



The EDACENTER

at the University of Minnesota Crookston

Exploring Travel Interests and Constraints among Minnesota Hmong

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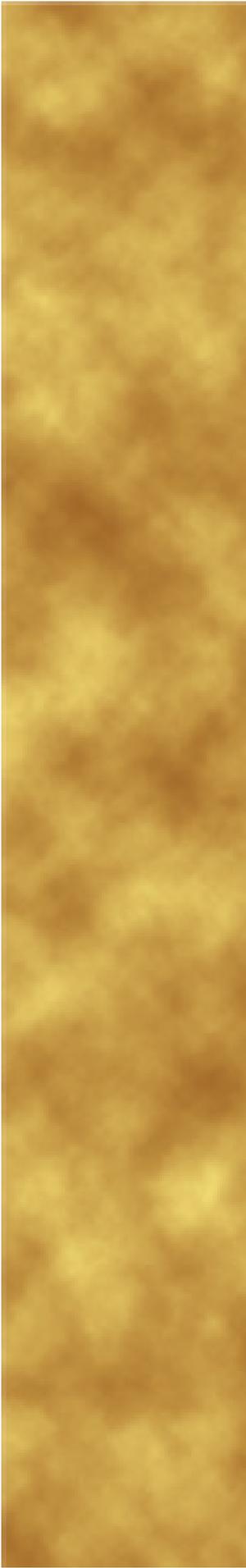
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SUMMARY

As Minnesotans comprise about half of Minnesota's travel market (Davidson Peterson, 2012), understanding this in-state population is important to attract and retain consumers and, subsequently, support communities and economies. As of 2015, tourist data primarily focuses on white, non-Hispanics. Other markets exist, however, and are growing in Minnesota and elsewhere. A rather unique Minnesota market is the Hmong, as the state has the second highest Hmong population in the United States. Research on other immigrant groups finds some challenges and opportunities related to leisure and leisure-related activities, such as travel. This report provides results from initial qualitative explorations of Hmong leisure travel behaviors. Given a self-reported propensity towards outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism, Hmong are particularly important to consider in destination areas where the outdoors is a key attraction. Results will inform planning, marketing, and product development for Hmong tourists as a niche group both in the United States and Minnesota.

Six focus groups occurred fall 2014 with a convenience sample of Hmong Minnesotans across three age groups (n= 56). Held in socially valued places and facilitated by a Hmong Minnesotan who could speak Hmong and English, the focus groups explored travel interests, behaviors, and preferences among participants. The discussions took place in the language preferred by the group (English, Hmong, or a combination of the two), were recorded for later review, and ended with a traditional Hmong meal. Participants were compensated for their time (\$50) and invited to review and confirm the data and findings.

Data revealed Hmong travel for and are generally constrained from travel for similar reasons as non-Hmong. Specifically, Hmong Minnesotans travel to get away, relax, and visit attractions or appealing destinations. Hmong Minnesotans do not travel as much as they desire due to time, finances, and distance to destinations. Like other immigrant groups, the influence of culture on leisure travel preferences and participation was clear, as were constraints of discrimination. Specific cultural influences on travel included the perceived value of leisure travel, familial responsibility for elders, travel group size, as well as food preferences. Discrimination was particularly prominent outside the Twin Cities Metropolitan area. Generational differences in travel preferences and behaviors existed and are in stark contrast to the broader U.S. and Minnesota population where the older generation has more money and interest in travel than - Hmong elders and the younger generation is not as culturally compelled toward group family travel. To attract and retain Hmong consumers, Hmong suggest 1) facility information, specifically for larger travel groups and parking; 2) Hmong marketing through word of mouth, traditional and electronic, 3) packages and tours including Hmong travelers.

BACKGROUND

Since the end of Second Indochina War in 1975, the United States has become home to approximately 260,000 Hmong Americans, the majority of whom trace their ancestry to Laos (Vang, 2008). Minnesota is home to the second largest population of Hmong in the United States (66,181), behind California (91,224) and ahead of Wisconsin (49,249; Pfeiffer, Sullivan, Yang, & Yang, 2012). The Hmong population is also the largest Asian population in Minnesota, which increased 45.6% from 2000 to 2010 (Council of Asian Pacific Minnesotans, 2012). Most Minnesota Hmong are concentrated in the Twin Cities metropolitan area with scattered communities in greater Minnesota (Hmong National Development, Inc., 2004). With the changing demographics of Minnesota, it is important to understand how the growing Hmong community affects the state and local economy, particularly in tourism.

Coming from traditionally agrarian and subsistence-based livelihoods, participation and exposure to nature-based activities, such as hunting, fishing, and foraging is intertwined into Hmong culture (Bengston, Schermann, Hawj, & Moua, 2012; Quincy, 1995). Travel for these outdoor activities occurs as it does for visiting family or for business. However, a literature search on Hmong tourism resulted in no published literature, suggesting a lack of documented information on leisure travel among the Hmong American community. Despite this dearth of literature, limited information exists on other immigrants and their leisure patterns, as well as Hmong cultural practices, outdoor recreation participation, and socio-economic status. Synthesizing these different areas of information, the travel interests and preferences of Hmong begin to emerge.

Immigrants and leisure

While literature exploring the relationship between immigrants and leisure travel is scarce, leisure literature has emerged in the 21st century that documents if and how immigrants experience leisure. As leisure travel falls under the leisure umbrella, it is possible to obtain some insight into the challenges and opportunities related to Hmong travel.

