

## Surf travel behavior and destination preferences: An application of the Serious Leisure Inventory and Measure

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### H I G H L I G H T S

- ▶ The study examines surfing as serious leisure and its implication in surf tourism.
- ▶ Surfers show high levels of serious leisure qualities and a strong disposition for surf tourism.
- ▶ Serious leisure qualities do not have any effect on surf travel behavior.
- ▶ Serious leisure qualities are significant associated with preferences on the surfing appeal of the destination.

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### A B S T R A C T

Surfers are characterized by the time and effort they invest in surfing and their propensity to travel in search for the perfect wave. In spite of such characteristics and the economic significance of surf tourism, little is known about surfing as serious leisure and its implications in surf tourism. Thus, a study was conducted using a convenient sample of 126 surfers to examine whether the six serious leisure qualities (Effort, Ethos, Career, Identity, Perseverance, Benefits) are associated with surf travel behavior and destination preferences. Results confirmed that surfers have a strong disposition for surf tourism and that they show high levels of serious leisure in their six qualities. Statistical tests also revealed that although serious leisure qualities are not associated with surf travel behavior, they do predict destination preferences especially related to the overall surfing appeal of the destination, the variety of waves, and the quality of the natural environment. Management and marketing implications for surf tourism operators and destinations are discussed. Besides filling a gap in the literature, this study augments the marketing intelligence for owners and managers of surf-related business as well agencies and organizations promoting surf tourism.

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### 1. Introduction

Since the sixties, the popularity of surfing among participants and spectators has steadily increased fostering a multi-million dollar industry that stimulates local economies (Buckley, 2002a; Frank, Zhou, Bezerra, & Crowley, 2009; Ponting, 2008; Tantamjarik, 2004). Such increased popularity, as well as the surfers' quest for the perfect wave, have created the surf tourism industry (Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003b; Pitt, 2009). In 2007, it was calculated that 112 countries offered some sort of surfing tours or had available surfing-related information for tourists (Ponting, 2008). Although calculating the size and economic significance of the global surf tourism is

not an easy task (Buckley, 2002a, 2003), its world total value is likely to be at least one quarter of a billion U.S. dollars (Ponting, 2008). However, such estimate may fall short when taking into account that most popular surf destinations in developed and developing countries have hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of small surf tourism operations which value has never been calculated (Ponting, 2008). This industry also encompasses businesses offering ancillary products (e.g., souvenirs, clothing) to fans, who although are not always surfers, pretend being part of the surfing world mostly through the surfing mode of dress and branded garments (Moutinho, Dionisio, & Leal, 2007). Furthermore, the surf tourism industry promises further growth with the development of more specialized services such as surf schools as well as increase of the market for surfing-related consumer brands (Moutinho et al., 2007).

In spite of the size and economic implications of the surf tourism industry, few studies have examined this form of niche tourism

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(e.g., Buckley, 2002a, 2002b, 2003; Dolnicar & Flucker, 2003a, 2003b, 2004; Ponting, 2008, 2009; Tantamjarik, 2004). In particular, and to the extent of the authors knowledge, it is yet to be examined the application of Stebbins' (1982, 2001) six qualities of serious leisure among surfers and its influence on surf tourism. Aiming to fill such a gap in the literature, a study was undertaken between 2010 and 2011 to examine the application of the Serious Leisure Inventory and Measure – SLIM (Gould, Moore, McGuire, & Stebbins, 2008) among surfers residing in different countries. Specifically, the study addressed two objectives: (1) to explore whether socio-demographic and surfing behavior are associated to the six qualities of serious leisure; and (2) to examine the six serious leisure qualities as predictors of surf travel behavior and destination preferences.

Examining the application of serious leisure among surfers augments the marketing intelligence for owners and managers of surf-related business (e.g., tour operators, surfing resorts, surf schools) as well as agencies and organizations promoting surf tourism; this information is critical given the size of the global surf tourism industry and its economic significance especially for surfing destinations in developing countries (Dolnicar & Flucker, 2003a). For example, identifying the demographics and surfing behavior that are associated with the seriousness of surfing can be utilized to craft promotional messages targeting certain surfers' segments. Examining whether the serious leisure qualities predict surf travel behavior and preferences has important management implications as such information can assist the development or enhancement of surfing destinations as well as to guide businesses in the provision of complementary activities and services to enhance the satisfaction of their clients. The following section of the manuscript reviews the literature related to surf tourism and serious leisure, detailing the application of the latter construct among tourism studies. The remaining sections detail the study methods, results and conclusions.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Surf tourism

Although surf tourism has been examined in the last years, its definition is yet to be settled. For Buckley (2002a), surf tourism occurs “when surfers travel at least 40 km and stay overnight with surfing as the primary purpose for travel” (p. 407), including domestic as well as international travel (Dolnicar & Flucker, 2003a). In their several studies, Dolnicar and Flucker (2003a, 2003b, 2004) do not refer to any minimum distance traveled, but they mention at least one overnight stay as long as the stay does not exceed six months for domestic travels or 12 months for international locations; they also refer to an active surfing participation. Ponting (2008) highlights the primary purpose of surfing waves in his definition of “surfing tourism”, thus rejecting those positions that include spectators and non-surfing travel companions (e.g., Dolnicar & Flucker, 2003b) which he labels as “surf tourism”. In both definitions, Ponting (2008) refers to the minimum of one overnight away from home. It is important to note that Flucker's (2003) pioneer study on surf tourism referred to the use of the wave power to ride the wave (as cited by Dolnicar & Flucker, 2003a, 2003b, 2004), thus excluding similar water-based activities using other types of power such as sail-wind surfing or kite-powered surfing (Ponting, 2008).

Surf tourism has become a significant component of the worldwide adventure tourism sector, generating sufficient economic, social and environmental significance to justify academic attention (Buckley, 2002a; 2002b). Started with independent travelers searching for new surfing spots, surf tourism

peaked in the 1960s mostly because of more affordable air travel, lighter surfboards, and the image of a surfing culture delivered through mass media (Butts, 2001; Ponting, 2006; Tantamjarik, 2004). Numerous surf-related films including Hollywood beach-related stories, aficionado “pure” surfing films, and surfing industry videos, have popularized surfing-style fashions and values (Booth, 1996), while printed material, music, clothing, and competitions, have created a demand for people traveling to several beach destinations, portrayed as perfect unspoiled beaches in paradisiacal tropical destinations (Ponting, 2009). As a consequence, surfers usually accompanied by a partner or with up to four friends (Dolnicar & Flucker, 2003a), flock to such portrayed destinations searching for their main attraction: the perfect waves (Butts, 2001; Tantamjarik, 2004).

