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## Chapter 5

# SAVORING PERSIAN TRAVEL Analyzing Tourists' Memories

**Philip L. Pearce**

James Cook University, Australia

**Zohre Mohammadi**

Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran

### ABSTRACT

Building on key ideas about the value of savoring to understand the importance of holiday memories, the researchers asked a sample of Iranians to write a long paragraph (one page) which described a particularly important, happy, and enjoyable holiday occasion. The answers were coded using five categories developed from savoring studies. By benchmarking the scores with data from well-matched samples from other countries (specifically a European sample from Austria, and Chinese and Japanese respondents), the Iranian tourists were shown to be especially appreciative of holidays in terms of being grateful, marvelling, luxuriating and having a strong sense of the status value of their time. For Iranians, holidays provide powerful, evocative highlights for their lives.

Keywords: holiday memories, savoring, benchmarking, Iranian well-being, widespread benefits

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the content and dimensions of importance in the highly valued travel memories of Iranian tourists. The recall of intensely remembered occasions is referred to as savoring and the work on this topic fits within a diverse set of memory studies in tourism and psychology (Bryant & Veroff, 2007; Martin Carlson & Buskit, 2010). The North American spelling - "savoring" - is used throughout the chapter to follow the precedent set by the original researchers who developed the concept for psychology and memory studies. In this chapter, the authors report on data describing a set of memorable occasions and encounters for a heterogeneous sample. Tourists from Iran are used as the source for

representing modern Persian culture, though the researchers appreciate that there are pockets of communities in other countries who could justifiably claim that they share a Persian heritage.

It is also the main argument of this chapter that studies of tourists from any one nation can be more meaningful if comparative data from other cultures are also provided. For such parallel or contextual information the use of a benchmarking approach allows researchers to identify distinctive cultural emphases and ideas (Reisinger & Turner, 2004). The scope of the chapter, therefore, considers the kinds of themes and dimensions reported when Iranian tourists savor their travel, and these data are set in the context of responses from Japanese, Chinese and western (European) tourists. The methods section of this chapter describes the rationale for this selection of benchmarking partners.

Identifying special or distinctive forces shaping the behavior of any national group of tourists demands a consideration of both forces external to the tourists themselves as well as a study of the culture and psychology of the tourist. For tourists from Iran, there are several broad forces pertaining to the current position of the country in the geopolitical framework that shape national and international travel experiences. For Iranians, the difficulty of obtaining some visas is one of the limiting forces for international travel. During the last decade, many countries have opened their doors to new source markets, especially those from Asia (Pearce & Wu, 2017). In western Asia however, and notably for Iranian citizens, the ability to travel to other countries is not a smooth or easy process. One important and foundation implication of this difficulty is that travel by those with a Persian heritage has predominantly occurred within their own country or to a small circuit of accepting neighboring states where Islam is a powerful prevailing force. A second limiting issue for Iranian tourists lies in the difficulties of moving around the world without access to the credit card facilities and systems employed in so many destinations. The economic sanctions and banking restrictions imposed on the country have isolated this part of western Asia resulting in stress on tourists in that they are required to mostly manage their resources as cash.

And beyond these large-scale logistical issues, the gaze and behavior of the government towards the behavior of Iranian citizens can be a source of concern. Government attention to the behaviors of Iranian

citizens is a powerful but not easily discussed the issue and can shape the choices individual Iranians make both inside and outside their country (cf. Molz, 2012). It would be naïve not to think that these Foucault like gazes do not frame Iranian tourists' behavior and affect their memories and most savored experiences. The authors recognize these molar forces in influencing and interpreting data about Iranian tourists' experiences and their memories. Nevertheless, it can also be argued that due to the longevity of an intellectual, outward-looking Persian culture, and despite the limitations on international tourism, Iranian citizens do still enjoy holidays as an integral part of social and leisure life. The driving aim of this chapter is to examine the themes and dimensions that Iranian tourists emphasize in their highly valued travel experiences. The work uses and embellishes a well-established coding scheme, the specific system being that developed by Bryant and Veroff (2007), for reviewing the savored experiences. In interpreting these themes, the authors consider comparative data from other countries to understand how Iranian tourists reflect on their environments, cultural sites, and cities and, in this process, seek to uncover distinctive themes in contemporary Persian tourism.