As one would imagine, immigrants both cease and start activities once living in a new country. The decision to start or end these activities is based on a number of factors, such as the environment, language, and access (Stodolska, 2000). Opportunities for new activities are a result of latent demand in which access in the home-country may not be available. Conversely, cultural pressure may inhibit continuation of certain leisure activities while cultural comfort ensures others are maintained.

Constraints to Hmong leisure and travel have been categorized into three categories: 1) intrapersonal, 2) interpersonal, and 3) structural (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991). Intrapersonal constraints include personal characteristics and psychological attributes (e.g., fear of violence, fear of heights,

self-image) that interact and influence leisure preferences. Interpersonal constraints emerge from interactions with others and coordinating personal resources to engage in leisure (e.g., unable to coordinate schedules with friends). The most frequently cited category is structural constraints, which intervene between leisure preference and participation (e.g., time, money, supplies). Structural constraint sub-categories include the natural environment, social environment, territories, and institutional categories (Walker & Virden, 2003, 2005). Natural environment constraints include weather, topography, and landscapes and primarily impact participation. Social environmental structural constraints include anything that interferes between preference and participation. Territorial constraints involve those where access may be prevented and or perceived differently depending on socio-economic class or race/ethnicity. Institutional constraints result from the managing organization and include intentional acts such as closures or unintentional moves such as lack of access. Territorial and institutional may be particularly problematic for immigrants.

Hmong Cultural Capital

With the establishment of Hmong enclaves in Minnesota, the Twin Cities has been coined “the Hmong Capital” for the United States (Hien, 2014). The convergence of high concentrations of Hmong and Hmong-owned businesses in Minnesota provides unique opportunities for cultural tourism catering to the Hmong and non-Hmong community. Marketplaces, farmers’ markets, and businesses not only provide cultural, socially familiar, and communal spaces for Hmong, but also economic opportunities for small-scale Hmong entrepreneurs. Complimenting these year-round activities, the Hmong Minnesotan community also holds annual festivals drawing audiences from across the state. Most notable are the Hmong American Freedom Festival on the first weekend of July and the Hmong New Year on Thanksgiving weekend, both events that take place in St. Paul.

Hmong Outdoors

Unlike other immigrant groups (Johnson-Gaither, 2014; Taylor, Grandjean, & Gramann, 2011), Hmong visit nature-based settings and participate in outdoor recreation at a rate disproportionately higher than the general U.S. population (Hutchison, 1993; Price, 1995). Hmong of all ages engage in hunting and fishing, as documented in literature and in mass media (Breining, 2011; Orrick, 2013). Like non-Hmong, much of Hmong youth exposure to outdoor recreational activities has been facilitated by community organizations, non-profits, and social groups.

Since the 2004 Chai Soua Vang hunting incident, in which Vang shot eight hunters after they taunted him, surrounded him, and blocked his path, other violent clashes between Hmong and white hunters have occurred. Undoubtedly, issues of racism, cultural misunderstanding, and community discourse exist, particularly with Hmong and hunting (Bengston, Schermann, Moua, &

Lee, 2008; Price, 1995; Schein & Thoj, 2007). Bengston et al. address the tension as the “elephant in the room” in their analysis of Hmong perspectives and public lands. As of 2015, media accounts of Hmong harassment on both public and private land remain. Just as discrimination and fear constrain others from leisure and outdoor activity (Schneider, Shinew & Fernandez, 2014; Stodolska & Shinew, 2010), direct attacks may hinder Hmong travel interest.

Hmong Economic Status

Hmong have lower median household income than non-Hmong Minnesotans, and one in three lived below the poverty line in 2012 (Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans, 2012). Consequently, Hmong families have less reported discretionary purchasing power than others. However, the poverty level for second generation Hmong is lower than previous generations (Corrie & Radosevich, 2013). Since the 1990s, Hmong Minnesotans’ economic status has improved, as illustrated by Hmong per capita income rising from \$2,692 in 1990 to \$11,506 in 2011. In terms of buying power, the Hmong community has increased from \$62 million in 1990 to an estimated \$523 million in 2011, and in the same time period added \$36 billion in estimated lifetime earnings (Corrie & Radosevich,).

Beyond income reported in the United States, the tradition of kev sib koom nyiaj, or money pool, sporadically continues in the U.S. and influences Hmong purchasing power. This tradition occurs when Hmong pool their money to support both others and themselves. Using this system, family members can make purchases that they otherwise would not be able to through normal financial methods (Koltyk, 1998; Yang & Solheim, 2008). Access to resources through this type of pooling may afford greater travel opportunities than through reported income alone. Given this tradition, however, actual available income remains unknown. National traveler data reports an average household income of \$62,500 among U.S. travelers (U.S. Travel Association, 2015).

Important to note is that financial management differs by Hmong generation, and for Hmong, ‘generation’ is a concept that indicates place of birth, as well as being born and living and at the same time, thus sharing similar experiences. In a qualitative study of Hmong family financial practices, Solheim and Yang (2010) found that “first generation” Hmong – those born and raised in Laos and who came to the U.S. after age 12 – valued money because of how hard it was to earn it, were more frugal, and tended to save their money. In contrast, those arriving in the United States before age 12 and “second generation” Hmong (those born in the United States), valued money for its ability to purchase goods and solve problems. Based on this information, generational differences regarding the propensity to – and reasons for – travel are probable.