Although surf tourism started as a self-guided adventure driven by the quality of the surfing experience in other regions or climates (e.g., wave height and period, swell direction, tide), the majority of current surf travelers are no longer backpackers with plenty of free time but travelers relying on surf tour operators to help them coordinate their travel arrangements and find the perfect wave (Pitt, 2009; Ponting, 2008; Tantamjarik, 2004). Thus, the specialized commercial surfing tours that began with rudimentary surf camps and live-aboard a boat in the late 1970s has led to a global industry involving thousands of tour operators, village homestays, resorts, charter boats, wholesalers, retail travel agents, and vertically integrated service combinations around the world (Nourbakhsh, 2008; Phillips & House, 2009; Ponting, 2009).

Dolnicar and Flucker (2003a, 2003b, 2004) advanced our understanding of surf tourism marketing by identifying five segments of surf tourists with different socio-demographic characteristics, namely, age, education and income levels (Dolnicar & Flucker, 2003a, 2003b). Although they concluded that all surf tourists are concerned for their personal safety and prefer non-crowded surf destinations, each segment has different preferences for the waves they would like to ride and the overall surrounding of the destination including its friendly facilities, infrastructure (e.g., quality of the meal) and its easy access (Dolnicar & Flucker, 2003a).

### 2.2. Serious leisure and the Serious Leisure Inventory and Measure (SLIM)

During the early 1980s, Stebbins (1982) introduced “serious leisure” as a framework for the research of leisure as a means for personal fulfillment, identity enhancement, self-expression, among other benefits. Ten years after his first publication, Stebbins (1992) defined serious leisure as: “the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that is sufficiently substantial and interesting for a participant to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of its special skills and knowledge” (p. 3). Aiming to define, describe and interrelate three types of leisure (i.e., amateurism, hobbyist pursuits, and career volunteering), he found that although serious leisure practitioners sometimes get paid, they are not dependent on such remuneration (Stebbins, 1982).

Six interrelated qualities distinguish serious leisure from casual leisure: (1) The occasional need to *Persevere* in the activity to overcome difficulties; (2) the tendency for individuals to create a *Career* of their activities; (3) a significant personal *Effort* which leads to the development of special knowledge, training, or skill; (4) the attainment of some long-lasting *Benefits*; (5) the formation of a strong *Identity* with the activity; and (6) a unique *Ethos* that grows around the activity and leads to the development of a special social world (Brown, 2007; Gould et al., 2008; Stebbins, 1982, 1992, 1999). According to Stebbins (2008), as serious leisure participants endure in their pursuits and progress through different stages (beginning,

development, establishment, and maintenance), they can make their leisure career into a work career.

More recently, Gould et al. (2008) developed the Serious Leisure Inventory and Measure (SLIM) as an instrument to assess serious leisure. SLIM is composed by 54 operational items organized in 18 sub-dimensions that represent the six definitional qualities of serious leisure as follows. *Perseverance*, *Effort*, *Ethos* and *Identity* are defined by one sub-dimension each. The *Career* quality is defined by two sub-dimensions: Career Progress and Career Contingencies. The last quality, *Benefits*, includes 12 sub-dimensions: Personal Enrichment; Self-Actualization; Self-Expressing Abilities; Individual Self-Expression; Self-Image; Self-Gratification Satisfaction; Enjoy; Recreation; Financial Return; Social Attraction; Group Accomplishments; and Group Maintenance. However, Gould et al. (2008) concluded that the *Benefits* quality can stand by itself as an independent inventory of outcomes. Each SLIM sub-dimension includes four statements which are very similar in wording. For example, the *Identity* sub-dimension includes: “Others that know me understand that *blank* is a part of who I am”; “I am often recognized as one devoted to *blank*”; “Others identify me as one dedicated to *blank*”; and “Others recognize that I identify with *blank*”.

### 2.3. Serious leisure as a framework within recreation and tourism studies

Serious leisure has framed the examination of several recreational and leisure activities including wildlife watching (Cole & Scott, 1999), shag dancing (Brown, 2007), home brewing of craft beers (Murray, 2009), art photography (Spurgin, 2008), involvement in dog competitions (Baldwin & Norris, 1999) and volunteerism (Parker, 1992; Stebbins, 1996), in which the application of their six qualities has been validated. Previous studies have also examined the application of serious leisure among youth and seniors, especially to unveil the positive role of recreation in youth development (Siegenthaler & Gonzalez, 1997), successful aging (Brown, McGuire, & Voelkl, 2008; Heo & Lee, 2010), and for therapeutic purposes (Heo, Lee, Lundberg, McCormick, & Chun, 2008). It is within the realm of sports, that serious leisure has been more widely studied, either among athletes of specific activities such as swimming and climbing (Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Hastings, Kurth, & Schloder, 1996; Hastings, Kurth, Schloder, & Cyr, 1995) or among their fandom (Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2002; Green & Chalip, 1998; Jones, 2000).

Although surfing as a serious recreational activity has not been examined yet, evidence of serious leisure qualities among surfers are found in the literature. Regarding *Perseverance*, *Effort*, and *Career*, studies emphasize the importance of attaining skills and technical knowledge to master the waves and move up in the surfing ladder (Butts, 2001; Ponting, 2008). Such evolution is especially important to become a member of the surfing sub-culture and attain peers' recognition as a “surfer” (Butts, 2001; Nourbakhsh, 2008), thus suggesting the presence of an *Ethos*. Moutinho et al. (2007) asserted that surfers have a “tribal” behavior characterized by a strong surfing *Identity* which is externalized by taking their boards whenever they go to the beach; however, they also found that surfers do not have the same need for social recognition as compared to surfing fans. Evidence of *Benefits* is also found in the literature, especially in the form of self-invigoration, self-confidence and fitness attainment (Nourbakhsh, 2008).

The application of the serious leisure framework in tourism studies is scarce. Voigt, Howat, and Brown (2010) examined wellness tourism among tourists visiting beauty spas, lifestyle resorts, and spiritual retreats. They found that, based on their wellness experiences, those tourists can be placed along a continuum

between casual (hedonic) and serious (eudaimonic) leisure end-points. While beauty spa visitation was perceived as a purely casual hedonic tourism activity, spiritual retreat experiences were considered as almost purely eudaimonic. Although not directly examined, some studies also suggest that serious leisure may stimulate some travel endeavors. Besides concluding that the “Gators” (fans of the University of Florida sport teams) fit all the criteria established by Stebbins (1982) especially related to their sense of *Identity*, Gibson et al. (2002), concluded that the significant *Effort* those fans exhibit is in the form of travel, as they regularly travel between 70 and 700 miles round-trip to support their team. In a similar vein, Baldwin and Norris (1999) interpreted that the travel that Kennel Club Association participants need to undertake to attend dog competitions is an exhibit of the *Perseverance* quality.