## MEMORY AND SAVORING

The trinkets, toys and treasures that tourists buy at their visited locations are often purchased on a whim. Nevertheless, such purchases can have the serious purpose of providing a physical symbol reminding the person of the place or time (Timothy, 2005). It is also possible to cast travel memories as souvenirs. They are the intangible accompaniments to actual souvenirs. As time passes, several studies have argued that the physical souvenirs that tourists collect are often lost, misplaced or relegated to a backroom (Collins-Kreiner & Zins, 2011; Murphy, Benckendorff, Moscardo & Pearce, 2011). These changes arguably mirror what happens to the memories of travel; they change, suffer damage due to the interference of subsequent events and are often re-used in different ways over the years. In particular, there is a recognition that the memory of the time spent at the holiday place is likely to fade and perhaps some of the value of the vacation is lost. These concerns reflect a quite pragmatic and useful public understanding of the way human memory works.

As Bartlett (1932) explained a long time ago, there are no immutable records in the human brain, no storage system like a library catalog or file drawer. Instead, there is remembering. Bartlett argued that memory researchers are not dealing with “the re-excitation of innumerable fixed, lifeless and fragmentary traces” (1932, p. 213). Rather, remembering appears to be far more decisively an affair of construction rather than reproduction. It is an imaginative reconstruction, or construction, built out of the relation of our attitude towards a mass of organized past reactions or experiences (pp. 205- 213). The essence of these ideas persists as a defining way to view memory (Roediger, 2000). Bartlett identified two key processes operating when memory is reconstructed. He suggested that the processes at work in the repeated telling of a story, where the act can apply to tell others or ruminating over an episode oneself, are simplification and a thrust to extract clearer and clearer meaning.

These important foundation ideas have implications for tourism studies and memory. In working with tourists’ memories, there are no absolutes. When individuals are asked to recollect a particularly strong or powerful memory, it may not be presented or represented in the same way on subsequent occasions. Such occasions are introduced by Jafari (1987) in a tourism model consists of phases in a tourist cycle-moving from ordinary life, experiencing the unfamiliar, and returning to the ordinary world. The labels for the sequences that Jafari used were corporation, emancipation, animation, repatriation incorporation, and omission. Noy (2005) expanded on this point in arguing that stories have a time- based momentum in the life of Israeli backpackers. In particular, Noy identified heightened phases in both the tourists’ journey and the return home, where travel episodes are more likely to be reported. The two phases correspond to animation and incorporation phases in Jafari’s tourist immersion model. It can also be added that the way the stories are told may vary over time and according to the listeners. Researchers have to respect this shifting quality of memory work (Small, 2002). Further, researchers and the questions they ask provide a small-scale social milieu that can affect remembering, or in more everyday terms, the presentation of the memory based story. In an experimental study of the acceptability of ten different travel stories Pearce (1991) built on the implicit realization of positive and negative motives. He demonstrated that while both positive and negative stories were seen as material for communication, stories which challenged the self-esteem of the tourist were the least likely to be shared.

These preliminary observations about memory and travel stories frame the key interest in a special type of travel memory that is central to this chapter. The fundamental interest in the present analysis is on the topic of savoring. Savoring involves focused intensity related to the anticipation, involvement in or recollection of experience (Bryant & Veroff, 2007). Savoring is about the processes through which people actively derive pleasure and fulfillment in relation to positive experiences. Savoring as a process confers advantages to individuals – it is an effective part of resilience and coping with emotional lows (Tugade & Frederickson, 2004). The emphasis in this study is on savoring related to the recollection of key and intense but positive travel experiences, though it is possible to suggest that at times people savor negative experiences as a way of comforting themselves or reviewing the passing of bad times. There are, nevertheless, further complexities to be explored in these assertions which involve considering the benefits of negative travel experiences on overall well-being, possibly through the contrast of making travelers feel more satisfied in staying at home (Jung and Cho, 2015).

It can be noted that there is already a small and growing tradition in tourism studies directed at understanding memorable tourism experiences (; Kim, Ritchie & McCormic, 2010; Hosany & Gilbert , 2010; Tung & Ritchie 2011; Hosany, 2012; Hosany and Prayag, 2013; Kim 2014). The existing studies in tourism on memory are worth considering as a background for the present chapter, although there is a key distinction between those studies and the present interest in savoring. The principal difference lies in the specificity of instruction to the respondents. In much of the existing memorable tourism work, the tourists or the recently returned tourists, are simply asked to recount stories or remember aspects of their holiday. By way of contrast, the concern with savoring attempts, through the instructions to respondents, to focus on the most intense and important occasions. In the present work, such events were restricted to the most positive and intense tourism experiences. In emphasizing these differences in focus-specific intense experiences versus general memories, the present research may also be accessing more frequently recalled and reworked key episodes (cf. Roediger, 2000).

