

Capturing the visitor experience

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Researchers at The University of Queensland (UQ) School of Tourism have developed a tool to gauge the “visitor experience” to allow Australia's tourism industry to improve in quality and profitability.

Working with Professor Roy Ballantyne and Mr Nigel Bond, Dr Jan Packer has developed a checklist of adjectives and nouns, and participants are able to choose from the checklist the words that best describe their experience.

“Although each individual's experience is unique, when you add together a number of responses a pattern emerges that reflects the unique offerings of the particular site or event,” Dr Packer said.

“The checklist method had some advantages over an open-ended question approach because it allowed participants to respond to the same set of items.”

“It also has the capacity to involve a large number of items without making the task too onerous as experienced with a rating scale approach.”

Dr Packer said the subjective nature and quality of experiences makes the ‘visitor experience’ challenging to measure.

“Researchers have explored the visitor experience qualitatively, but this process is time-consuming and does not lend itself to large-scale data collection, or comparison between sites or among different visitor

groups.”

A recent study of visitors to the Australian War Memorial (AWM) used this checklist to investigate aspects of the visitor experience that led to a heightened sense of national identity.

The study found the unique experiences offered by the AWM, which engender a sense of privilege and respect among visitors, contributed to increasing the ‘attachment’ aspects of national identity (the extent to which the person identifies with and feels attached to Australia), and decreasing the ‘criticism’ aspects (the extent to which the person regrets or devalues being an Australian).

The checklist will also be trialed at a number of cultural institutions in the USA, Canada and New Zealand using an online database which will enable comparisons of visitor experiences at different sites.

The participating institutions will have access to these results, which may help to improve the design and marketing of the visitor experiences they offer, as well as provide a benchmarking measure.

“The need to understand the visitor experience is common to many different fields of interest – tourism, leisure, events, heritage interpretation, museums and zoos – all of these focus on providing visitors with experiences,” Dr Packer said.

“There is clearly a need to understand and have the ability to measure this elusive thing we call ‘the visitor experience’.”

Provided by University of Queensland

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