Few studies have examined attributes associated with serious leisure. Hastings et al. (1995) examined whether demographic characteristics and swimming experience influenced the benefits that Canadian and United States masters' swimmers perceive from their engagement in this activity. They found that although age was not associated with perceived benefits, gender and swimming experience were. Specifically, Hastings et al. (1995) concluded that females perceived greater benefits than males in terms of fitness, sociability, and enjoyment; and that swimmers' experience was associated to skill development and achievement. More recently, Lin (2008) found a significant positive correlation between serious leisure and affect potency, concentration, motivation, and satisfaction among bikers in central Taiwan. They also found that levels of serious leisure can predict leisure commitment, including their personal *Effort* and perceived *Benefits*, while *Perseverance* can predict involvement opportunity.

### 3. Research design and rationale

This study examines the application of serious leisure among surfers by exploring non-causal relationships between five socio-demographic and surfing behavior attributes of surfers and the six qualities of serious leisure. Given that previous studies suggest that surf tourists differ on their age, education, and income composition (Dolnicar & Flucker, 2003a), it was deemed important to explore whether those demographic characteristics may also be associated to serious surfing. Evidence of associations between levels of activity behavior and serious leisure qualities (Hastings et al., 1995; Heo et al., 2008; Lin, 2008) and surf tourism (Dolnicar & Flucker, 2003a) are found in the literature. Therefore, this study explored whether surfing behavior in terms of number of years surfing and number of days per week dedicated to surfing is associated to the six serious leisure qualities.

Based on the literature reviewed, serious leisure qualities were also examined as predictors of surf travel behavior and destination preferences. Given that traveling to various destinations appear in the literature as exhibitors of the *Effort* and *Perseverance* qualities of serious leisure (Baldwin & Norris, 1999; Gibson et al., 2002), this study explored the six qualities of serious leisure as predictors of surf travel behavior in terms of number and variety of surfing trips. Willingness to undertake surfing trips in the future was also examined as most surf tourism studies have focused on past travel behavior (Dolnicar & Flucker, 2003b, 2004) and given its importance for developing tourism marketing strategies.

Cole and Scott (1999) concluded that casual and serious bird watchers have different preferences on the access and infrastructure attributes of the site visited (e.g., closeness to a community, availability of restroom facilities), while Dolnicar and Flucker (2003a) reported that surf tourists differ on their preferences for the surfing destination in terms of specific characteristics of the waves (e.g., height, variety), the environment (e.g., lack of crowds)

and access/infrastructure (e.g., easy access). Hence, this study explored whether serious leisure qualities can predict preferences on the surfing appeal and the access/infrastructure of the surf tourism destination. Finally, an effort was also placed to examine whether the perceived benefits of surfing can predict surf travel destination preferences given that [Gould et al. \(2008\)](#) concluded that the durable *Benefits* quality should be examined as an independent inventory scale. [Fig. 1](#) summarizes the study model.

#### 4. Research methods

##### 4.1. Survey instrument and variables measurement

A survey questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data from surfers about the seriousness of their surfing, their surf travel behavior and preferences, and socio-demographic characteristics. The instrument included 25 questions representing four distinct topics. In order, respondents were firstly queried about their surfing behavior, specifically about the number of days per week they surf using a single-choice option and how long they have been surfing using a six-point scale (1 = less than 3 months; 6 = 10 years or more). The second survey topic focused on surfing as serious leisure. One statement for each of the 18 SLIM sub-dimensions ([Gould et al., 2008](#)) was included to assess the perceived importance that surfing plays in participants' lives; perceptions were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = "Strongly Disagree"; 5 = "Strongly Agree"). [Table 1](#) summarizes the statements used to operationalize the 18 SLIM sub-dimensions ([Gould et al., 2008](#)) organized by the six serious leisure qualities ([Stebbins, 1982](#)).

The instrument also collected information on several aspects related to participant's surfing trips, including their travel behavior and destination preferences. Based on [Buckley's \(2002a\)](#) definition, the survey instrument defined a surfing trip as "traveling for the main purpose of surfing to a place located at least 40 km (25 miles) away from home, where you overnight at least one night". As for surfing travel behavior, the survey queried: the number of surfing trips taken in the last five years; the length of surfing trips that respondents undertake through discrete responses (e.g., less than one week trip; 1–2 weeks trips; more than 2 months) which later served to construct a seven-point trip variety index (1 = one type of trip; 7 = seven types of trips); and willingness to undertake a surfing trip in the future using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Very unwilling; 5 = Very willing).

Respondents were also surveyed about the importance of 30 attributes when selecting a destination for their surfing travels using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Very unimportant; 5 = Very important). Most attributes emerged from the literature reviewed ([Cole & Scott, 1999](#); [Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003a](#)) and represented four distinct destination domains: (1) the surfing appeal of the

**Table 1**  
SLIM statements and sub-dimensions used to operationalize the six serious leisure qualities.

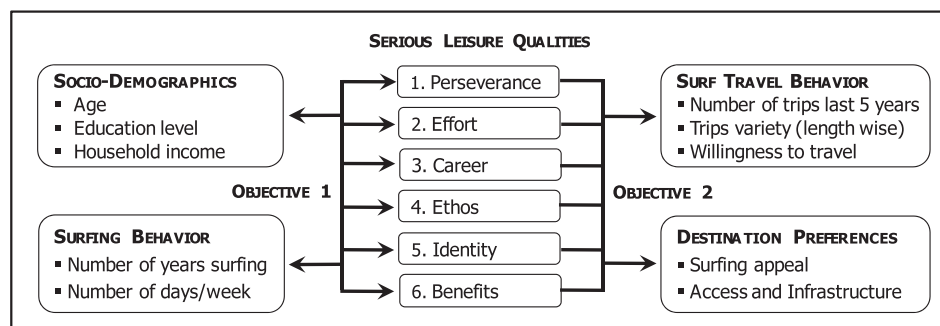
Serious leisure qualities <sup>a</sup>	SLIM Sub-dimensions <sup>b</sup>	SLIM Statements <sup>b</sup>
Perseverance	Perseverance	I overcome difficulties in surfing by being persistent
Personal effort	Effort	I practice to improve my surfing skills
Ethos	Ethos	I share the same way of thinking with other surfers
Identity Career	Identity	I am often recognized as a surfer
	Career progress	I have consistently improved since I started surfing
	Career contingencies	Certain positive or negative surfing events have influenced my surfing involvement
Benefits	Personal enrichment	Surfing had added richness to my life
	Self actualization	I make full use of my talent when surfing
	Self expressing abilities	Surfing is a way to display my skills and abilities
	Individual self expression	Surfing is an expression of myself
	Self image	Surfing has enhanced my self-image
	Self gratification	Surfing is intensively gratifying to me
	Enjoyment	I enjoy surfing
	Recreation	I feel renewed after surfing
	Financial return	I have been paid for my surfing efforts
	Social attraction	I like interacting with other surfers
Group accomplishments	The accomplishments of my surfing group are important to me	
Group maintenance	The development of my surfing group is important to me	

<sup>a</sup> [Stebbins \(1982\)](#).