The kinds of tourist memory studies undertaken in the wider memory interest area have developed under the heading of MTEs (memorable tourism experiences). The category of memory of interest in both these studies and the savoring work is known as autobiographical memory- that is the experiences that

relate to the individual's own life. Other more factual memory topics in tourism, such as remembering a route, recalling the address of a foreign hotel, keeping in mind the exchange rate when visiting a foreign country, are not the topics of present memory concern. The main efforts of the researchers working in MTEs lie in trying to catalog the forces that make a travel episode likely to be stored in autobiographical memory (Table 1). For example, Kim, Ritchie and McCormic (2010) identified seven memorable features or domains: hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty. Four further dimensions from tourists' stories - affect, expectations, consequentiality, and recollection - were then seen as useful additional categorizations (Thung & Ritchie, 2011). A subsequent study by a member of the same research group developed a scale with ten destinations attributes seen as likely to be associated with MTEs (Kim, 2014). Broad characteristics of destinations were employed in this appraisal including local culture/history, psychographic linkage, activities and events, quality of service, hospitality, place attachment and superstructure. Clearly, the direction and drift of these categories are towards the features of the destination. By way of contrast, the dimensions that have been developed to explore the characteristics of savoring in memory are more closely tied to the personal involvement and psychological states of the individual, and in the present tourism study this means the way the tourists react in terms of valuing their experience.

**[Table 1 Here]**

The principal dimensions developed by researchers in savoring are presented in detail in the work of Bryant and Veroff (2007). They have instigated a series of studies reported in full in their book to describe the dimensions of both positively and negatively savored memories. The authors' interest in the tourism context lies in the positive benefits and associations. The key savoring terms Bryant and Veroff have developed are presented in Table 2. The positive terms in Table 2 are accompanied by associated descriptions.

**[Table 2 Here]**

### *The value of holidays*

The importance of studying savoring in tourism lies in expanding the assessment of the value of holidays. Some researchers have concluded that the well-being benefits of holidays are ephemeral (De Bloom, Geurts & Kompier, 2013; Nawijn, 2011). Such studies tend to rely on rating scales and assess tourists' responses shortly after they return from their travels – typically a one week to one month post-holiday time frame. Considering the existing literature concerning the recuperative benefits of holidays and the changes tourists report during their holiday experience, some limitations regarding “savoring” emerge. One issue is the problem of reactivity in the measurement process. In repeatedly asking respondents to report their emotions and benefits, it is quite possible that individuals modify their responses with an awareness that they will be asked again how they are feeling or reacting. A second limitation lies in the persistent sampling of tourists from North America, Europe, or Australia. And, of special relevance to the importance of savoring, the short time frames in which these post-holiday appraisals are measured does not allow for the longer terms use of the travel experience as an emotional resource which can build resilience through the recall of good times.

It has been established in studies outside of the tourism sphere that the generic process of savoring has positive emotional consequences for individuals and their social world (Frederickson, 2001; Tugade & Frederickson, 2004). By developing studies of tourists who savor their holiday memories, it is possible that some enduring benefits of holiday taking may be established (March & Woodside, 2005; Filep & Pearce, 2014). An understanding of savoring can be developed by investigating the relative importance of key processes, as already described in Table 2. Studies investigating these processes and the rewards they bring to individuals may, therefore, be seen as contributing to debates that holiday benefits are not necessarily ephemeral (De Bloom et al., 2010; Dolnicar, Yanamandram, & Cliff, 2012). Importantly, broad claims about the way savoring works have rarely been investigated in tourism and rarely across cultures. Filep, Cao, Jiang, and DeLacy (2013) found that amongst a sample of Chinese tourists traveling in Australia, joy was the most savored emotion, followed by interest, contentment and love. Joy, interest and contentment were most commonly linked to experiences that involved observations of natural scenery, while love was the emotion that was linked to acts of kindness with the locals.



