

The Economic Benefits Associated with Grey Caravanners' Involvement in Organised Rallies in Regional Queensland, Australia

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ABSTRACT

There has been increasing interest in the economic value of event tourism activities in regional and rural communities of Australia to help revive local economies. One touted solution is to encourage regional communities to embrace more fully older 'grey nomads' as they travel for six months or more around Australia. However, little attention has been paid to older adults who attend regular, short duration caravanning rallies as members of a caravan club. This research is based on a survey of 90 respondents who attended a caravan rally in 2012, and measures the economic contribution of these grey caravanners to a regional area while attending the organized event. Initial findings revealed that the group's expenditure was found to be greater than previously acknowledged for older travellers of this type. As such, it is argued that this group presents a growing and sustainable revenue source for regional communities who are willing to support these regularly staged rallies. Given the exploratory nature of the initial study, further research is needed in order to obtain a more detailed understanding of the economic contribution of this form of event related tourism activity in the Australian context.

KEY WORDS

Short-stay caravan travel; Older adults; Grey caravanners; Economic contribution

INTRODUCTION

Grey nomads are considered to be older travellers who are 55 years and older, retired or semi-retired, who travel around the continent in their caravans, campervans, motor homes or camper trailers, enjoying the rural outback, as well as different tourist destinations. This group of self-drive tourists is becoming a significant market and are of increasing interest to researchers because of this particular type of lifestyle (Tourism Research Australia, 2008), and the amount they spend on their travels.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010) estimated that the over 60 year old age group is projected to increase from 3.3 million Australians (or 17% of the population) in 2002, to 5.9 million by 2021 (or 25% of the population). Based on these figures, the grey tourism market is also likely to continue to grow strongly in coming years. Among the 8.5 million domestic caravanning and camping visitors in 2011, a quarter of them (2.6 million) were identified as being

seniors aged between the ages of 55 and 70 years. Importantly, when compared to the year 2000 estimates, trips by seniors have increased by 90% and their expenditure was up by 77% in nominal terms (Tourism Research Australia, 2012a).

Perhaps of greater significance is the fact that grey nomads often travel to rural and regional areas to experience an 'outback' lifestyle (Stockel, Geiner, & Mayocchi, 2006). Most of the previous research (Mings, 1997; Onyx & Leonard 2005; Prideaux, & McClymont, 2006; Higgs & Quirk, 2007; 2007; Patterson, Pegg, & Litster, 2011) has concentrated principally on long distance travellers who are 'following their dream' of travelling around the continent of Australia. Grey nomad travel has been touted as a resilient and sustainable form of tourism which can help cushion any drop in the number of inbound international tourist arrivals as a consequence of some form of global crisis. It has been noted by a number of researchers that globally, grey nomads are a very resilient group of travellers in that they continue to actively engage in tourist-related activities despite the recent 2008/09 financial crisis (DEEDI, 2010), rising fuel costs (Baillie 2008), the destruction of the twin towers in 2001, the second Gulf War and the 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome epidemic (Bates 2004).

Given the importance of this tourism segment, some studies (Table 1) have attempted to value the economic contribution of the senior self-drive tourism market in Australia by simply looking at expenditure patterns. This paper sheds some light on the importance of segregating the grey caravanners market for further analyses, and reassesses previous studies that have been based on the broad expenditure patterns of grey nomads generally as they engage in extended trips of two months duration or more.

Much like other tourist groups, the grey caravanner market can be segmented based on the duration and type of travel. In terms of the completed study, the authors identified two categories of particular interest - one group travels for short periods, not more than two weeks at a time; while the other group travels for longer periods from a few months to a year or longer. While it is argued that there has been considerable research on the latter, there is a dearth of studies on the former. It is argued that this is a critical oversight as the length of travel is considered an important aspect when studying expenditure patterns of older travellers, given the differences in the two groups, albeit duly recognizing there are indeed some similarities to be noted. The next section provides a summary of the results of the previous studies and describes the methodology that was used.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Grey nomads generally travel with a caravan in tow and have often been portrayed as not being high value tourists, with frugality a key part of the mainstream media stereotype (Anon 2002; Baker 2002; Chadwick 2006). This portrayal had been challenged at both the macro and micro level. At the macro level, it was noted that in 2004 domestic mature aged travellers in Australia spent a total of \$12 billion, which is a direct contribution of 35% of the total tourism GDP (Tourism Research Australia, 2007). While grey nomads' spend per day is lower than that of a typical tourist, they spend six times more per visit because they stay longer (Greiner, Stoeckl & Schweigert, 2004). Robson (2007) noted that the average length of stay of grey nomads is about four times longer than other tourist segments and as a result their overall expenditure is the highest, making them a very valuable market. In addition, McKinnon (2003) and Raggatt (2005)

pointed to the sheer increase in numbers of grey nomads who are travelling, and this is having a significant impact on local economies in regional, rural and outback communities.