<sup>b</sup> [Gould et al. \(2008\)](#).

destination (8 items; e.g., special types of wave; popular surf destination); (2) on-site access and infrastructure (5 items; e.g., closeness to a community or town, availability of food and beverage services); (3) local services and conveniences (10 items; e.g., basic lodging; family-friendly facilities); and (4) local attractions (7 items; e.g., historic and cultural richness of the site; nightlife opportunities). This study reports on the first two destination domains: *Surfing Appeal* and *Access and Infrastructure*.

The last survey section queried demographic information and country of residence of participants. Actual age of participants was gathered while their education level was inquired on a six-point scale to smooth differences on educational systems across



**Fig. 1.** Study design.

countries. Given the geo-cultural diversity of study participants, income indicator was collected using a six-point scale with subjective indicators that could represent any economic context of a given country rather than typical monetary scales: I don't earn income yet; I hardly make it to live; I can afford basic needs; I live with some comfort; I am able to save some money monthly; income is not a problem for me.

Two language versions of the survey instrument (English and Spanish) with identical questions and format interfaces were available for participants. The instrument was first developed in English and translated into Spanish by the study researchers who master both languages; a back-translation to English was then performed by a third party to ensure accuracy. Both versions were then pre-tested among English and Spanish native speakers; comments and suggestions received were addressed.

#### 4.2. Population, sampling and survey procedures

The population for this study was defined as male and female adult surfers residing in different geographic regions (i.e., the Americas; Polynesia and Asia; Europe). Such geographic dispersion of the sample was purposively sought to control for any contextual biases that respondents from a specific region may introduce; in that way, this study was able to capture perceptions of surfers from developed and less-developed countries and immersed within different cultures. Snowball sampling techniques was used to recruit study participants. The initial contact list included 52 surfers, acquaintances of both researchers, residing in Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Hawaii, Japan, Peru, Spain, and U.S. (continental). Then, respondents were encouraged to provide the contact information of their surfer friends to broaden the initial sample list. Taking into consideration the use of a convenient non-random sample, which seems to be predominant in empirical studies in surf tourism (Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003b), study results are not intended to be generalized and should be interpreted with caution.

Survey procedures followed a modified Tailored Design Method (Dillman, 2000), including an invitation e-mail and up to three reminders to non-respondents. Data were collected using a web-based platform from October 2010 to February 2011. The survey produced 136 valid responses, after having removed 37 cases because of underage of respondents (less than 18 years old) or incompleteness of key responses when imputation methods were not feasible (e.g., missing all SLIM related questions). About half of respondents (47.6%) were from the Pacific South America including Peru ( $n = 56$ ) and Chile ( $n = 4$ ) and over a quarter ( $n = 33$ ; 26.2%) were from the continental U.S.; the remaining respondents were residing in Atlantic South American countries, Central America, Hawaii, Australia and Japan.

#### 4.3. Statistical analysis

Descriptive analyses were first conducted to profile responding surfers, examine the seriousness of their surfing, and identify destination preferences of their surfing travels. Cronbach's alphas were computed to assess internal reliability (Cortina, 1993) of those serious leisure qualities with more than one sub-dimension (i.e., *Career*; *Benefits*) as well as the descriptors used to evaluate the *Surfing Appeal* and *Access and Infrastructure* of the surfing tourism destination. Cronbach's alphas over .6 were expected following the minimum recommended coefficient (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). When applicable, means were created to represent each of those theme dimensions (*Career*; *Benefits*; *Surfing Appeal*; *Access and Infrastructure*) by averaging their comprising variables.

To address the first study objective, each of the six qualities of serious leisure were correlated with socio-demographic (i.e., age,

education; household income) and surfing behavior attributes (i.e., number of years surfing, number of days per week dedicated to surf). Spearman correlations were conducted as serious leisure qualities were examined in Likert scale. The mean of all 12 statements included to assess the *Benefits* quality (one for each sub-dimension) was used in the correlations. Given that the two items included to assess both *Career* sub-dimensions showed low internal reliability ( $\alpha = 0.316$ ), only the statement with the higher score (*Career Progress*: "I have consistently improved since I started surfing") was retained for further analysis. Bonferroni adjustments ( $.05/6 = p < 0.008$ ) were applied to account for multiple comparisons and control for family-wise type I statistical error (Vaske, 2008, p. 635).

A series of standard multiple linear regressions were conducted to address the second study objective. Specifically, the six qualities of serious leisure were treated as independent variables including the *Benefits* mean; all independent variables entered simultaneously in the model. No multicollinearity was found among the independent variables; variance inflation factor statistics obtained ( $VIF > .20$ ) were above the conservative minimum scores ( $VIF > .10$ ) while tolerance statistics ( $< 5.0$ ) were below conservative maximum scores ( $< 10.0$ ; Mertler & Vannatta, 2005). Dependent variables were respondents' surf travel behavior (i.e., past, current, and future trips) and destination preferences of their surfing trips (i.e., *Surfing Appeal*, *Access and Infrastructure*). When analyses showed that the *Benefits* quality is significant associated with surf travel behavior or destination preferences ( $p < 0.05$ ), follow-up multiple linear regressions were conducted using individual benefits statements as independent variables.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Socio-economic and surfing profile of respondents

The large majority of respondents (87.3%) were male which is consistent with the predominant male participation in surfing (Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003a, 2003b; Nourbakhsh, 2008, Table 2). A large proportion (41.7%) of respondents were young adults between 18 and 30 years old, a third (33.9%) aged between 31 and 40 years

**Table 2**  
Gender, age, education level, and income indicators of participating surfers.

Socio-demographic indicators	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Gender (<i>n</i> = 126)</b>		
Male	110	87.3%
Female	16	12.7%
<b>Age (<i>n</i> = 127)</b>		
18–30 years old	53	41.7%
31–40 years old	43	33.9%
41–50 years old	15	11.8%
51–60 years old	12	9.5%
61 years old or older	4	3.1%
Mean (in years)		(35.2)
Standard deviation		(11.3)
<b>Level of education (<i>n</i> = 127)</b>		
High school or less	13	10.3%
Some college or university	17	13.4%
Associate or technical degree (2 year college)	18	14.2%
Bachelor's degree (4 year college)	48	37.7%
Post-graduate studies (Master or Doctorate)	31	24.4%
<b>Household income indicator (<i>n</i> = 127)</b>		
I don't earn income yet	10	7.9%
I hardly make it to live	9	7.1%
I can afford basic needs	17	13.4%
I live with some comfort	39	30.7%
I am able to save some money monthly	39	30.7%
Income is not a problem for me	13	10.2%

old, and about a quarter (24.4%) were at least 41 years old ( $M = 35.2$  years;  $SD = 11.3$ ) indicating a good age-distribution in the sample. Over three-quarters (76.3%) of respondents had at least a two-year degree; 37.7% had a four-year bachelors' degree and 24.4% had post-graduate studies. Consistent with the high education levels and large proportion of full and self-employees, the majority (71.6%) of responding surfers indicated living with at least some comfort; 30.7% reported that they are able to save some money on monthly basis, and 10.2% do not have any economic concerns. These results are consistent with high income levels among surf tourists already reported in the literature (Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003a, 2003b).