### *Benchmarking and Culture*

One of the difficulties in working with broad issues such as memory processes and savoring within any one cultural group lies in not being able to understand the distinctiveness or generalizability of the results. Comparative studies by other researchers may build a body of knowledge that helps this understanding, but a more direct pathway lies in comparing other samples within the one study. These kinds of cross-cultural comparative efforts benefit from established processes in benchmarking studies (Pearce & Benckendorff, 2006; Wober, 2002). A particular theme in the benchmarking literature is that by using carefully selected comparisons, the researcher is not left with “floating data”, where that term refers to information collected that cannot be placed in context. As an example, is a satisfaction score of 8.25/10 for a community operated ecotourism resort a very good score, a moderate score or a low score for this kind of specialist experience? Similarly, and with the present research interests in mind, do Iranian tourists who are invited to report on their intense holiday experiences provide content that is similar to or unlike that of tourists from other nations? A rationale for the selection of comparative source markets in the study of savoring is presented subsequently as a part of the method’s documentation in the present chapter.

Another aim of the study is to uncover distinctive themes in contemporary Persian tourism through the analysis of savoring records. This aim demands some consideration of how to compare and contrast cultural themes and topics. There are several well-known molar schemes that have identified international differences in values and the orientation of cultural groups. The work of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) describes one such system and is a development from the earlier work of Hofstede (1980). The latter researcher and his team of associates have provided several updates to their first listing of dimensions which they originally used to describe intercultural differences (de Mooij & Hofstede 2010; Hofstede, 2001). There is no clear agreement amongst researchers about the best dimensions to use in the changing, technology, influenced contemporary world. As a broad appraisal, the categories developed by Hofstede, originally six now trimmed to five, can be used as organizers of

specific literature about a place. Using this approach Zare and Riasati (2017) have offered a summary of Hofstede's system applied to Iran. This recent analysis is closely allied to a review of Iranian values from multiple surveys collected together by Khajehpour, Namazie and Honari (2013). In these summaries, Iranian culture can be portrayed as a collective society, one with higher power distance, characterized by a desire to avoid uncertainty, underpinned by a predisposition towards a feminine appreciation for nature, poetry, art and indirect communication, where restraint is valued but shorter rather than long-term goals prevail (Hofstede, 2017; Khajehpour, Namazie & Honari, 2013). In the extensive commentary which has existed about Hofstede's system and related large-scale assessments of cultural values, it is not clear whether these generic dimensions function in the same way in different domains of life such as business, education and travel. The approach to using this information in the present chapter is to follow Hofstede's own advice when he comments that the dimensions are valuable as useful interpretive tools, not immutable rules, and indeed they are most unlikely to apply to all individuals. This advice suggests that care must be taken in reviewing these dimensions in interpreting savoring results, and, in seeking to describe Persian tourism issues and orientations, a broad view of the themes must be maintained rather than addressing individual cases.

A final yet powerful overarching set of Islamic religious forces pervade life in contemporary Iran. These views and values are strongly held and reinforced by the dominant powers who govern the country. It is consistent with Islamic teaching that travel is a valued part of human development and an act that can show respect for God (Jafari & Scott, 2014). Such ideas about the benefits of travel for Muslims include appreciating God's creations and the natural world, the value of socializing with and meeting other people, enhancing health and well-being, learning from the past, understanding cultural diversity, and adding to knowledge (Ghani, 2016; Henderson, 2003; Mohsin, Ramli, & Alkhulayfi, 2016; Zamani-Farahani & Eid, 2016). Although it is not the specific tourism interest of this study, one of the five Islamic pillars in the Arab world (performing Hajj) involves travel (Ghani, 2016). In Shia Islam (around 90% of Iranians are Shia), there are also five pillars but they are different to those followed by Sunni Islamic adherents. For most Iranian Muslims, there are ten Obligatory Acts or so-called Ancillaries of the Faith of which "Haj" or "travel to Mecca" is one. The researchers appreciate that these values and

emphases may underpin some of the savoring episodes reported by Iranian tourists. The role of these religious perspectives on leisure travel motives and patterns may offer insights into the kinds of savoring reported in the study.

A further codicil to these influences can be noted. Persian culture itself is an older, and in the relatively recent past of the twentieth century, a very powerful force with its own intellectual and aesthetic traditions as well as views on how to relate others. As with many countries where there are layers of cultural values blending, dominating or juxtaposed onto older traditions, individual family perspectives within a culture may integrate these diverse views and be more influential in shaping travel attitudes and goals than any one system of thought (cf. Pisani, 2016).

