

Multi-Destination Trip Patterns

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In a 1993 article in *Annals*, Leu, Crompton and Fesenmaier (LCF) presented a model of multi-destination pleasure trips. In the article, they questioned the practice of modeling pleasure trips as single destination trips, and put forward conceptual arguments suggesting that most trips “are not simple origin–destination trips” (1993:291) but instead involve visiting multiple destinations. LCF put forth their conceptual model as a tool for classifying trips for descriptive, modeling, and marketing purposes, but offered no empirical data to illustrate the model’s use and applicability. The purpose of this research note is take that next step in model development. It applies the LCF conceptualization of trip patterns to data collected via trip diaries distributed to Branson (Missouri, USA) visitors.

One objective of the study was to assess the potential interest among Branson visitors in stopping at nearby Mark Twain National Forest (MTNF) during their vacation. If single destination trips are the norm for Branson visitors, there is little hope of attracting them to MTNF or to other attractions in the region. If travelers are combining visits to Branson with visits to other destinations, as the LCF model suggests they may, more regional tourism development is possible. LCF list five motives travelers may have for visiting more than one destination per trip: to satisfy the heterogeneity of preferences present in their travel party; to visit family and friends; to find variety; to reduce the risk of being dissatisfied with the vacation; and to increase travel efficiency by visiting many destinations that interest them during one trip (1993:291–292). Branson is focused almost exclusively around music entertainment and commercial attractions, and most Branson visitors are middle-aged or older, low to middle income, and traveling with their spouse or other family members, so all five motives are plausible in this context.

Branson attracted 6 million visitors in 1994, most of whom traveled by automobile. During selected weeks in the spring and fall of 1994, postcard surveys were included with a random sample of about 16% of Branson information packets ($n = 7,000$). Respondents ($n = 1,049$) indicated whether they were willing to participate further in the study, reported the date they would travel, and provided their address. Willing participants traveling within the study’s time frame ($n = 636$) were sent a pre-trip survey, a trip diary, and a small gift; then a thank you/reminder postcard 1 week later. The pre-trip survey response rate was 62% ($n = 394$) and the diary response rate, 46% ($n = 246$).

The trip diaries provide an overview of a Branson vacation, including visits to surrounding attractions and other destinations. An open-ended question on the diary cued respondents to describe their travel to Branson, including any stops along the way. Of the 246 diarists, 205 answered this question. Twelve respondents who flew to Springfield, near Branson, were excluded from further analysis as air travel does not allow the same level of spontaneity and flexibility in travel route or destination choice. The written trip descriptions in the remaining 193 diaries were used to classify trip patterns based on the nature and duration of stops made before arriving in Branson, the number of places the traveler stayed overnight, and the distance between destinations. The authors’ initial independent ratings agreed in 75% of the cases, and all differences were resolved through discussion.

The LCF trip pattern definitions (1993:294–295) and number of cases so classified are as follows: (a) *Single Destination*—traveler stops only for gas, meals, and rest; Branson is the only attraction and the only destination ($n = 58$). (b) *En-route*—traveler stops briefly along the way to visit shops, roadside attractions, friends and relatives; Branson is the only destination, but other attractions close to the route may be visited ($n = 56$). (c) *Base Camp*—traveler goes directly to Branson but once there, makes day trips to other attractions nearby, returning to Branson each night ($n = 25$). (d) *Regional Tour*—traveler drives to the region (defined as Missouri and contiguous states), visits Branson and other destinations, staying overnight in Branson and other places; Branson is one of many destinations in the region ($n = 39$). (e) *Trip Chaining*—traveler is on an extended tour and visits several different regions in North America as part of the same trip; Branson is one of many destinations and Missouri is one of many states or provinces visited ($n = 15$) (Figure 1). The only difference between the LCF model and this operationalization of it is that the original model does not distinguish between (d) regional tours and (e) trip chaining. These two types of trips as described in Branson diaries were clearly different, and for purposes of modeling and marketing their implications were quite different, so they were separated here.

Seventy percent of respondents stopped by other attractions during their Branson trip, and 28% made overnight visits to other destinations, confirming the significance and prevalence of multi-destination travel. Analysis of variance shows that average trip mileage varies significantly across the five trip patterns ($F = 25.6, p = 0.001$). Base trips were shortest ($\bar{X} = 553$ miles), and en-route ($\bar{X} = 608$ miles) and single destination trips ($\bar{X} = 601$ miles) were slightly longer. Average distance jumps to 676 miles for regional tours, and trip chaining is associated with the longest trips, on average 2,177 miles.