The vast majority (94.8%) of respondents reported being surfers at the time of the study (Table 3); most (60.7%) were experienced surfers who had been surfing for at least 10 years and 23.7% had been surfing for five-to-ten years. A very small proportion of respondents (3.0%) were novice surfers with less than one year of experience. The survey captured respondents with different levels of surfing behavior; 45.1% reported surfing or having surfed three or four days per week and 27.5% surf or used to surf at least five days per week ( $M = 3.6$  days/week).

### 5.2. Surfing travel behavior and destination preferences

The vast majority of respondents had taken a surfing trip in the past (91.1%) or reported to be willing or very willing to take a surfing trip in the near future (94.1%) which may be associated to the relative high income of respondents (Table 4). Those who have already taken a surfing trip ( $n = 123$ ; 91.1%) showed a very active surfing travel behavior. The majority (54.8%) reported having taken more than five surfing trips in the last five years and 19.8% indicated they had taken more than 20 trips during such time frame ( $M = 20.8$  trips;  $SD = 39.9$ ). Additionally, 30.6% travels at least once a year for surfing and 31.3% do so at least three times a year. These results are not surprising as the propensity of surfers participating in surf tourism has been consistently reported in the literature (Butts, 2001; Tantamjarik, 2004). Respondents take a variety of surfing trips in terms of length; 38.8% indicated taking short trips of less than one week, 43.0% take long surfing trips of at least one week, and 7.4% embark into lengthy trips of at least two months.

Cronbach's tests show high internal reliability in the items included to evaluate respondent's preferences regarding the *Surfing Appeal* ( $\alpha = 0.742$ ) and the *Access and Infrastructure* ( $\alpha = 0.865$ ) when choosing a surf travel destination (overall reliability

**Table 3**  
Surfing profile of respondents.

Indicators of surfing behavior	n	%
<b>Current behavior (n = 135)</b>		
Currently surf	128	94.8%
Do not surf currently	7	5.2%
<b>Number of years surfing (n = 135)<sup>a</sup></b>		
Less than 1 year	4	3.0%
1–2 years	5	3.7%
2–5 years	12	8.9%
5–10 years	32	23.7%
10 years or more	82	60.7%
<b>Number of surfing days per week (n = 135)<sup>a</sup></b>		
1 day	10	7.4%
2 days	27	20.0%
3 days	42	31.0%
4 days	19	14.1%
5 days	16	11.9%
6 days	7	5.2%
7 days	14	10.4%
Mean (in days)		(3.6)
Standard deviation		(1.7)

<sup>a</sup> This includes those who currently surf ( $n = 128$ ; 94.8%) and those who have stopped surfing but used to surf ( $n = 7$ ; 5.2%).

**Table 4**  
Surf travel behavior among responding surfers.

Indicators of Surf travel behavior	n	%
<b>Past surfing trips (n = 135)</b>		
Have taken at least one surfing trip	123	91.1%
Have never taken a surfing trip	12	8.9%
<b>Willingness to take a surfing trip in the future (n = 135)</b>		
Very unwilling	2	1.5%
Unwilling	1	.7%
Undecided	5	3.7%
Willing	36	26.7%
Very willing	91	67.4%
<b>Number of surfing trips in the last 5 years (n = 117)<sup>a</sup></b>		
1–2 trips	21	17.9%
3–5 trips	32	27.3%
6–10 trips	19	16.2%
11–20 trips	22	18.8%
21 or more trips	23	19.8%
Mean (in number of trips)		(20.8)
Standard deviation		(39.9)
<b>Number of surfing trips per year (n = 121)<sup>a</sup></b>		
Less than once a year	21	17.4%
At least once a year	37	30.6%
2–3 times a year	25	20.7%
More than 3 times a year	38	31.3%
<b>Length of surfing trips (n = 121)<sup>a,b</sup></b>		
Less than one week	47	38.8%
At least one week	52	43.0%
1–2 weeks	29	24.0%
2–3 weeks	19	15.7%
3–4 weeks	11	9.1%
1–2 months	7	5.8%
More than 2 months	9	7.4%

<sup>a</sup> This only includes those who have taken a surfing trip ( $n = 123$ ; 91.1%).

<sup>b</sup> Percentages sum to more than 100%, as respondents were able to select multiple trip length categories.

$\alpha = 0.843$ ; Table 5). Overall, responding surfers perceive that the *Surfing Appeal* is more important ( $M = 3.8$ ;  $SD = .6$ ) than the *Access and Infrastructure* ( $M = 3.0$ ;  $SD = .9$ ) of the travel destination. The most prevalent attributes when choosing a travel destination for surfing relates to the quality of the waves in terms of abundance ( $M = 4.6$ ;  $SD = .6$ ), variety ( $M = 4.1$ ;  $SD = .9$ ), and specialty ( $M = 4.0$ ;  $SD = .9$ ), confirming previous findings (Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003a). The surrounding environment in terms of natural quality ( $M = 4.1$ ;  $SD = .9$ ) and seclusion ( $M = 4.0$ ;  $SD = 1.1$ ) were also important characteristics when choosing a surf travel destination, attributes that are consistent with the portrait of idyllic surfing spots dominant since the sixties (Ponting, 2009). Socializing indicators, such as being the destination popular for surfing ( $M = 3.1$ ;  $SD = 1.2$ ) or a good place to meet other surfers ( $M = 2.6$ ;  $SD = 1.3$ ) were perceived as less important. These results may suggest that social attributes (*Ethos*) associated with serious leisure participants (Baldwin & Norris, 1999; Brown et al., 2008; Gibson et al., 2002) may not be as strong among surfers as Moutinho et al. (2007) suggested.

Overall, respondents did not place much importance in the site *Access and Infrastructure* when choosing a surf tourism destination. Half of respondents (53.0%) though considered that having food and beverages services located nearby is important or very important when choosing a surf travel destination ( $M = 3.3$ ;  $SD = 1.2$ ). Site accessibility in terms of easy access ( $M = 3.2$ ;  $SD = 1.1$ ) and closeness to a community or town ( $M = 3.1$ ;  $SD = 1.2$ ) did not show major relevance when choosing a destination. On-site availability of restrooms ( $M = 3.0$ ;  $SD = 1.3$ ) and lack of overall services and facilities –undeveloped– ( $M = 2.7$ ;  $SD = 1.1$ ) were not important attributes when choosing a surf travel destination, challenging previous studies on that regard (Cole & Scott, 1999; Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003a).