Baillie (2008) on the other hand, contended that the typical grey nomad is in a different demographic group to that of the “cashed-up” retiree and has less disposable money to spend. However, Golik (1991) argued that seniors generally have more discretionary income than younger people with many choosing to spend it on travel. Sweetman (2012) inferred from a report by DEEDI (2011) that a third of the expenditure of grey nomads is on fuel, and since grey nomads look for ‘value for money and quality’, they are not exactly, ‘travelling goldmines’.

In the interests of this discussion, there have been few attempts in the literature to gain an understanding of the expenditure patterns of this niche market of grey nomads in Australia. This being particularly the case when considering grey caravanners involved in regular short-stay travel cased in terms of attendance at staged rallies. Table 1 summarizes the key findings of previous studies which are found to vary quite substantially. That is, the results are dependent on the method used to collect the data, the location of the interview such as the region or area, as well as the accommodation type or camping ground that are favoured (caravan park, free rest area, or show ground).

Table 1: Comparison of Grey Nomad Expenditure and Stay

Source	Daily Spend (A\$)	Average Length of Stay (Days)	Total Spend (A\$) Per Trip/Year
Carter (2002)	67	7	442
Greiner et al. (2004)	61	76	4 618
CARRS-Q (2010)	84	67	5 646
CMCA (2003)	51	157	8 074
Cridland (2008)	120	126	15 120
CMCA (2010b)	82	197	16 100

Source: Economic Development Committee (2010).

Apart from the findings of Cridland (2008), and the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia (CMCA, 2003), the daily spend calculated from other studies is broadly in the same range. As the latter study interviewed grey nomads who stayed in free rest areas, the daily spend was lower as it did not include accommodation. In fact, Balfour Consulting (2009) found that on average, grey nomads spent one night in a caravan park for every three nights in a free rest area or camping ground. Cridland (2008) on the other hand covered a number of areas in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory and separately computed expenditure for those who stayed in caravan parks as opposed to camping areas, as well as in different locations such as cities, remote areas and large and small coastal and inland towns and centres. Thus, the relatively high value reported in Table 1 is an average of a range of different attributes of travel.

What is perhaps more striking is the disparity in the average length of stay per trip. A shorter length of seven days was reported in the first study by Carter (2002) in Table 1, which is in line with Gray’s (2010) 4.5 days at the caravanning and camping areas of New South Wales, while Tourism Research Australia (2008) reported an average of five nights for overnight mature age visitors. Greiner et al. (2004) and CARRS-Q (2010) findings are approximately 10 times higher

than Carter's study (2002). The other three studies in Table 1 have large differences between them with an average trip length of between 126 and 197 days, while Baillie's (2008) study found that grey nomads traveled for about 101 days at a time.

The authors propose that a more accurate way of capturing the expenditure patterns of grey caravanners in particular is to segment the market based on the differences in the length of travel that is undertaken. For example, Table 1 shows the variation in the average number of trips of grey nomads. Clearly, it is highly unlikely that the majority of grey nomads are always on the road travelling. Rather, many older travellers prefer short-stay trips, often as members of a caravan club so as to attend one or more of the many staged rallies held annually at the regional, state and national levels. Often, engagement in such staged events usually involves travelling between 200 and 300 kilometres from where participants normally reside. More importantly, involvement in this form of event entails being away for between two days and two weeks, depending on whether they work full time, part time or are retired.

The senior travel market has been categorised into different subgroups based on their demographic, geographic, psychographic or behavioral characteristics (Ruys & Wei, 2001). Cridland (2008) segmented Australian grey nomads into: enthusiasts, sun soakers, semi-nomads, wanderers, adventurers and budget travelers. Robson (2007) reported that academic studies have grouped Australian grey nomads into: nostalgics (who want to revisit special spots), friendlies (who want to socialize); learners (who seek out new experiences) and escapists (who chase fun and relaxation). Gollick (1999) on the other hand identified four distinct groups - vacationers, livewires, explorers and home bodies within the older travel market. This type of segmentation is more likely to have a direct impact on the expenditure patterns of grey nomads. That is, adventurers, sun seekers and explorers are more likely to travel long distances and spend more on fuel and accommodation in their travel patterns than friendlies and homebodies, who are perhaps looking for different types of experiences that are closer to home.