Purpose

Hmong travelers in Minnesota are a niche market. This report provides primary data on Hmong leisure travel behaviors and continues the University of Minnesota Tourism Center's effort to understand diverse travelers and niche markets while complimenting secondary data gathering efforts on African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos (Benavides 2014, 2015a, 2015b). Given the improving economic conditions for Hmong, coupled with their interest in the outdoors and growing population in Minnesota, it is prudent to understand their interests – and constraints to – leisure travel.

STUDY APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Focus groups led to a better understanding of Minnesotan Hmong travel perceptions and behaviors. As Hmong have a rich history in oral tradition and communication in social groups, a qualitative approach seemed appropriate (Allen, Matthew & Bolland, 2004; Park, 2000).

Study Sample

The target population were Hmong ages 18 years and older who had traveled for pleasure or vacation more than 50 miles from home overnight during the past 12 months. Given the large concentration of Hmong in the Twin Cities Metropolitan area, a convenience sample in the metro area was recruited through social media and word of mouth. Respondents were screened about their leisure travel. If they fit the criteria of a traveler not employed by marketing or related firms (Appendix A), they were then invited to participate. Study participants were stratified into three generational age groupings: Young Generation, Middle Generation, and Elders. Young Generation (Tub Ntxhais Hluas) consisted of young, single people. In Hmong culture, even if a person is 30 years old, they are considered a child if they are single. The Middle Generation includes people in the age range of 30-55 who are married with children. In Hmong culture, a person is considered an adult once he or she is married. Elders include people who are 55 years of age and older and who already have son-in-laws, daughters-in-laws, or grandchildren (Danes, O'Donnell, & Sakulnamarka, 1993).

More than 50 people participated in the focus groups – 20 Young Generation (YG), 25 Middle Generation (MG), and 12 Elders. Participants were more frequently female than male (Table 1). The age range for the YG group was 19-31, for the MG groups 28-50, and the Elders ages ranged from 58-69 years of age. Participation was voluntary and participants were notified of their rights and opportunities. The University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board granted approval of this study with exempt status; IRB determined there was minimal risk to participants. Participants were provided with a modest economic incentive to participate (\$50 gift card), as well as a meal following the focus group.

| TABLE 1: FOCUS GROUP AGE BREAKDOWN BY GENERATION AND GENDER | | | | |
|--|------------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Young Gen | Middle Gen | Elder | TOTAL |
| Male | 6 | 14 | 4 | 24 |
| Female | 14 | 10 | 8 | 32 |
| TOTAL | 20 | 24 | 12 | 56 |

Study Questions and Process

The question set (see Appendix B) was adapted from previous focus groups and informed by general travel research. A Hmong community member and lead researcher, with extensive experience in the Hmong community and Hmong research, ensured the questions were both culturally and age appropriate. After the first focus group, an additional question was added about multi-generational travel. Specifically, YG and MG participants shared their experiences of traveling with parents, and Elder participants were asked about traveling with their children.

The questions were worded and ordered to put participants at ease and maximize their elaboration on leisure travel issues. Probes such as ‘tell me more’ or ‘can you share a bit’ elicited more information. The same bilingual focus group facilitator conducted all focus group discussions. Participants could choose to speak in Hmong or English. Two focus groups were in English (YG 1 and YG 2), one included a combination of Hmong and English (MG 1), and two were in Hmong (MG 2 and Elder).

Discussions occurred at locally valued locations, such as the Center for Asian Pacific Islanders, the Amherst M. Wilder Center, the Hmong Assembly of God Church, and Tsev Laus Txhwj Xeeb, a community center for Hmong Elders. Focus groups were audio-recorded (with permission) and transcribed or translated and transcribed, as necessary.

Data Analysis

At the conclusion of the focus groups, all text files were shared with the research team for reading and re-readings. The team met to discuss major themes and ideas. Texts were uploaded to Atlas.ti (version 6.2.28) for content analysis to organize the text (Scientific Software Development, 2014). Three Hmong professionals known to the authors reviewed this study for cultural accuracy and representation. Key results are presented by topics of interest with representative quotes where appropriate.

RESULTS

Perceptions of and motivations for leisure travel

Like other immigrant groups, Hmong perceptions of leisure travel were similar to non-Hmong in terms of motivations and most constraints. Motivations for leisure travel included typical push factors of getting away from daily life and escaping home environments, as well as pull factors related to destinations, seeing nature and cultural historic sites, and warm weather (Table 2).

| TABLE 2: EXAMPLE REASONS FOR TRAVEL BY GENERATIONAL GROUP | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| | Young | Middle | Elder |
| Destination attributes | Fishing, a lake Someplace far away Has to have a beach Solitude / Night life Big cities | Anywhere not home “Wondrous Places” Beaches, warmth | Laos, nostalgia To see beauty Oceans, water |
| Personal push and pull factors | Trying new activities Meeting new people Relieve stress Challenging myself Get out of routine Away from home/work | Relieve stress No cooking or responsibilities | Relieve stress |
| Visit and be with family | Being with family and doing what family wants Bonding with friends Visit family | Family fun with no boundaries Visit family | Visit family |

Generational differences in perceptions of and rights to leisure travel emerged. Specifically, the Elders were unaccustomed to the idea of leisure travel and indicated spending and time could be spent elsewhere. Middle Generation and Younger Generation Hmong were more inclined to leisure travel and, not surprisingly, had more experience in and desire for leisure travel. Cultural issues emerged with the perceived obligation of family travel, to include family in travel, and to negotiate travel to include family both in travel groups and travel itineraries.