**Table 5**  
Perceived importance of destination attributes among respondents.

Destination attributes <sup>a</sup>	n	Very unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very important	M <sup>b</sup>	SD
<b>Surfing appeal (<math>\alpha = 0.742</math>)</b>							<b>3.8</b>	<b>0.6</b>
Abundance of good waves	116	.9%	.9%	1.7%	25.9%	70.6%	4.6	.6
Variety of wave types	117	.0%	6.0%	15.4%	38.5%	40.1%	4.1	.9
Quality of its natural environment	117	3.4%	4.3%	9.4%	44.4%	38.5%	4.1	.9
Secluded and unspoiled place	117	4.3%	4.3%	16.2%	37.6%	37.6%	4.0	1.1
Special types of wave	116	2.6%	6.0%	13.8%	44.0%	33.6%	4.0	.9
Area never crowded	117	2.6%	7.7%	12.8%	43.6%	33.3%	3.9	1.0
Popular surf destination	117	11.1%	22.2%	29.1%	24.8%	12.8%	3.1	1.2
Good place to meet other surfers	116	24.1%	27.6%	26.7%	11.2%	10.4%	2.6	1.3
<b>Access and infrastructure (<math>\alpha = 0.865</math>)</b>							<b>3.0</b>	<b>.9</b>
F&B services located nearby	115	7.0%	20.9%	19.1%	40.0%	13.0%	3.3	1.2
Easy access	117	6.8%	19.7%	32.5%	31.6%	9.4%	3.2	1.1
Closeness to a community or town	116	11.3%	26.7%	20.7%	28.4%	12.9%	3.1	1.2
Restroom facilities located on-site	115	14.8%	21.7%	25.2%	23.5%	14.8%	3.0	1.3
Undeveloped site	117	16.2%	20.5%	44.4%	12.8%		2.7	1.1
						6.1%		

<sup>a</sup> Overall reliability ( $\alpha = 0.843$ ).

<sup>b</sup> Measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Very unimportant) to 5 (Very important).

### 5.3. Indicators of serious leisure among responding surfers

Overall, respondents showed high levels of agreement on the six qualities of serious leisure regarding their surfing behavior (Table 6). *Perseverance* ( $M = 4.3$ ;  $SD = .8$ ) and *Effort* ( $M = 4.3$ ;  $SD = .8$ ) were the qualities to which the vast majority of respondents agreed with, closely followed by *Career* ( $M = 4.1$ ;  $SD = .9$ ) and *Benefits* ( $M = 4.0$ ;  $SD = .6$ ). Although still showing relative high levels of agreement, having an *Ethos* ( $M = 3.9$ ;  $SD = .9$ ) and a surfing *Identity* ( $M = 3.7$ ;  $SD = 1.0$ ) were the qualities with the lowest scores. Moutinho et al. (2007) found that surfers do not necessarily share a daily social life (*Ethos*) mostly because they tend to be young students with a varied leisure routine; however, these are not predominant characteristics of this study sample. Thus, lower scores in the *Identity* and *Ethos* qualities may be explained by having a group of novice surfers (6.7%) in the sample with less than two years engaged in this activity as the attainment of both qualities is a process. According to Jones (2000), sport fans start developing their identity after having been engaged for some time, thereafter they start identifying themselves with their social group. This study may suggest a different trend as responding surfers

perceived lower surfing *Identity* than social recognition (*Ethos*), results that deserve further exploration in the future.

Respondents strongly agreed that surfing provides them with several *Benefits*, especially related to self-satisfaction in terms of enjoyment ( $M = 4.8$ ;  $SD = .6$ ), self-gratification ( $M = 4.7$ ;  $SD = .7$ ), recreation ( $M = 4.7$ ;  $SD = .7$ ), and personal enrichment ( $M = 4.6$ ;  $SD = .8$ ). At the same time, it seems that surfing is not perceived as beneficial in terms of financial return ( $M = 2.1$ ;  $SD = 1.3$ ). Although these results may be associated with the relative high income of the sample, they can also imply that financial return is not a universal seriousness indicator, but conditioned to a group of individuals within a specific context (Gould et al., 2008).

### 5.4. Socio-demographic and surfing behavior associated with serious leisure

Statistical tests indicated few weak socio-demographic and surfing behavior attributes correlated with serious leisure qualities (Bonferroni adjusted  $p < 0.008$ ; Table 7). As for socio-demographic indicators, the higher the education level of the respondent, the less perceived surfing *Identity* ( $r = -.276$ ) and their *Benefits*

**Table 6**  
Indicators of surfing as serious leisure.

Serious leisure qualities <sup>a</sup>	n	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	M <sup>b</sup>	SD
Perseverance	127	1.6%	1.6%	6.3%	44.9%	45.6%	<b>4.3</b>	<b>.8</b>
Effort	124	.8%	1.6%	12.9%	37.1%	47.6%	<b>4.3</b>	<b>.8</b>
Career <sup>c</sup>	126	.8%	4.8%	16.7%	36.5%	41.2%	<b>4.1</b>	<b>.9</b>
Ethos	125	3.2%	6.4%	28.0%	44.0%	18.4%	<b>3.9</b>	<b>.9</b>
Identity	125	3.2%	7.2%	27.2%	36.8%	25.6%	<b>3.7</b>	<b>1.0</b>
<b>Benefits (<math>\alpha = 0.846</math>)</b>							<b>4.0</b>	<b>.6</b>
Enjoyment	127	1.6%	.8%	.0%	7.1%	90.5%	4.8	.6
Self gratification	127	1.6%	.8%	.0%	20.5%	77.1%	4.7	.7
Recreation	127	1.6%	.8%	3.1%	14.2%	80.3%	4.7	.7
Personal enrichment	127	1.6%	1.6%	2.4%	20.5%	73.9%	4.6	.6
Individual self expression	126	1.6%	3.2%	12.7%	38.9%	43.6%	4.2	.9
Social attraction	124	1.6%	1.6%	12.9%	47.6%	36.3%	4.2	.8
Self actualization	126	.8%	3.2%	23.8%	37.3%	34.9%	4.0	.9
Self image	125	1.6%	4.0%	23.2%	36.8%	34.4%	4.0	.9
Group maintenance	127	3.9%	3.9%	21.3%	44.1%	26.8%	3.9	.9
Group accomplishments	127	5.5%	4.0%	30.7%	30.7%	29.1%	3.7	1.1
Self expressing abilities	125	1.6%	8.0%	40.8%	27.2%	22.4%	3.6	.9
Financial return	125	45.6%	19.2%	16.8%	12.0%	6.4%	2.1	1.3

<sup>a</sup> Overall reliability ( $\alpha = 0.853$ ).

<sup>b</sup> Measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Very unimportant) to 5 (Very important).

<sup>c</sup> This represents the Career Program dimension. Due to low internal reliability ( $\alpha = 0.316$ ), the item corresponding to Career contingencies ( $M = 3.7$ ;  $SD = 1.1$ ) was removed from further analysis.