The following steps in this chapter document the original data collected for the appraisal of savoring. These data were assembled to meet the aims of firstly seeing how Iranian tourists distinctively reflect on their holidays. Secondly, by reviewing the themes in the savoring episodes, the authors seek to uncover organizing themes in contemporary Persian tourism.

## METHOD

*Design.* The research design involved selecting respondents from four countries: Austria representing Europe, Japan, China, and Iran. Postgraduate level or older respondents with sufficient travel experience to be able to reflect on memories were chosen through the researchers' networks of academic contacts. A desired target of 200 respondents was set - 50 respondents each from the contributing locations. The purpose of informing the country selection was to vary respondents' level of familiarity in international tourism activity; at first accessing a sample where international tourism as a life-enriching activity has been established for a long time (European based sample collected in Austria), next a group where tourist travel is quite well established (Japan), and then a sample from a source country where travel is a rapidly developing international activity (China), as well as the national group where travel mobility is less well developed across the international borders (Iran). It was further anticipated that in Hofstede's terms these choices contrasted collectivist cultures (all Asian versus European), feminine cultures (Japan and

Iran) versus those with masculinity tendencies (China and Europe), and risk averse cultures (China and Japan and Iran) versus more adventurous nations (Europe). The actual respondents were recruited through University colleagues in major cities and needed to have sufficient travel experience to be able to reflect on memories; many graduate-level students and their family networks assisted in the completion of the savoring data.

It was explained to respondents that the study was about tourism and the memory of special happy and enjoyable occasions from their past travels. They were asked to write down a long paragraph of about 300-400 words (one page), which described one such particular important happy and enjoyable occasion. Translations from the relevant local language were made by the research associates assisting with the study. It was suggested to respondents that they remember and write down as much as they could about the place, the people, the meaning of the trip and the feelings they had then and now. Respondents were assured that their answers were anonymous but that there was a need for the international comparisons driving the study to collect their age, nationality, whether they were male or female and whether they considered themselves to be very, somewhat, or not very experienced in how much travel they had completed. The process resulted in a reasonably well-matched sample of postgraduate students and their networks from other countries (specifically a European sample from Austria, and Chinese and Japanese samples). The results of these demographic measures ensured that the groups were quite uniform with mean ages in the 25-34 year range, an evenly distributed split between the sexes with most respondents having plentiful domestic travel experiences and often some international trips.

*Scoring.* When respondents had completed their 300-400 word description, the research team members gave each story a score out of 10 where 10 meant the recorded savoring episode very much contained this factor and 0 meant it was not present at all. The scores were given for the constructs Thanksgiving, Basking, Marveling, Luxuriating, and Knowing.

## STUDY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The content of the stories reported by the tourists in all countries was coded by research associates using the definitions provided for the savoring dimensions. These data are presented in Table 3.

### [Table 3 Here]

(a) Using t-tests for unrelated samples pairs of score with the bracketed letters a and b were significantly different ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the Iranian and Chinese sample differences between the Iranian and Japanese sample are indicated with the bracketed letters a and c, and differences between the Iranian and Austrian sample are indicated by the bracketed letters a and d. The differences between the Iranian scores and the overall mean are indicated by the pairing (a) and (e).

The highlights from the savoring categories which help understand this process of tourists' extracting long-term value from their experiences are that thanksgiving, marveling and luxuriating contribute the most to the savoring experiences when viewed across the four countries studied. To again clarify the meaning of these terms, the results describe tourists being grateful and pleased to be in that place with that opportunity, being in awe, amazed and impressed by the experience place or people, and enjoying the physical and sensory pleasure of the experience. Less powerful overall drivers of the savored experiences were basking (having pride in the occasion, and the tourists' performance or what was achieved there) and knowing (building knowledge and understanding a lot more about the place or people).

By tracking the ratings for the Iranian tourists in relation to these general results, the findings indicated that the Iranians also gave high scores on thanksgiving, marveling and luxuriating and lower scores on knowing and basking. The overall pattern of the results for the Iranian tourists showed some key statistically significant differences from the other specific nationalities studied. These data are highlighted in Table 3). Compared to the Chinese respondents, Iranian respondents provided generally lower scores overall. Compared to the Japanese tourists, the Iranians were more inclined to marvel at

environments, reported more sensory involvement and had a tendency to luxuriate in the holiday experience. These differences can be assigned to the qualities of the Iranian feminine culture with the predisposition to be sensitive to the nuances of art, culture and beauty in the environment. Compared to the European sample, the Iranians were likely to record basking responses and take pride in their achievements as well as report stories where the dimension of knowing (building knowledge and understanding) was rated more highly.