Like many non-Hmong travelers, the Younger Generation took vacations to go somewhere else but also to get away from home, work and school, and daily routines. Unstructured freedoms to explore new geographic places, eat different foods, explore other cultures and people, and try outdoor adventures were some of the pulls of leisure travel. Traveling with friends made vacations memorable, especially when going to new places and sharing experiences and memories. The younger generation enjoyed getting away from family supervision and expectations imposed on them by their Elders.

“It’s being able to get out of routine and my day to day things of life. Vacation is something that I look forward to and I get excited about.”

“I needed to get away from my life here and to release stress, and it was a good opportunity to go sightseeing and see what the world has to offer.”

“Getting away from normal activities of work and such. Sometimes we like to try to turn off our cell phones, too, so we’re really away from phone calls and text messages. To disconnect from what you are doing, that helps you enjoy the time more. Attractions, because that’s what makes vacations interesting, and the people you go with.”

Similarly, MG participants viewed vacation as getting away from home but more frequently mentioned vacationing with other couples or in groups, including family. Some participants stated being away from Elder responsibilities and child care for grandchildren was a vacation. For MG, a memorable vacation was one in which they visited a natural or human-made

site of great beauty, history, or technology. Being with family and friends was important as well, but the feelings evoked from the place they visited were what made it memorable.

“We don’t gamble, we don’t party or drink, but it’s nice to get away from what you’re normally with and fill your mind with nonsense and not have to worry about anything else. We love the different buildings. We can’t go to Paris, but we can go to Paris in Las Vegas.”

“The Grand Canyon in Arizona. In this world, God created such a beautiful place for us. When I see it, it is so beautiful. I don’t want to die anymore.”

“The Kennedy Space Center. . . I remember because I live a normal life, but yet I get to see how smart people are, and they have traveled to the moon. I feel like I’ve gone to the moon as well.”

“In Hawaii, everything is beautiful. When you are in the water you feel like a mermaid. You are so released from everything. The ocean view is beautiful, you can walk on the beach and feel the breeze of the ocean and hear the ocean waves so it’s really relaxing. You don’t remember the stress back home.”

Vacation was something the YG understood well, the MG was newly accustomed to, and something Elders were unfamiliar with. For the Elders and some MG, not going to a place of employment was a vacation. However, instead of not working, they would often do other work, such as farming or helping family members. Many of the Elders did not drive and depended on their children and grandchildren for any vacation travel.

“Our parents and the older generation – their idea of vacation is not going to work. Like my dad, two Fridays ago, he took a vacation day on Friday and didn’t go to work, and he wanted to take that day to go farming. So that was his idea of vacation. (YG)

“Their concept of vacation is: as long as we’re not working, and we’re at home resting, relaxing, or farming, or just not having to do hard labor.” (YG speaking about their parent)

“We grew up in Laos without vacation time. I took a vacation day yesterday to go shopping for our luncheon this weekend. Sometimes, I take a vacation day to attend a funeral in California. It’s a vacation, but yet it’s for a funeral.” (MG)

“Vacation means [something] different from [how] Americans [view it]. When you need to help relatives, you have to take a vacation from work. For Americans, when they take a vacation from work, they’re actually on vacation somewhere. For us Hmong, we use vacation days for a variety of events. I usually take a week of vacation just to stay home to help my family or just spend time talking to my kids about their schooling.” (MG)

The Elders were motivated by nostalgia and talked about past travel to Laos, wanting to go to Laos, or even never wanting to go to Laos, because it would not be the same. Elders also mentioned memorable places and the feelings associated with those places. They also mentioned places that reminded them of Laos. Though they traveled mainly to see family and with family, occasional group sightseeing travel was organized by a Hmong association or non-profit.

"I vacationed in Hawaii. It is a good place to live. It has good weather, the ocean is near, it has beautiful landscape...which reminds me of Laos. I really like Hawaii and it'll be a good place to live."

"I've been to Florida and also Los Angeles, CA. Both fun places that made me happy."

"I'm old now, so I can only go wherever my kids take me; I go look at the oceans and fish."

Participants shared they particularly enjoy traveling to locations where they can relate to the people and surroundings – places with diversity of people, especially other Asians. This sheds light on why Hawaii, California, Vancouver, New York City, and Toronto were popular destinations among the group.

The Case of Visiting Family

Visiting family and friends was a frequently noted travel motivation, but usually not considered vacation by the YG due to its obligatory nature and constraint to perceived freedom. If the family-obligated travel involved a wedding or a funeral and even occurred in a desirable location such as California, the preparations and work made this type of travel a non-vacation.

On the other hand, when the YG wanted to plan a vacation, they would often suggest a location that would encourage their parents to travel along with them by adding a family stop in the itinerary. Elders visited family as the primary purpose of their vacation, unless they were traveling with other family members who planned the trip.