ANNUAL EXPENDITURE OF SHORT-STAY GREY CARAVANNER TRAVEL

In this section, the authors have attempted to estimate the annual expenditure of short-stay grey caravanner travel. For the purposes of the exercise, it was deemed important that this information be obtained from a homogenous group who share common activities and travel consistently during the year. The members of the Queensland Combined Caravan Club (QCCC) is one such association. In fact, this is true for all the seven state caravan clubs in Australia, where a high proportion of the caravan clubs in each state are affiliated with their respective state caravan club associations.

For this study, a mixed method concurrent design was used which involved in-depth interviews and self-administered questionnaires completed by participants at an annual state-wide Caravan Rally. In this paper, the authors have chosen to report the findings from a select range of variables contained in the datafile. The dataset was collected via the administration of a survey questionnaire which was specifically developed for the research study, and was divided into three main sections. The first section contained a series of questions designed to collect information about the caravanner's travel behaviour and associated costs. The second section included a series of questions designed to measure the respondent's motivations for attending the state rally, the value attributed to a range of aspects related to the event itself, as well as

several others designed to ascertain their overall level of satisfaction with their visit to the region. The third section contained a series of questions designed to collect the range of demographic details about the rally participants themselves. All questions which were included in the study survey had been used, in one form or another, by two members of the research team in previous research that they had undertaken. To cross-check the suitability of the survey items for administration to the prospective respondents, the Management Committee of the Combined Caravans Club of Queensland (CCCQ) were used as an expert panel as a further validity check for the survey's format and content. In addition to the survey data, data was also collected directly from the Management Committee with respect to the number of caravans that had attended the National Rally over the last three years.

The sample for this study consisted of participants who were registered and attended the annual state rally organized by the CCCQ. The rally itself was held in Beaudesert, a regional community located approximately 80 kilometers from the state capital, Brisbane, in the State of Queensland, Australia. For the purpose of this research, a suitable study respondent was defined by the researchers as any individual having the status as a financial member of the CCCQ and registered as an attendee at the annual state rally. Information was elicited using a convenience sampling approach involving a paper-based 4 page survey provided to attendees in their welcome bag when they registered on site at the rally. In total, 179 caravan sites were registered for the event and only one survey per site was distributed to ensure that any data collected was not duplicated by members of the same traveling party. On the opening night of the Rally, members of the research team made a presentation to the assembled participants about the research, outlining its intent and ethical considerations. Surveys completed by the rally attendees were collected via a sealed drop box which was located at the Rally administration office for the final days of the rally. In all, 90 completed usable surveys were returned for analysis representing a response rate of 50.3%.

RESULTS

An analysis of the completed surveys revealed that the respondents were heavily involved with their respective caravan clubs and rallies that were held on a monthly basis. This level of engagement was facilitated by the respective affiliated clubs, who organized for its membership a monthly rally/trip where the group travelled to a pre-determined destination approximately 200 to 300 kilometres from their geographic base. Respondents reported that they regularly attended these monthly rallies for an average of four night's duration. Depending on whether they were retired, semi-retired or working, some members reported that they often extended their stays by an additional four to five days. Attendance at these monthly rallies was high with at least 70% of members attending these individual short stay activities. In addition, once a year, many members of the affiliated caravan clubs congregated at a week-long Queensland State Rally, and some also attended a week-long National Rally held at a different location once every three years. With the annual state rallies, about 50% of the caravanners extended their trip by an average of two days.

To estimate the annual expenditure of the grey caravanners attending CCCQ sanctioned rallies, the authors used data which was collected from respondents with respect to three main items of expenditure, which included the monthly rallies of the affiliated clubs, the QCCC annual State Rally, as well as the National Rally. Each section below shows the expenditure for each of

these three rallies, and explains how the figures in Table 2 were calculated.

Table 2: Annual Estimated Expenditure by QCCC Members

Activities	Conservative estimate	Likely estimate
Monthly Affiliated Club Rallies (based on 4 days/month and 9 trips/year)	\$2.76 million	\$2.81million ¹
Annual State Rally (3-year average)	\$49 308 ²	\$90 971
National Rally held every 3 years (averaged over 3 years)	\$64 801 ³	\$77 761
Total	\$2 870 359	\$2 980 107

Note:1 This includes potential expenditure on long trips apart from monthly rallies. 2This is based on shopper dockets collected from attendees on expenditure incurred during their Rally stay as well as the expenditure incurred by the QCCC Committee in organizing the Rally. The average was taken over the period of 2010-2012. 3This is an estimate as data is yet to be collected on this event. Source: QCCC Committee and data collected at 2012 QCCC State Rally.

