour sector. Cathal is anti-government, operates independently and refused to discuss the difference between Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. Stephanie said reports and training provided by government agencies were helpful but not much other support was offered. Both believed the government needs to recognise the impact coach tourism is having the country and the government need to play a more active role to ensure the sustainability of the sector.

#### *5.8. Coach Tourism in the Shannon Region as a Sustainable Industry*

Both informants agreed more needs to be done to make coach tourism in the Shannon region a sustainable practice, such as promoting what the region has to offer and what counties it takes in. Tourist attractions in the region also need to lower their prices and offer quality for money services. Cathal believed it was a matter of 'standing out from the crowd'; and for as long as the Cliffs of Moher stand, there will be a demand for coach tourism in the Shannon region. Stephanie stated it was important to recognise that the region isn't just the Cliffs of Moher, she acknowledged the region has the most 'spectacular tourist attractions' and a plan needs to be put in place to market the region better.

### **5. Conclusion and recommendations**

The first objective set out, was to research and outline what exactly coach tourism is. The literature review section of this research gives an overview. Costa (2009) identifies coach tourism as a guided bus tour, which follows a scheduled itinerary, for a group of holidaymakers. Coach tourism was researched further in the data analysis and findings section of this research. A clear definition was sought from the key informants, both agreed a definition does not exist because every coach tour business is different and means different things to the coach operator. Through analysing the data gathered it was clear coach tourism is about travelling in comfort, meeting new people and seeking Irish cultural experiences through engaging the participants in their surroundings.

The second objective set out in this research was to identify key international markets, in other words to discover where the coach tourist to the Shannon region originated. Secondary research was conducted and reports from Fáilte Ireland (2010 a, b and e) were analysed to find that the main coach tourism markets to the Shannon region are North America, mainland Europe, Britain and other countries such as Australia. Primary research was also carried out and it was clear that the key international coach tourism markets that were found in the Fáilte Ireland (2010 a, b and e) reports matched the findings from the research conducted. It is clear, therefore, that the North American coach tourist is the biggest market to the Shannon region.

The third objective of this research was to find out about the typical coach tourist that comes to the Shannon region. Secondary research was carried out and it was found that the typical coach tourist are over the age of sixty five married, and travel as a couple or in a group. Primary research was also conducted to get a clear picture of who the coach tourist is. The findings from the survey carried out varied greatly from the literature review section of this research. It was found that majority of coach tourists were between the ages of twenty one and thirty were single and travelled in a group. Few similarities exist between the secondary and primary research conducted, it is clear the majority of coach tourists to the region are on their first visit. Further research should be conducted to gain a clearer insight into whom the typical coach tourist to the Shannon region are.

The fourth objective and the most important of this research, was to uncover and examine the motivations of international coach tourists to the Shannon region. Extensive research was carried out in the literature review section into tourist motivations, identifying motivation, such as the motivation to travel and the push and pull concept. No research was previously available on motivations of coach tourists to partake in a coach tour. Findings from the literature review section on tourists' motivations to travel were adapted from Gnoth (1997), Mc Cabe (2000) and Ryan et al (1998); six of the motivations were put into the survey which was given to one hundred international coach tourists to the Shannon region. All factors asked rated highly among participants. It is now clear that the main motivations of international coach tourists to come to the Shannon region are 'to relax', 'to seek new experiences', 'to escape from everyday life', 'to learn', 'to switch off' and 'to reflect'. The motivations which rated highest were 'to relax' and 'to seek new experiences'. The question of coach tourist motivation was also put to the tour operators who partook in the interviews, both respondents agreed that it was the fact that everything was laid on for the tourist, so they could relax and not worry about finding a place to stay and also to make new friends while sharing a unique experience.