"I went to California for a funeral; it did not feel like a vacation because I was stuck in the funeral home. Even though I was miles away, it was not vacation." (YG)

"I went to Seattle for wedding; we were there for a good week and a half, and we didn't do anything but prepare so it didn't feel like a vacation." (YG)

"I think of visiting as a task, like work, to support your parents. I don't think they would go on a vacation to the middle of nowhere, like somewhere where they don't know people. They want to visit family; I go with them because that makes them feel more comfortable and makes them feel like there is some sense of connection. My parents would not go on vacation by themselves or visit relatives by themselves unless there were other people with them. Whether I'm connected to these relatives or not, I have to go to show support." (YG)

"Visiting family depends – if visiting is for fun, then it's a vacation; if it's a family obligation, then it's not a vacation." (MG)

"Mostly, if you are traveling on vacation with the Elders it's to see relatives. If it's true vacationing, those are not real vacations (when traveling with Elders)." (MG)

Leisure Travel Constraints

Constraints to Hmong travel include structural constraints typically identified by most markets: time, money, and distance to destinations. The majority of

participants did not travel as frequently or as far as they would like. Time was constrained not only by the typical work and school issues, but also family caregiving. This cultural influence is particularly important for, while caregiving impacts several traveler segments, Hmong have a strong family bond and sense of responsibility.

Generational differences did exist in the prominence of certain constraints. Work responsibilities constrained the YG, family responsibilities the MG, and health and familial dependence constrained most Elders (Table 3). In addition, among the younger and MG in particular, there was a perceived lack of novelty about Minnesota that influenced its appeal as a destination.

TABLE 3: CONSTRAINTS TO TRAVEL BY HMONG GENERATIONAL GROUP

| Constraints | Young | Middle | Elder |
|--|--|---|---|
| Structural (natural, territorial, social, institutional) | No money No time No flexibility in work/school schedules Traditional responsibilities (of daughter) Accommodations too small Discrimination | No money No time Safety | No money Confusing rules and laws Food choices Fear of bad people |
| Intrapersonal | Don't know what is out there | Worry about kids at home | Poor health English language challenges Age (perceptions of age) Fear of illness Fear of drowning Fear of bad people |
| Interpersonal | Need to care for aging parents Parents worry when we go Family events Hard to plan schedule for 12-15 family members | Need to help family; care for grandchildren and Elders Availability of others as travel companions | No children Depend on our children to take us |

Family obligations kept YG and MG Hmong from vacationing as much as they wanted. Some of the YG and MG felt the need to care for their parents, with MG participants also expressing the need to save money for their children instead of spending on themselves.

"I have obligations as an adult and have to take care of an ailing parent....."
(YG)

"Added to the time and the financial [aspect of not being able to travel often] is the responsibility of a daughter. Coming from my family, which is very culturally rooted in the different levels of genders, it can be really hard to negotiate your time or a good excuse to travel." (YG)

"One reason I don't vacation is that I have a lot of children. I'd rather spend time with my children and save money to help them. You can't vacation too often and be able to help your children. I worry a lot about them; I want to stay and help them." (MG)

"I'd love to [vacation] often but can't for two reasons – no money and too many kids. I'm afraid they will start drinking alcohol, runaway with friends, or whatever when I'm on vacation. Also, I want to save money for them to spend on their education."

Rather unique to immigrant and non-dominant groups, Hmong shared experiences of perceived discrimination. Discrimination, from past or expected experience, was identified across generations as a constraint to travel. Some Hmong travelers felt uncomfortable in rural areas and small towns where they stated frequently being "stared at." Participants noted that when they made phone calls or wrote emails about lodging and cabin rentals, rarely were they returned. Participants assumed an Asian name deterred a response.

"Because we are multi-culture, depending on where you live, there is always tension between people, between groups. If you go up north or south or wherever, being Asian you need to be careful where you go, not that they [is] hatred [toward] you, but you need to plan and watch out. There's good and bad people out there. Especially if you go in the woods or go hunting, because we [have] had encounters in hunting and gathering."

"I think the biggest problem is racism, especially when you go way up north. They don't see people like us. They stare at you like you're an alien. That's the problem."

"I definitely go to places that are diverse. I don't feel safe going to very white places."

"I feel unsafe when I go up north, but I open up. I talk and communicate with people I see. I don't give them dirty looks. They don't have to talk back, but I'll say hi, be friendly. Deep inside, I have this gut feeling that I shouldn't be there or they don't like me, but I still say hi to them."

Multigenerational Vacations

Though family issues may limit Hmong travel, it is common in multigenerational family groups. Like other ethnic groups (e.g., Latinos), Hmong tend to travel in larger groups which presents both opportunities and challenges.

Participants shared the ways in which they have negotiated the constraints of multigenerational travel. The YGs, financially dependent on their MG parents, traveled to destinations with family stops, so the trip would also appeal to the MG. While identified as burdensome and sometimes irritating, family travel seems to occur with graciousness, love, and flexibility. For example, respondents mentioned renting a 15-passenger van so a parent or Elder can have a whole row to him or herself for comfort or renting an RV so parents can cook 'their food' and rest.

"I think of visiting as a task, like work, to support your parents. They want to visit family, so I go with them because that makes them feel more comfortable and makes them feel like there is some sense of connection. My parents would not go on vacation by themselves or visit relatives by themselves unless there were other people with them."

"I have to persuade my parents to go on vacation. I usually have to direct it, like 'Let's go to this place because we can visit these people [or] family members, and then we can go explore.' Sometimes that's what pulls my parents to go to a certain place – that we're going to visit family and then do something else."

"For Hmong parents, the vacation always has to involve family. Visiting family."