**Table 7**  
Socio-demographic characteristics and surfing participation associated with overall serious leisure level qualities.

Serious leisure qualities	Socio-demographics and surfing participation ( <i>r</i> and significance)				
	Age	Education level	Household income	Years surfing	Surf days per week
Perseverance	-.191	-.104	-.088	-.098	.165
Effort	-.122	-.237	-.189	-.080	.298*
Career	-.155	-.233	-.029	-.105	.271*
Ethos	-.042	-.109	.115	.026	.094
Identity	.017	-.276*	.114	.270*	.340*
Benefits	.021	-.305*	.076	.206	.196

\*Significant with Bonferroni adjusted critical value ( $p < 0.008$ ).

( $r = -.305$ ). These results may suggest that added job responsibilities usually associated with higher education levels may dilute the impact of surfing as serious leisure, for example due to time constraints. Age and household income were not found to be associated to any of the six serious leisure qualities, partially confirming previous studies among master swimmers (Hastings et al., 1995).

As expected, the more years respondents had been surfing, the stronger their surfing *Identity* ( $r = .270$ ), while how often respondents surf on weekly basis was positive associated with the *Effort* ( $r = .298$ ), *Career* ( $r = .271$ ) and *Identity* ( $r = .340$ ) qualities. These results suggest that associations previously found between the dedication invested in other activities (e.g., swimming, biking) and the *Effort* and *Career* qualities of serious leisure (Hastings et al., 1995; Lin, 2008) are also exhibited among surfers. It is worth mentioning that the few associations found between the number of years respondents had surfed and serious leisure qualities should be interpreted with caution as may be explained by the large proportion of respondents with more than 10 years surfing. Significant associations found between the number of days per week that respondents surf and some serious leisure qualities, especially *Effort* and *Career*, are important for those surf destinations enjoying overall good weather throughout the year as they can position such benefit as a competitive advantage to capture assiduous surfers interested in enhancing their skills.

### 5.5. The role of serious leisure in surf tourism behavior and destination preferences

Results show that the six serious leisure qualities are not good predictors of surf travel behavior, especially related to the number of trips respondents took in the last five years ( $R^2 = .058$ ,  $p = 0.438$ ) and in their willingness to take surfing trips in the future ( $R^2 = .005$ ,  $p = 0.374$ ; Table 8). Serious leisure qualities as predictors of current surf travel behavior in terms of the variety of trips length-wise surfers embark on ( $R^2 = .050$ ,  $p = 0.090$ ) are not conclusive either and should be interpreted with caution given the relative high possibility (10%) of being significant by chance. Overall these results may be related to the propensity that surfers have to travel in their quest for good surfing destinations (Butts, 2001; Tantamjarik, 2004) which suggests a positive augury for the surf tourism industry. Controlling for other variables, *Perseverance* ( $\beta = .228$ ) was found to be positively associated with past travel behavior, *Effort* ( $\beta = -.211$ ) and *Benefits* ( $\beta = .242$ ) associated to the variety of trips respondents currently take, and *Career* ( $\beta = .270$ ) to their willingness to travel in the future. The latter results are especially important for those surf tourism destinations that can offer specific surfing conditions (e.g., unusual type of wave) to attract surfers wanting to advance their surfing career, especially taking into consideration that those in an advanced career stage tend to invest more money to keep improving (Cole & Scott, 1999).

**Table 8**  
Multiple linear regressions of serious leisure indicators on surf travel behavior.

Independent variables: Serious leisure qualities	DV – Surf travel behavior (standardized $\beta$ and significance)		
	Past <sup>a</sup>	Current <sup>b</sup>	Future <sup>c</sup>
Perseverance	.228*	.045	-.066
Effort	.005	-.211*	-.034
Career	-.044	-.189	.270**
Ethos	.008	.008	.003
Identity	.160	-.148	-.011
Benefits	-.148	.242*	.043
$R^2$	.058	.106	.064
Adjusted $R^2$	-.001	.050	.005
<i>p</i> -value	.438	.090	.374

\* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ .

<sup>a</sup> Defined as number of surfing trips took in the last 5 years.

<sup>b</sup> Defined as the variety of trips length wise.

<sup>c</sup> Defined as willingness to take surfing trips in the future.

Results show that the level of seriousness of respondents' surfing shape their preferences on the *Surfing Appeal* ( $R^2 = .263$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) of the surf travel destination (Table 9). When controlling for other variables, results show that those with stronger surfing *Identity* and perceptions of the *Benefits* derived from surfing tend to favor the *Surfing Appeal* of a destination. However, serious surfing does not predict preferences for the site *Access and Infrastructure* ( $R^2 = .052$ ,  $p = 0.510$ ), most likely due to the overall unimportance that respondents placed on these attributes as previously mentioned. These results are especially important for surf tourism destinations in developing countries, which although having ideal surfing conditions to capture surf tourists, may not have economic resources to develop sophisticated on-site infrastructure in terms of services or access.

When closer examined the attributes that were most influential in choosing a surf tourism destination, results showed that serious leisure predicts preferences for the variety of waves ( $R^2 = .263$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), the quality of the natural environment ( $R^2 = .127$ ,  $p = 0.041$ ), and the availability of special types of waves ( $R^2 = .122$ ,  $p = 0.050$ ) in the destination. No significant models were obtained on the effect of serious leisure on the preferences for abundant good waves ( $R^2 = .112$ ,  $p = 0.074$ ) and secluded/unspoiled conditions ( $R^2 = .115$ ,  $p = 0.065$ ) of the destination, suggesting that both attributes may be supplementary to the overall site surfing conditions, but not attributes with the capacity to pull serious surfers on their own. When controlling for other variables, surfing *Identity* predicts preferences for a variety of waves ( $\beta = .174$ ) and the quality of the natural environment ( $\beta = .249$ ); *Benefits* perceived to stem from surfing were found to be associated only with the variety of waves ( $\beta = .286$ ). These results add to the known preference of surf tourists for specific surfing and environmental attributes of the destination (Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003a, 2003b) by singling out specific qualities of serious surfing (*Career*, *Identity*, *Benefits*) predicting those preferences.

Subsequent examination of the *Benefits* quality confirm that benefits altogether predict preferences for the *Surfing Appeal* ( $R^2 = .295$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and the variety of the waves ( $R^2 = .266$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ) in the surf travel destination (Table 10). Specifically, those experiencing higher levels of enjoyment when surfing tend to care less about the overall *Surfing Appeal* ( $\beta = -.411$ ) and specifically the variety of waves of the destination ( $\beta = -.535$ ). The more respondents perceive surfing as an expression of the self the more they favor the *Surfing Appeal* ( $\beta = .296$ ) and the variety of waves ( $\beta = 0.296$ ) when choosing their surf travel destination. Financial benefits was found to predict preferences for the variety of waves ( $\beta = .193$ ) of the destination, which is not surprising as those who make a living or supplement their income from surfing may seek different waves to master their skills. In sum, these results suggest that those seeking more pleasure-related rewards (e.g., enjoyment,



**Table 9**  
Multiple linear regressions of long-lasting benefits attributes on the surfing appeal of the surf travel destination.