Annual Expenditure on the Monthly Rallies

To estimate the annual expenditure of the QCCC, the researchers estimated the average daily spend of caravanners at their monthly rallies. Based on the data obtained from the questionnaires, there was an average spend per trip of A\$350. Thus, the average daily expenditure over a four-day monthly rally was A\$87.50. Given that there are 1200 club members with QCCC¹ and that 70% of the members attend on average nine out of the 12 trips per year, the annual cost of attending the monthly rallies of the associated caravan clubs of QCCC = $70/100 * 1200 * 9 * 350 = A\$2,646,000$.

The research team then added on the average extended 3-day stays taken before or after the monthly rallies of 50% of the club members. This equates to $50/100 * 70/100 * 1200 * 87.5 * 3$, that is, A\$110,250. Thus, the annual total expenditure of the monthly rallies undertaken by the QCCC members = $A\$2,646,000 + A\$110,250 = A\$2,756,250$. Respondents also revealed that the some club members undertook longer trips (lasting a few weeks) in addition to the monthly rallies. Assuming that the expenditure on such trips is about 2% of the above computed cost, this results in $2/100 * 2,756,250 = A\$ 55,125$. Hence the more likely estimate is = $A\$2,756,250 + A\$ 55,125 = A\$2.81million$.

Annual Expenditure on the State Rally

Apart from the monthly rallies and some longer trips made by the QCCC members for the year, the authors also included expenditure on the State Rally which was averaged over the three years. Every year, the QCCC collects shopper-dockets/receipts from all its members to keep track of the types, and amount of expenditure incurred at the site by those who attended the State Rally. Adding this to the information on how much the QCCC Management Committee has spent on organizing the State Rally based on an average over the last three years, the research team calculated expenditure in the order of A\$49,308.

In addition, the authors also included the travel costs (TC) incurred by members as well as the expenditure for their extended stay beyond the State Rally period. The TC information was

obtained from the survey findings. This was assessed as a round trip, as 96% of the respondents indicated that the main reason for the trip was attending the State Rally at Beaudesert. Hence, multi-destination journeys were not found to be an issue of major concern. Respondents were able to report their travel expenditure which consisted of fuel costs, expenditure on food on the way to the site, and accommodation costs along the way as well as at the site. The mean of the TC per caravan per day was found to be A\$118.

The State Rally in 2012 was attended by 179 caravan owners and the survey results showed that on average, caravanners spent about 3.22 days either travelling to the Rally or staying beyond the Rally. The survey also revealed that 50% of the respondents travelled directly to the Rally and did so within a day. Thus, travel costs to the State Rally were estimated to be $118 * 0.50 * 179 * 3.22 = \text{A\$ } 34,006$. Averaging this expenditure over the attendance of the previous three state rallies amounted to A\$41,663. Hence the likely estimate of the expenditure incurred at a State Rally = A\$49,308 + A\$41,663 = A\$90,971.

Annual Expenditure on the National Rally

The National Rally is a much bigger event than the State Rally, attracting an average of 468 caravans over the last three years from all over Australia. Data based on the expenditure for the National Rally however is largely incomplete, with extremely limited usability. Thus, an estimate was made for the event. Using the annual State Rally expenditure of \$90,971 from the average of 219 caravans attending the State Rally over the three years, the expenditure at the National State Rally is conservatively estimated to be $90,971/219 * 468 = \text{A\$ } 194,138$. As the event is held every three years, the annual expenditure of this event works out to be \$64,713.

Given that the National Rally is attended by caravan groups from all over Australia, it is highly likely that the expenditure incurred when travelling to and fro to the National Rally would be higher than the average 3.22 days of the annual State Rally. To capture this reasonably, we assume that this expenditure would be 20% more than the conservative estimate of A\$64,801, that is, an additional A\$12,960.