Within multigenerational travel, food choices sometimes determined where or how families would travel, depending upon on whether or not parents preferred Hmong or Asian food. YGs stated food made it difficult to travel with parents, because they did not like to try new foods and wanted to bring cooking implements to prepare sticky rice and other preferred foods while traveling.

"When you travel with your family, the Elders think about [food] too, because that's why they boil their chicken and get their sticky rice ready – for the long road trip."

"I actually brought the Lub tsu cub mov to make the rice. We didn't even get to do it because most of the time we were driving. This is just not vacation-like. "

"The reason it's hard to travel [with your parents] – they just want sticky rice."

"Food determines where they can go."

Traveling with the Elder generation was usually not enjoyable for their MG children and created additional worry and limited choices. Given some Elder health problems, vacations had to be planned with accessible or comfortable transportation to locations with available restrooms, pharmacies, food concerns, and in some cases, dialysis clinics.

"The real meaning of vacation is to enjoy it and not to create or cause more stress. You've already lost before it [began by bringing an Elder]."

"Ttravel with an Elder will be a hassle. It will cause more problems, and I will not enjoy it as much. [If] you bring the Elder along, and they get sick, you [will] worry."

However, not all Elders caused worry. One MG mentioned parents liked vacationing and trying new things, including bowling, hamburgers, and going on the water slides at Wisconsin Dells.

Minnesota travel

Like non-Hmong Minnesotans, Hmong find Minnesota an attractive vacation spot due to its access, natural beauty (Ipsos Reid, 2012), and familiarity. Minnesota is an easy place to vacation for Hmong residents because it is close, and subsequently, a less expensive trip than destinations further away. Also, much of Minnesota is familiar to Hmong and therefore comfortable for multiple generations. For the YG, traveling in Minnesota is appealing, as they are close if something happened to their parents (Table 4).

TABLE 4: ATTRACTIVE ATTRIBUTES OF MINNESOTA AS A DESTINATION, BY HMONG GENERATIONAL GROUP

| Younger Gen | Middle Gen | Elders |
|--|--|--------------------|
| You can ask others where to go Easier to get home if something happens You can decide at the last minute Easier to take a big group of people Familiar Quick My parents are at peace Easier to predict weather You don't have to fly Close; you can drive You might know the area better Familiar surroundings Less planning needed Less lecturing from parents | Less costly No preplanning Close to home Don't have to worry about hotels, can sleep in car We know most places Don't have to buy plane ticket Cheap distance Can drive there It's easy to get there Hmong families too big; can pack in a rental van vs. fly Easy to do day trips | We can drive there |

Similar to other Minnesota travelers, perceptions of Minnesota among Hmong were mixed and opportunities to increase awareness about destinations and attractions identified. The number and type of attractions Minnesota offers was perceived as less than other destinations, and participants expressed the need for increased awareness about Minnesota's offerings from large-scale shopping to cultural opportunities. Perceptions of a lack of multi-generational activities were voiced, as well, with the Wisconsin Dells mentioned multiple times as a location that caters to Hmong family needs, such as adjoining lodging rooms, activities for children, adults (YG and MG), and Elders, food, and plenty of parking.

Among respondents who traveled in the state, the opportunity to do something new or novel in appeared low. The same reasons for what makes vacation easy in Minnesota were also a reason why Hmong Minnesotans do not vacation in Minnesota – familiarity and being too close to home. Minnesota was “boring” and “kind of dead” for many of the younger generation. Respondents like traveling to big cities or places with mountains and oceans; rural areas and farmland were not considered a vacation.

- “We live here. We want to go somewhere else.”*
- “We’re used to the surroundings; nothing new.”*
- “It’s too close to home, so it will not feel like a vacation.”*
- “Not enough things to do and the scenery – same old same old.”*
- “Hmong people like beautiful scenery, rivers, flower gardens, and mountains, and Minnesota doesn’t have a lot of that to offer. It’s not good for picture taking.”*
- “It’s flat with trees. The only time it’s really nice is fall when the leaves change. And then the hotels are booked, especially in Duluth.”*

As with other Minnesota markets (Ipsos Reid, 2012), the weather was a deterrent for seasonal travel in Minnesota. Younger people who enjoyed winter sports liked to leave Minnesota because “we don’t have enough fun

mountains.” A few participants did enjoy winter sports and mentioned ice fishing and skiing at Lutsen, but others mentioned the lack of activities for the entire family at winter vacation destinations. Generally, the MG and the Elders travel to warmer places.

Facility capacity also influenced travel experience for Hmong families. The YG expressed frustration with online searches for Minnesota destinations and lodging due to the number of click-throughs and inadequate information on parking and large group settings.

Other concerns about vacationing in Minnesota included too many mosquitos, being afraid of animals in the wilderness (dogs and wolves), poor cell phone reception, getting lost, and not being able to find a hospital in an emergency. Minnesota parks, in particular, were mentioned as not having enough parking spaces. Paying to park was also a concern when a family travels in multiple vehicles.