IV: Serious leisure qualities	DV: Destination attributes (standardized $\beta$ and significance)						
	Surfing appeal (mean)	Infra-structure (mean)	Abundant good waves	Variety of waves	Natural environment quality	Secluded and unspoiled	Special waves
Perseverance	.033	.026	.036	-.199*	.143	.141	.083
Effort	-.010	.012	.027	.062	.032	-.089	-.092
Career	.143	-.023	.279**	.152	-.071	.091	.098
Ethos	.063	.008	.009	.084	-.140	.019	.066
Identity	.199*	.009	.031	.174*	.249**	.120	.127
Benefits	.248**	.216	.015	.286**	.104	.139	.159
$R^2$	.263	.052	.112	.263	.127	.115	.122
Adjusted $R^2$	.218	-.007	.056	.216	.072	.059	.067
$p$ -value	<.001	.510	.074	<.001	.041	.065	.050

\* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 10**  
Multiple linear regressions of perceived long-lasting benefits attributes on the surfing appeal of the surf travel destination.

IV: Perceived benefits	DV: Destination attributes (standardized $\beta$ and significance)	
	Surfing appeal (mean)	Variety of waves
Enjoyment	-.411*	-.535**
Self gratification	.003	.164
Recreation	.072	.116
Personal enrichment	.221	.084
Individual self expression	.296**	.296**
Social attraction	.127	.104
Self actualization	-.035	.001
Self image	-.131	-.077
Group maintenance	-.006	-.042
Group accomplishments	.169	.143
Self expressing abilities	.156	.084
Financial return	.156	.193**
$R^2$	.295	.266
Adjusted $R^2$	.204	.171
$p$ -value	.001	.003

\* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ .

recreation, socialization) in their surfing trips care less about the surfing conditions of the destination. However, those seeking for other types of benefits associated with serious leisure, such as self-expression and financial rewards are more demanding on specific surfing characteristics of the travel destination including the variety of waves, which in turn is an indicator of the seriousness of their surfing. These results should be taken into consideration by surf destinations opting either to capture a broad clientele of surfers (e.g., providing alternative recreational activities) or a very specialized group of serious surfers seeking to master their skills.

## 6. Conclusion: study implications and limitations

This study responded to the need of a better understanding of surf tourists given the size of this form of niche tourism and its capacity to produce positive economic impacts especially in less developed areas (Buckley, 2002a, 2002b; Dolnicar & Flucker, 2003a; Ponting, 2009). By examining the relationships between surfing as a serious leisure pastime and surf travel behavior and preferences, this study unveiled information that could be used to strengthen marketing strategies for capturing or retaining surf tourists or to implement managerial actions to better serve those tourists.

This study confirms that surfers have a strong disposition for surf tourism (Butts, 2001; Tantamjarik, 2004); not only the majority of respondents have traveled in the past primarily for surfing, but most of them also reported their willingness to embark on surfing trips in the near future. Such large proportion of surf tourists among the sample, along with the overall predisposition that

surfers have to travel searching for *the* perfect wave (Butts, 2001; Tantamjarik, 2004), may explain the weak associations found between the six serious leisure qualities and the surf travel behavior, especially related to their desire to embark on surfing trips in the future. Such strong disposition for traveling and the higher relevance of the destination surfing appeal (e.g., abundance and/or variety of waves) over the infrastructure should be capitalized by tourism agencies, especially in less developed regions, regions that while comprising ideal surfing conditions may not possess a sophisticated infrastructure nor resources to develop it.

Surf destinations willing to attract more skilled surfers should incorporate on their tourism promotional campaigns those serious leisure qualities to which respondents highly agreed upon (e.g., *Perseverance*, *Effort*). It is also important that marketing material integrates serious leisure qualities with those characteristics of the surfing destination that were found to be significantly associated. For example, advertising messages could be crafted to portray the surfing appeal of the destination especially related to the variety of waves and the quality of the natural environment as a catalyst for reinforcing the surfing *Identity* of tourists.

Similarly, *Benefits* that surfers perceive to attain from surfing (especially self-expression) should also be incorporated in marketing strategies along with the variety of waves and the overall surfing appeal of the destination. Negative or not significant impact of benefits associated with enjoyment, recreation and socialization on destination preferences may suggest that such outcomes could be associated with other recreational activities that surf destinations may offer (e.g., surf-themed parties). These results have important managerial implications; destination managers should make sure that their surf destinations have adequate ancillary outlets to strengthen the surf-identity (e.g., souvenir shops, surf-related gear and clothing) and foster social network opportunities (e.g., surf-related parties, surf events) for their surf tourists. In turn the existence of this ancillary product line may help to invigorate the economy of local communities. On this regard, further research is needed to examine predominant activity preferences of surf tourists within the casual-serious surfing continuum.

This study contributes to the understanding of surf travel behavior by examining how serious leisure qualities, and particularly perceived benefits, shape preferences of surf travel destinations. However, the authors acknowledge some limitations that should be controlled for in future studies. The most evident limitation relates to the use of a convenient sample which prevents generalizing results and carrying its implications to the surfing community. Additionally, in the attempt to reduce contextual biases by conducting this research within an international approach, this study denied the importance of the social context. Taking into considering that the *Benefits* quality of serious leisure appears to be conditioned to contextual factors (Gould et al., 2008), this was

a critical limitation especially because the examination of potential differences across regions was not feasible due to the sample size. Although the use of a convenient sample representing surfers from different contexts was an important criterion in the design of this exploratory study, it is suggested that future research efforts control for both limitations to enable generalizations to the world surfing community, and to further examine the influence of contextual differences on the seriousness of surfing across geographic regions.

The large proportion of experienced surfers in the sample is another study limitation that prevented capturing travel preferences of novice surfers who may or may not also have strong surf travel behavior. This is critical because more skilled recreationists tend to have different activity orientations and preferences than novice ones (Bryan, 1977; Cole & Scott, 1999). In this sense, future studies may consider stratifying the sample to make sure that enough representation from novice to advanced surfers (and in between) are represented. Taking into consideration the contribution of this study to advance the knowledge of surf-tourism, the size and economic relevance of the global surf tourism, as well as the exploratory nature of this study, future examination is needed to better understand this form of specialized tourism. Specifically, further research is needed to unveil the development process of the surfing *Identity* and *Ethos*, as well as different stages in their surf *Career* as those attributes could influence surf travel behavior and preferences.

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## Appendix A. Supplementary material

Supplementary data related to this article can be found online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2012.06.005>.

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