To illustrate these general dimensions the following excerpts from the Iranian sample are provided. Overall high savoring scores and mean ratings can be expected as the researchers were focusing on the respondents' most positive experiences. Iranian tourists gave the highest score to the construct of **Thanksgiving** which was 8.64. Iranians were in the upper bracket of countries providing a Thanksgiving score at this high level. The Iranian respondents mostly conveyed the feeling of being thankful and of having the chance to have such an opportunity in their life. Analyzing the stories, phrases such as “the best travel”, “the most interesting travel”, “great experience” and similar phrases were repeated. Joy and interest were the most savored specific emotions. Two respondents demonstrated their sense of thanksgiving as follows:

*“...Water was so clear. Barrier reefs were so distinguishable ..... Colorful fishes....Every day and every moment of those days were scenic and amazing and I cannot forget any moment of that.... Flora and fauna of the region were distinguishable.... In total it was an amazing and relaxing holiday in the winter to rest and make very interesting memories... It was one of my best travels.”*

*“...We did something expensive but worthy. We hired an island for some hours and we were taken there by a boat....the island was owned by us for some hours. And we were the king and the queen of the island. It was a very unique experience that I think not so many people in the world can experience it. I can firmly say this trip was my ever best experience in the life.”*

**Basking** is a strong feeling reflecting degrees of self-satisfaction. It can also have implications for one's social status and imply that others would be envious of the tourists' holiday experiences. Iranian tourists received a moderately high score on this construct with a mean score of 7.70. It was the second highest score in the dataset and above the mean value. Two forces can be suggested here. Traditionally great pride and the dimension of basking could be applied to achieving the goal of visiting Mecca. Muslims can have strong feeling and emotions such as basking while and after undertaking the pilgrimage. In the dataset there were limited numbers of stories about the religious experiences used when compiling the stories. It has been suggested that Iranians feel proud of their achievements in art or science rather than travel (Khajehpour, Namazie & Honari, 2013) but the view can be offered that this is changing and younger Iranians such as those in the sample are very comfortable in taking pride in their travel achievements. The following quote shows a relatively rare example of basking due to a religious travel experience:

*“ ... traveling to Karbala brings pride to every Shiite ...the place which God promised to Shiite as a former experience of heaven... the pride of listening to the adhan (the Islamic call to prayer) in Imam Husayn shrine is unbelievable and hard to describe.”*

By way of contrast, an example of basking from travel was evident in the following account:

*“There is a nice memory from traveling to Turkey which still gives me goose bumps even after 5 years and it was when we were on a ship on Bosphorus strait and our tasteful tour operators played Iranian national song and all of the tourists who were Iranians sang together in a great harmony, it was a sense of being proud of my country... Singing the national song was not something to take my attention but that day in Turkey, on the ship, with people who were not obliged to sing the song and just singing from the bottom of their heart to show their affection to their country made me think how lucky I am to have such a nice and pleasant experience.”*

The second highest score among the savoring constructs for the Iranian tourists was given to **Marveling** with a mean score of 8.40. Iranians are nationalistic, arguably a legacy of the external geopolitical environment which has provided restrictions and isolated the country. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that they take great pride in the longevity of Persian culture and marvel at ancient places which show the roots of their lifestyle and their one-time leading role in the development of civilization. The following quotes represent marveling:

*“...visiting an underground city in Kish island was incredible... related to the ancient times... the ancient inhabitants have dogged out long and narrow tunnels with lots of rooms in the ground to avoid warmth and humidity of the island...what they have done those years to be survived is amazing... the walls of the city were covered by fish bones and shells...”*

*“... visiting an ancient village belongs to 12000 years ago was so exclusive... the houses were hand-dug... the most interesting part was that there were still some families living there... imagine life was going on there from 12000 years ago till now, wow that is amazing.”*

*“...I experienced a week living with nomads...participating in a wedding... seeing people in colorful clothes...experiencing local dance...sleeping in a wool made tent... all were incredible... it was great to see they have kept their customs alive.”*