The fifth objective of this research was to analyse the reasons the coach tourist picked the Shannon region as their destination. Findings from the literature review section show that tourists come to the Shannon region to visit places with 'culture and historical importance' (Fáilte Ireland 2010 a and d). The question was then put to the tourists who participated

in the survey, they were asked to pick as many options as relevant regarding why they chose a coach tour of the Shannon region. The main findings differed slightly from the literature review section; holiday was rated highest as the reason why a coach tour in the region was selected among participants. To visit places of culture and heritage rated second highest, followed by sightseeing. Through analysing both sets of data collected through primary and secondary research, it is clear that the reasons a tourist partakes in a coach tour of the Shannon region are to holiday and visit places of cultural and historical importance.

The final objective of this research was to discuss the viability of coach tourism in the Shannon region as a sustainable practice and ways to halt the rapid decline of the industry. Secondary research was conducted in the literature review section; reasons for the decline were identified by Deegan (2011) as the drop in passenger numbers in Shannon Airport. This theme was brought up again in the interviews, where Cathal O'Connell recognised the 'strain' Shannon airport was under, and how the tourists were all arriving in Dublin. Another reason for the decline in numbers highlighted in the literature review section (CITTC 2011) was the high cost of fuel which in turn was passed on to the coach tourist, making Ireland an unattractive destination for visitors. This issue emerged again during the interviews with both tour operators highlighting this as a factor affecting demand. Stephanie O'Toole also acknowledged the 'global economic recession' as one of the main reasons for the decline in the coach tour sector. She also recognised the affect the recession has had on the key international market of North America as a reason for the drop in visitor numbers. The issue of sustainability of coach tourism in the Shannon region was also raised by both informants. Both agreed coach tourism in the region can be sustainable; more needs to be done to promote the region and all it has to offer. A worrying theme among interviewees was the lack of government support available to coach tour operators. Cathal O'Connell told of how his initiative to bring the tourist from Dublin to the Shannon region was helping to maintain strong sustainable links with the coach tour sector. It is clear that coach tourism in the Shannon region can be sustainable, a number of issues were raised as to the reasons for the rapid decline in the sector, and the government needs to become involved to halt the decline in the sector.

It is clear from this section that all the objectives set out in this research have been answered. Further research is needed in areas where data collected differed, to clarify the actions that need to be taken to understand who the typical coach tourist to the region is and ways to ensure the future sustainability of the sector in Shannon region. Each of the objectives link together to meet the overall aim and 'uncover the motivations of international coach tourists to the Shannon region'. Conclusions can therefore be drawn from research carried out that coach tourists visit the region to 'holiday and to visit places of cultural and historical importance'. What motivates international coach tourist to visit the Shannon region is 'to relax', 'to seek new

experiences', 'to escape from everyday life', 'to learn', 'to switch off' and 'to reflect'.

Having studied coach tourism in the Shannon region, its downfalls and areas of value to the tourism industry, the following recommendations have been made. The government can take three main steps to increase coach tourism in the Shannon region. The sector itself could also take steps to ensure their sustainability, and finally areas of further research have been identified which would give a broader understanding of the typical coach tourist, and ways to ensure the sustainability of the sector in the Shannon region.

As no one conclusive definition of coach tourism is available, Research should be conducted in order to find one for coach tour operators in Ireland.

The government should offer incentives for coach tourists to fly into Shannon airport. This can be done through the establishment of an action plan for the airport and may include reduced tax charges associated with travel.

The Irish Government should follow the English parliament tax relief programme for coach tour operators. This involves allowing the operators claim tax relief on fuel consumption in the course of their business, therefore reducing costs and making coach tours in the region cheaper.

As the majority of coach tour operators operate from Dublin, it is necessary for the owners of attractions in the Shannon region to collaborate with these operators to bring more tourists to the region.

As Paddywagon is an alternative coach tour operator, this research has potential for a wide and exciting study should another more 'typical' coach tour operator agree to be involved and have their findings compared with that of Paddywagon.

Additional research during peak months should be conducted, findings from the participants should be compared with that of the information collected during the off peak months.

Further research is needed to determine what needs to be done to halt the rapid decline of the coach tour sector.

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