Total Expenditure

Table 2 shows that the annual total expenditure of QCCC members amounts to A\$2.98 million. This consists of the monthly rallies of the affiliated clubs, QCCC's annual State Rally, and the National Rally which is held every three years. This expenditure helps to create jobs and to provide income to others, who in turn spend the money, further injecting money into the economies of a diverse range of regional communities. Using the tourism multiplier effect of 1.9 from *Tourism Research Australia 2012*, the short stay caravanning associated with QCCC scheduled rallies is estimated to conservatively contribute \$5.66 million to the Australian economy.

DISCUSSION

As noted earlier in this research note, while much attention has been focused on grey nomad tourism in Australia in recent years, little attention has been given to the increasing engagement of older cohorts in short-stay caravan travel. This is particularly the case when the activity is associated with a caravanning club and is cased in terms of attending an organized rally.

Moreover, little is known about how this group values a particular location and the social and economic capital that they derive from visiting a given locality. Yet, such evidence is considered crucial in order to better understand what is considered of worth to this older cohort, and why they seek out the rally opportunities that they do.

While noting that the sample size for this exploratory study was relatively small, and a note of caution about what generalisations can be made from study results need thus be made, the findings do however raise some interesting questions worthy of further exploration. For instance, the results of this study lends support to the lobbying arguments of caravan groups that there is a need for greater investment on the part of the federal and state governments with respect to the services and infrastructure necessary to accommodate this growing tourism segment. Such effort would, in turn, serve to attract more grey nomads to engage purposefully in a leisurely and travel oriented lifestyle. Such an outcome has the prospect of accruing a range of benefits. For example, while the engagement of grey caravanners in staged rallies has immediate economic benefits for regional and rural communities in which this occurs, such endeavours also serve to increase the physical and psychological well-being of older Australians and to assist in keeping them healthy and active, a lifestyle which is purported to be an excellent model for ageing tourists (Higgs & Quirk 2007; Sedgley, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2010).

Finally, the results of the study also lends strong support to the argument that grey nomads will happily revisit locations which offer staged events, and event-related activities and services, that are better aligned with their own needs and interests than those presently offered by many tourist destinations and their associated local tourist attractions. Kandampully (2000) reaffirmed that tourist organizations must understand the expectations and needs of their customers, and to design products and services that match, and even exceed their expectations. Table 3 shows that on average, one trip per year over the last five years was made to the Beaudesert region. Moreover, findings revealed, and in the next five years an average of three more trips to this region are intended by study respondents. The study findings also revealed that 57% of older caravanners felt that national and/or state parks were also an important part of their visit (see Table 3). While travelling to a region in close proximity to a national or state park may be considered by many older individuals as being worthwhile, this alone is no longer a sufficient attractant to satisfy the needs and wants of the growing number of short-stay older travellers. For instance, 88% of them indicated that they were uncertain or did not feel that there was sufficient caravan accommodation in the region. Clearly, the ability to meaningfully engage in a regional and/or rural community environment with a staged rally as the principal conduit is a major draw card for this group of travellers. Thus, communities that are able to offer a welcoming atmosphere, and which are able and willing to support the staging of caravan rallies in their locale, provide a most desirable point of differentiation from other prospective destinations when it comes to attracting this growing but most discerning group of older tourists.

Table 3: Statistics from the Pilot Survey

Number of visits in the past 5 years	6.02 with a standard deviation of 7.36
Number of likely visits in the next 5 years	3.34 with a standard deviation of 4.93
Proportion of caravanners who felt that a national and/or state park is important for trip.	57.1%
Proportion of caravanners who were unsure and did not agree that there was sufficient caravan accommodation in the region.	87.78%

Source: Compiled from survey

CONCLUSION

The study is presented as a first attempt to estimate short-stay caravan group's expenditure patterns associated with their involvement in organized caravan rallies. Results of this initial study suggest that this short-stay market has great potential as a significant economic generator that tourism authorities have yet to fully comprehend or effectively tap into. The State Rally in 2012 was attended by 179 caravan owners and the survey results showed that on average, caravanners spent A\$90,971 including travelling costs and accommodation. Overall, using the tourism multiplier effect of 1.9, short stay caravanning associated with the three types of scheduled rallies has been estimated by the researchers to conservatively contribute \$5.66 million to the Australian economy.

With due consideration of the cautionary note made earlier about sample size, the preliminary findings nevertheless suggest that this economic contribution to regional and rural communities from short-stay grey caravanners may be a somewhat conservative valuation of their experiences. To address this concern, further research is therefore warranted so as to more deeply scrutinize the expenditure patterns of older short stay caravanning tourists as they regularly seek out positive and engaging tourist-driven, leisure-laden and event-based experiences.

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