

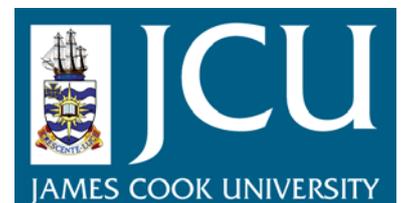
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**Tourists' Happiness  
through the Lens of Positive Psychology**

**thesis submitted by**

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**BBusBA (UTS) BM (Hons) (UTS)**

**in October 2009**

**for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)**

**School of Business  
James Cook University**

## STATEMENT ON SOURCES

### *Declaration*

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

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## **STATEMENT ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS**

I recognise James Cook University for providing me with PhD research assistance grants which provided financial support throughout my degree. I also recognise that the university provided grants to attend conferences that aided in the progress and completion of the PhD thesis.

I recognise the support received from the School of Business in the form of financial and physical resources provided during the course of the PhD thesis.

I recognise the contribution of my principal supervisor, Professor Philip Pearce, for his support and guidance during my PhD years.

I recognise the support of Dr. Paul Allatson and the University of Technology, Sydney for assisting me in accessing my research participants, Luke Greenacre for providing me with statistical support, the JCU tourism colleagues for their coding assistance and the travellers who participated in the studies.

I recognise the JCU Ethics Committee for ensuring that all research conducted for this PhD thesis met ethical standards and received approval.

## DECLARATION ON ETHICS

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999), the *Joint NHRMCI/VCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (1997), the *James Cook University Policy on Experimentation Ethics, Standard Practices and Guidelines* (2001), and the *James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (2001). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Experimentation Ethics Review Committee (H 2186; category 1).

Sebastian Filep

Date

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I dedicate this thesis to everyone mentioned here.

## **Abstract**

The purpose of the thesis is to contribute to knowledge in tourism studies by linking fresh concepts from psychology to tourist behaviour studies. The research field is called positive psychology and stems from organised initiatives by mainstream and prominent psychologists since the year 2000. The broad aim of positive psychology is to investigate what makes life worth living and the central preoccupation is with what human happiness means and how it can be measured.

The thesis is divided into six chapters. Following an introductory chapter on happiness, a detailed literature review covers key themes of positive psychology, youth travel, cultural tourism, tourist motivation, tourist satisfaction and methodological creativity. Each of the themes is divided into smaller sections in which recent and salient works are discussed. Knowledge gaps related to the overall theme of tourist happiness are identified in the review of these themes. To close the gaps, the thesis then addresses three questions:

- 1) How can a positive psychology approach to understanding human motivation contribute to a sound theory of tourist motivation?
- 2) How can flow state methods from positive psychology contribute to a better understanding of tourist satisfaction?
- 3) How can the answers to the first two questions contribute to a conceptualisation of a happy tourist?

Three studies are presented and analysed through a positive psychology lens in chapters 3, 4 and 5 to broadly address these questions. The studies analyse the experiences of a group of Australian study-abroad university students in relation to their travel year in Spain. The first and the last studies were conducted in Sydney and the second study was conducted in Spain. The first is a motivation study which consisted of a smaller qualitative investigation and a separate quantitative, supportive study. Travel motives of the student group were investigated qualitatively through an analysis of "a perfect day" at a destination. Using personal narrative essays, travel motives of relationship/belonging, safety/comfort, curiosity/mental stimulation and self-development were identified through this positive psychology lens. In the supportive context study, motives of a group of backpackers were investigated through motivation scales. It was shown that the students' travel motives

are similar to the motives of these other youth travellers. The essay approach thus eases the measurement of motivation. It is shown that through descriptions of perfect days similar travel motivations can be uncovered as in a more complex survey. By simplifying the measurement (employing the simple question which is universal in its application and is not culture, age nor gender specific) the positive psychology approach contributes to a sound theory of tourist motivation.

The second study is an analysis through in-depth interviews of the students' immediate conscious experiences at Spanish cultural heritage sites. The aim of this study was to identify immediate satisfaction themes from on-site experiences of the students at these sites. It is shown that the students' immediate satisfaction is characterised by challenge-skill balance, total concentration, autotelic (intrinsically rewarding) events, time transformation and the related themes of mindfulness, object focus, personal experience, calm/tranquility and discovery. It is further demonstrated that the flow model from positive psychology was useful in uncovering this layer of satisfaction and that it contributes to the overall picture of tourists' happiness.

The last study is an analysis of the students' memorable experiences in Spain. These experiences were analysed through personal narrative essays. It was found that the satisfaction themes of challenge-skills balance and autotelic events featured in the students' memorable experiences. Evidence of eudaimonia and surprise was also uncovered. These themes, together with those identified in the motivation and the on-site study further contribute to the exploratory picture of tourists' happiness.

The sixth and final chapter recaps the contribution of the three studies and presents a preliminary overview of tourists' happiness. Tourists' happiness through the lens of positive psychology is a product of the travel motivations for relationships and belonging, safety and comfort, curiosity and mental stimulation and a motive for personal development. The tourists' happiness is also about the on-site and memorable experience themes identified in the satisfaction studies. These tourist experience themes are all linked to the three dimensions of happiness from positive psychology: meaning, engagement and positive emotions. It is recommended that future tourism research relevant to the issue of tourists' happiness and the positive psychology field should be conducted. Suggested future research studies are: a challenge-skill balance study, a positive emotions and meaning study, a positive psychology study on tourism education and a study of benefits of travel to tourists' health.

## Presentation Note

The thesis document is formatted according to the official James Cook University thesis guidelines for a Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD). Under such guidelines, candidates are encouraged to publish sections of their theses before they are formally submitted for examination. If the study chapters of the thesis are presented as a series of published papers they should be presented in a coherent format (not be reprints bound together). The intellectual thread that connects the chapters should be signposted in the introduction and summarized by way of synthesis in the general discussion. Chapter 5, therefore, includes a refereed, published paper that was solely written by the author. A short preface precedes the paper and a final statement follows from the article to tie it in with the rest of the thesis. Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 do not include refereed publications.

Aspects of this thesis research have also been presented in academic publications other than the refereed paper included in the thesis. These other research outputs are:

1. Filep, S. (2007) 'Flow', Sightseeing, Satisfaction and Personal Development: Exploring Relationships via Positive Psychology. In I. McDonnell, S. Grabowski, and R. March (Eds.), *2007 Council for Australian University Tourism and Hospitality Education (CAUTHE) CD-ROM: Tourism - Past Achievements, Future Challenges*. Sydney, Australia: University of Technology, Sydney.
2. Filep, S. (2007) Measuring immediate experiences: Flow state methods and tourist satisfaction. *The Extraordinary Experiences Conference*, 3-4 September. Bournemouth, UK: Bournemouth University.
3. Filep, S. (2008) Linking Tourist Satisfaction to Happiness and Quality of Life. *BEST Think Thank VIII – Sustaining Quality of Life through Tourism*, 24 - 28 June. Izmir, Turkey: Izmir University of Economics: IN PRINT
4. Filep, S. (2008) Measuring Happiness: A New Look at Tourist Satisfaction. In S. Richardson, L., Fredline, A. Patiar, and M. Ternel (Eds.), *2008 Council for Australian University Tourism and Hospitality Education (CAUTHE) CD-ROM: Tourism and Hospitality Research, Training and Practice: Where the 'bloody hell' are we?* The Gold Coast, QLD, Australia: Griffith University.
5. Filep, S. and Greenacre, L. (2007) Evaluating and Extending the Travel Career Patterns Model, *TOURISM – An International Interdisciplinary Journal* 55 (1): 23-38.

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