The **Luxuriating** mean score was 8.18. This was in the middle range of the data from all the countries. Observation of natural scenery was a good source of joy and often provided material for reflection by the Iranian tourists. As noted in the review of the literature, Iranians are heirs to what may be designated as a feminine culture where the appreciation of nature and art flows in their blood (Khajehpour, Namazie & Honari, 2013). These excerpts from stories reveal the sensuous engagement with the world and both are good examples of luxuriating:

*“... visiting Jashak salt dome was one of the most joyful moments of the trip, I have looked for the images of the place earlier but the reality was not comparable to what was*



*pictured... domes of salt in different colors: white, pink, gray, red, orange and ... the shape was interestingly like a cone... walking on them was joyful and hard but interestingly safe to walk on... the sound of water could be heard but not seen as it was streaming under the thick layer of salt... it gave me the sense of novelty, authenticity and rebirth.”*

*“...the road was mountainous and hard to drive and it got worse when the rain started... it was night when we arrived to one of the Talesh county pasturages... walking outside of the car...dark sky but full of the stars, so close to the stars as I could imagine I can catch them...the next morning ...wow... waking up, opening my eyes to the extreme beauty of the surrounding green grassland, flowers with dew on them, the ring of bells, the sound of water streams, the smell of woods burning for cooking bread ... living on the clouds...just like a heaven...”*

The lowest score belonged to **Knowing**. Building knowledge and understanding about the place or people were not the main focus of the Iranian respondents. This result can be related to two cultural features. First, Iranians are not long-term thinkers (Hofstede, 2001). They enjoy their present world and coupled with the wary responses to strangers, they seemingly do not build knowledge about the locals and host communities. This tendency is likely to apply in domestic travel but in international contacts, there are more reports of friendly and outgoing behavior. In coding the data, the researchers occasionally found direct statements about the acquisition of knowledge but they were less frequent than the expressive remarks about the other savoring dimension. The following examples represent knowing:

*“...being in Switzerland... having the chance of visiting people from France, Italy and German...gave me lots of fun and joyful moments also this travel enhanced my cultural knowledge and make me think more on cultural differences and interactions.”*

*“.....what was distinguishable for me and made that trip one of the most interesting was the existence of contrasts, especially observing coexistence of people with different religions with peace and seeing churches and mosques next to each other... incredible.”*

## CONCLUSION

In this study, the researchers asked Iranian tourists to write down a long paragraph (one page) which described a particularly important, happy and enjoyable holiday occasion. These instructions produced a set of rich accounts of significant travel experiences which enabled the researchers to code the material into five categories developed from the academic studies of savoring. The travel reported in the stories included many accounts of domestic holidays but a range of international travel adventures and occasions were also included. By comparing the results to savoring scores collected from reasonably well matched postgraduate students and their networks from other countries (specifically a European sample from Austria, and Chinese and Japanese respondents), the Iranian tourists were shown to be grateful for their holiday times, to marvel at natural environments and to appreciate the sensory and aesthetic qualities of their travels. They were, also quite ready to bask in their travel achievements or infer status benefits from their experiences but less concerned with learning about other cultures and places. A caveat must be placed on this last point because much of the travel savored was within Iran, possibly reducing the importance and opportunity to engage in what was seen as significant new knowledge building.

There are some limitations to the study that can be used to guide fresh research. It would be beneficial to have a larger sample of remembered stories for savoring so that distinctions between memories of domestic and international trips could be developed. Other sampling issues worth considering include the ability to explore representative age and generation factors, and as with all travel and tourism studies to see if the effects of increased travel experience have influence on what is valued and savored (Pearce & Lee, 2005). A conversational rather than a written approach to savoring could also be trialed, although issues of trust and familiarity might need to be carefully managed in such discussions.

The broader implications of these results for understanding the position of Iranian travel and tourism can be extended into three main themes. One outstanding feature in the marveling results is the deep

appreciation and pride in the historical legacies of Persian culture. This extends to the buildings and architecture, the stories about the ancient civilization but is also built on respect for the lives of famous Persian figures as venerated at their tombs and monuments to their lives. There is a patriotic and culturally strong heritage at the root of this pride and marveling, and the researchers suggest that these respectful and much-enjoyed statements of appreciation are constants for Iranian people in a world of current threat and instability.