Hmong suggestions to enhance Minnesota leisure travel

Focus group participants had several ideas to encourage Hmong travel in and around Minnesota, ranging from marketing to onsite facility design. Their suggestions are listed below:

Enhance word-of-mouth

Build and enhance promotion from within the Hmong community. The YG and MG trust recommendations from friends and family about visiting an area or attraction. Consider working with Hmong community non-profits, agencies, liaisons, and entrepreneurs to serve as a word-of-mouth reference. Similarly, promote vacation travel using social media. The YG and MG were savvy users of Google and Facebook when looking for vacation packages and ideas. The YG also used VRBO, Trip Advisor, Expedia, Groupon, Hotwire, Google Maps, and Go Destinations to read reviews and recommendations.

Build infrastructure

Plan or expand parks, attractions, and accommodations for large, multi-generational group sizes, including more group sites at State Parks. Increase awareness of availability of such facilities and consider details, such as parking, movable tables, and cooking areas.

Highlight Package Deals

Highlight or create package deals that cater to families. Information about Wisconsin Dells was mentioned, and highlights included good customer service, lodging for large groups or families, marketing via social media, and easily accessible rate information.

Organize festivals, events, and tours

Coordinate and/or create events and festivals. For example, during a state organized camping/fishing/outdoors event for Hmong youth at one of the Environmental Learning Centers, the Minnesota Mycological Society organizes an educational mushroom foraging walk in a nearby park. Organize Hmong-specific bus tours to visit other areas or attractions and to help spread the word among friends and family. Organize Farm tours, or

farm stays for middle generation Hmong, or Hmong Day at parks with free admission to teach about birds and plants.

DISCUSSION

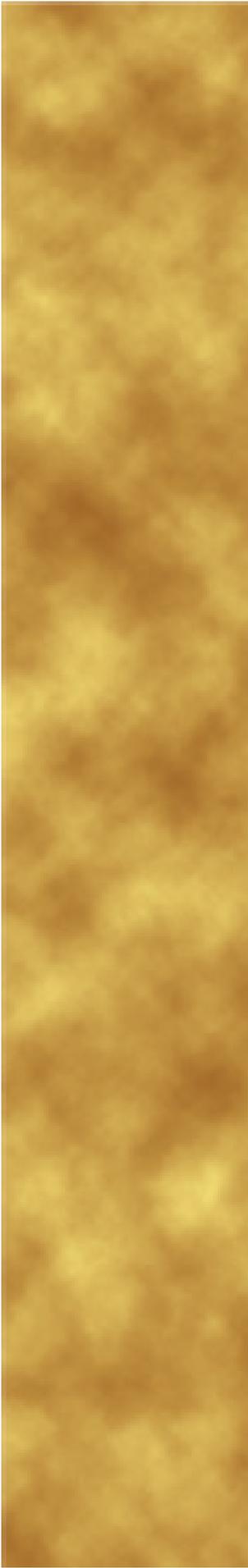
Similarities exist between Minnesota Hmong travelers and non-Hmong travelers, both in terms of travel motivations and constraints. Broad efforts to attract leisure travelers to and across Minnesota will be at least somewhat effective for Hmong. For example, Hmong exhibit similar travel product preferences of both the cultural and adventure markets Minnesota targets (Ipsos Reid, 2012). As such, the majority of products that appeal to Minnesota leisure travel markets may appeal to Hmong. Keeping products fresh, top of mind, and interesting will entice not only Hmong but all of Minnesota's travel market. Clearly Hmong businesses and cultural events can, themselves, serve as tourist products for non-Hmong travelers.

Attention to Hmong travel preferences and constraints will lead to more successful attraction and retention of the Hmong traveler and possibly other non-White travelers. Clearly, one of the most important constraints is the perceived discrimination and safety concerns, which was evident across generations. Perceived discrimination among other non-majority groups in other leisure activities is well documented nationally and in Minnesota (Metropolitan Council, 2014; Wilhelm Stanis, Schneider, Chavez, & Shinew, 2009). Not only will fear impede the desire to travel, but it will also likely dictate destination choice and lengths of stay. While fear is not easily overcome, efforts to welcome and support non-White travelers will likely be noticed, shared, and lead to travel opportunities. Focus group discussions revealed some measure of market share loss to Wisconsin among some travelers, and such spatial displacement may be occurring among other non-White markets as well.

Once Hmong are en route and on site, attention to the unique Hmong characteristics can attract and retain them. For example, Hmong travel party size is larger than the non-Hmong travel party and attention its needs are warranted throughout the travel phase – from parking to room size and onsite accommodations. On a related note, providing culturally important foods and inclusive design will not only comfort Hmong travelers, but likely benefit other consumers (Ceconi, 2008).

Limitations

While this study is an ambitious effort to better understand a niche tourism market, there are, of course, limitations. First, the study is not representative of all Hmong but only Minnesota travelers. Certainly, the findings may carry over to other mid-western destinations and locales, but the situation may be different among the California Hmong enclave. Lee and Greene (2010) report differences in acculturation experiences by geography and, as such, this study replicated in other destinations may reveal different findings, particularly regarding constraints. Fernandez and Witt (2013) report on the 'horizontal' discrimination among racial and ethnic groups which may be more prevalent in California than Minnesota due to the population base.



Future research

A number of opportunities exist to advance understanding of Hmong leisure travel. A continuation of this qualitative approach could provide additional insight on constraints by generation and familial role, as well as the constraints to leisure travel and planning process details. Beyond Hmong, comparative research with other non-White markets could shed light on travel preferences and patterns in Minnesota. In addition, if provided with access to a representative sample, a quantitative assessment of travel patterns as they relate to acculturation and time in country would be of interest (Lee & Green, 2010).