A second notable theme in the results lies in the appreciation of the beauty and aesthetics of places and scenery, shown most of all in compelling descriptions of the natural environment. It is possible to suggest a link here to the Persian heritage of having a well-developed respect for poetry and art. It is difficult to capture through translation into English some of the expressive ways the natural landscape is described and enjoyed in the luxuriating commentary, but even with this limiting factor (as displayed in the examples provided), a sensitivity to the settings is apparent. In the literature deriving from Hofstede and others, this kind of appreciation is referred to as a feminine pole in the masculine-feminine definitions of cultural variability and it seems to provide a good characterization of the savoring experiences.

The further implication arising from these results follows from the lower scores for knowledge and fulfilling curiosity. There does appear to be a reluctance among contemporary Iranians to engage with unfamiliar fellow Iranians. This circumspect approach to dealing with those outside the safety and familiarity of the family group and well-known friendship circles may be a response to the gaze and attention of the government. Expressed simply, it is prudent for Iranian tourists to avoid contacts and behaviors which are seen as contrary to the dictates of the interpretation of Islam prevailing in the country. Iranians may be seen as risk averse in this regard, preferring to be cautious in their social networks and holiday knowledge seeking due to implied threats of reprisal. There is though, a duality in this interpretation, as Iranians are also seen as hospitable to those international tourists who arrive in their country (Khajehpour, Namazie, & Honari, 2013).

In conclusion, the present study captures key contemporary dimensions underlying the travel by Iranian citizens. They are not the same as other citizens from Eastern Asia or Europe. The prospects for change and modification to some of these forces and descriptions for Iranian tourists do exist. In the short term, however, the insights from this study suggest that modern Iranian tourists are strongly influenced by their Persian heritage and ideals, while also monitoring their responses to the world in the context of contemporary political and religious views.

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## TABLES AND FIGURES

**Table 1. Suggested Dimensions of Memorable Tourism Experiences**

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Dimensions of MTE</b>
<b>Otto &amp; Ritchie</b>	1996	Hedonics, peace of mind, involvement, recognition, entertainment, escapism, aesthetics, and education.
<b>Oh, Fiore, &amp; Jeong</b>	2007	
<b>Crosby &amp; Johnson</b>	2006	Duration, intensity, breadth, interaction, triggers, and significance.
<b>Kim</b>	2009	Relaxing, hedonic, stimulating, freeing, refreshing, adverse feelings, sociable, happy, meaningfulness, knowledge, challenge, value, service, unexpected happenings, personal relevance, novelty, familiarity, participation, and planning.
<b>Kim, Ritchie &amp; McCormic</b>	2010	Hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty.
<b>Thung &amp; Ritchie</b>	2011	Affect, expectations, consequentiality, and recollection
<b>Kim</b>	2014	Local culture, variety of activities, hospitality, infrastructure, environment management, accessibility, quality of service, physiography, place attachment, and superstructure

**Table 2. Key positive savoring terms defined (following Bryant & Veroff, 2007)**

<b>Key Savoring Term</b>	<b>Description of the construct</b>
<b>Thanksgiving</b>	Being grateful, pleased that you were there and had this opportunity.
<b>Basking</b>	Having pride in the occasion, your performance or what you achieved there.
<b>Marveling</b>	Being in awe, amazed and impressed by the experience of the place or people
<b>Luxuriating</b>	Enjoying the physical and sensory pleasure of the experience; responding to beauty and sensory inputs
<b>Knowing</b>	Building knowledge, understanding a lot more about the place or people

**Table 3. Mean scores for the savoring dimensions by countries** Scale: 0 (not at all) - 10 (maximum)

	<b>IRAN</b> N=50	<b>CHINA</b> N=50	<b>JAPAN</b> N=39	<b>AUSTRIA</b> N=40	<b>Overall mean</b>
<b>Thanksgiving</b>	8.64 (a)	9.40 (b)	8.78	8.46	8.84
<b>Basking</b>	7.70 (a)	8.62 (b)	7.30	3.48 (d)	6.92(e)
<b>Marveling</b>	8.40 (a)	9.08 (b)	6.60 (c)	8.54	8.23
<b>Luxuriating</b>	8.18 (a)	9.02 (b)	7.28 (c)	8.20	8.22
<b>Knowing</b>	7.10 (a)	8.42 (b)	7.25	4.43 (d)	6.90

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