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APPENDIX A

Screener

| | | | | | |
|------------------------|--|-------|-------|-------|---------------------|
| NAME (CHECK SPELLING): | | | | | |
| ADDRESS: | | | | | |
| CITY: | | | ZIP: | | |
| PHONE: | | | | | |
| E-MAIL: | | | | | |
| AGE GROUP: | | 18-32 | 33-49 | 50-68 | MALE (1) FEMALE (2) |
| INTERVIEWER | | | | DATE | |

INTRO: Hello, my name is _____ and I am calling on behalf of the U of MN because we are recruiting people to participate in a focus group discussion for a research study concerning travel and tourism. This is not a sales call and at no time will anyone try to sell you anything. If you qualify and participate in the discussion group, you will receive a \$50 Target Gift Card as a thank-you.

1. Have you participated in a focus group or other research study in the past six months? (CIRCLE CODE)

2.

YES 1 (THANK AND TERMINATE)

NO 2 (CONTINUE)

3. Do you or any of your immediate family members work in...? (CIRCLE CODE)

| | <u>YES</u> | <u>NO</u> |
|-----------------|------------|-----------|
| Market research | 1 | 2 |
| Advertising | 1 | 2 |

IF YES TO ANY IN Q2, THANK AND TERMINATE

4. Have you travelled in the last 12 months more than 50 miles away or to a place where you spent at least one night away from home?

A) For work/business YES NO

B) For pleasure/vacation YES NO

C) Other reasons (Explain) YES NO

IF YES to B, continue.

Travel for work AND business in the same trip counts as YES for B.

Otherwise, TERMINATE and thank.

5. Were any of your pleasure/vacation trips taken for the purpose of visiting family and friends?

No - Proceed to Q5

Yes

Was at least one of your pleasure/vacation trips taken for a purpose other than to visit family and friends?

Yes - Continue

No - Continue for up to half of participants in any focus group; beyond that, terminate

6. What is your age? (READ & CIRCLE CODE)

18 to 32

33 to 49

50 to 68

7. GEN X or MILLENNIALS ONLY

Do you have a job...?

Full time

Part time

Retired

Student

Other

GROUP REMINDER (We can be flexible on time if it fits where we are renting. We can do 5:30-7:30, 6-8, 7-9 – whatever fits for the group.)

| | Millenials 18-32 | GenXers 33-49 | Boomers 50-68 |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| DATE: | October 14 | October 28 | November 1 |
| DATE: | October 16 | October 30 | November 8 |
| TIME: (flexible) | Evening | Evening | 10-12am |
| TIME: (flexible) | Evening | Evening | 10-12am |
| LOCATION | Wilder Rm 2520 for Oct 14. | To be determined. Ideas welcome. | To be determined. |

Thank you. The group will be 1.5 hours in length. You were specifically selected to participate in this focus group; therefore if you cannot attend please let me [You will need to let them know how] know immediately so we can invite an alternate to attend.

You MUST arrive and be checked in 15 minutes before the start of the focus group to participate and be seated so that means that you will need to arrive by _____

Parking will be free, and you will be given a \$50 Target gift card for your time. The group will be held at _____.

Someone will call the day before the group with a brief reminder call.

[Make sure we have their phone number].

If you usually wear glasses for reading or watching TV, please bring them along.

We would like to send you a letter or e-mail confirming your attendance and providing you with a map and instructions on how to get to the location of the group. May I have your address and e-mail?

RECORD ALL INFORMATION ON THE FRONT PAGE. BE SURE TO VERIFY ALL NAMES AND ADDRESSES FOR CORRECT SPELLING.

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Question Guide

Opening Question

Q1. Think about previous vacations you have taken. What is memorable about these vacations? If you'd like, write down some notes about what is so memorable about these vacations on the cards in front of you. You define what "vacation" and "memorable" means. We will take a few minutes for you to think about this. (Wait a few minutes—3 to 5). Ok, please give us your name and share one of your most memorable vacation experiences.....

Vacation questions

Q2. Thank you for sharing. We are interested in your vacations: but first, in your mind, what makes a 'trip' a 'vacation'...? (probe if necessary)

- a. Is it the purpose of trip...?
- b. Group you are travelling with...?
- c. Distance or time you spend away from home...?
- d. Do you consider visiting family a vacation....why or why not?

Q3. For tracking purposes, people who work in tourism think of a vacation as a trip for pleasure at a place 50 miles or more from your home or a place you stayed overnight. Do you go on as many vacations as you'd like.....? Why or why not?

- a. For those of you who have vacationed in MN, what makes it easy to vacation in Minnesota?
- b. For those of you who have not vacationed in MN, where do you go? Why that destination?

Why don't you vacation in MN?

(probe) Would could make it better to vacation in Minnesota

(probe) Are there concerns or problems that come to mind when you think about vacationing in Minnesota? How could these problems be overcome?

Q4: There are a lot of places you can go on vacation. How do you decide where to go on vacation...(reminder: trip for pleasure 50 or more miles from home or overnight stay)?

- a. Who initiates the discussion....?
- b. Who decides when and where to go...?
- c. What information tools or sources do you use to make decisions about vacations?
- d. How much lead time do you allow for researching/booking the vacation?

Ending Question

Q5. Are there destinations you would recommend to other Hmong for vacation: where are they and why would you recommend them?

Thank you for sharing your thoughts and ideas!



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