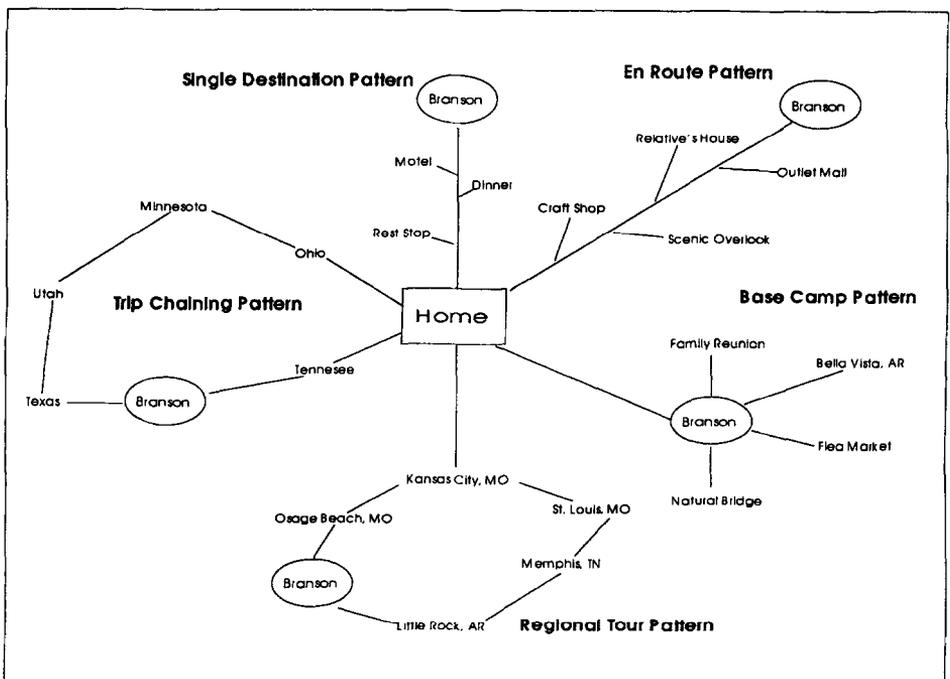


Figure 1. Branson Trip Patterns

Grouping trip origins into five broad regions of the United States showed origins were significantly related to trip patterns, ($\chi^2 = 45$, $df = 16$, $p = 0.0$). East and West Coast visitors (i.e., those from more distant regions) were more likely to choose regional tours or trip chaining patterns, while those from Central and Plains states (closer regions) more often made single or en-route trips. Finally, trip patterns seem to be seasonal, with regional tour patterns much more prevalent during spring and summer months (May–August); single, base camp, and chaining patterns more common in the fall (September–November) ($\chi^2 = 6.9$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.1$); and en-route trips equally likely during summer or fall. These patterns may reflect the destination's seasonal attractions or price variations, the timing of promotional efforts, the travelers' leisure time patterns, or other factors.

There are many potential attractions and destinations around Branson. The tourism development choice which Branson and the larger region face is whether to market these attractions collectively or individually. Results of this study indicate that a large segment of Branson visitors are already likely to stop at other attractions in the region. With cooperation between Branson and other attractions in the region such as MTNF, the pre-trip information most study participants relied on for planning their trip would be more comprehensive and might expand the markets of newer or less-known places. Without direct cooperation, the travel corridors leading to and from Branson offer a prime locale for smaller attractions to reach the huge Branson market through signage or brochures.

The trip pattern conceptualization put forth in LCF was a useful method for classifying, analyzing, and describing the travel patterns of Branson visitors and should be useful in other settings as well. Much of the literature on destination choice implicitly assumes single destination trips are the norm, which simplifies predictive modeling. This study and others (Murphy and Keller 1990; O'Kelly 1982) illustrate the untenability of the single destination assumption. With the growing diversity of approaches to tourism behavior, it is time to revisit destination choice research to see if new paradigms, methods, and models can illuminate the decisionmaking process that underlies destination choice. For example, multi-destination trips represent the choice of a cluster of destinations. On what basis does the traveler compose that cluster? Are transportation and access the only considerations, or are travelers mentally grouping destinations based on some perceived similarity (all historic sites) or difference (seeking variety) in destination images? Do the discontinuities of mental maps, such as state boundaries (Dwyer, Gobster and Schroeder 1992), affect destination clustering? Do multi-destination trips arise from planning or from impulse? What role does information play in the choice and composition of a trip pattern? These and other questions about multi-destinations trips are ripe for study. □ □

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Rethinking Carrying Capacity

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To every complex problem, there is a simple solution. And it is wrong
(H. L. Mencken).

The cause of most problems is solutions (Severeid's Rule).

In discussions of sustainable development, tourism has been suggested as a tool for achieving economic development while protecting the natural environment. However, tourism, like any economic activity, can lead to undesirable environmental and socioeconomic impacts. The concept of sustainable tourism involves recognition of negative impacts and the need to manage them if sustainability is to be achieved. Carrying capacity often has been cited as a framework within which such issues can be considered (Hunter and Green 1995; Inskeep 1991; McIntyre 1993; O'Reilly 1986; Williams and Gill 1994; WTO/UNEP 1992). Unfortunately, though carrying capacity is an intuitively appealing concept, it simply is not adequate to address the complexity found in tourism situations.

Tourism carrying capacity issues mirror those found in the outdoor recreation field, and the experience gained in this field holds lessons for tourism management; this is one of many areas in which cross-fertilization between the artificially-separated tourism and recreation fields is beneficial. Similar to the interest in carrying capacity by tourism managers, researchers, and policymakers, many in the outdoor recreation field saw the concept as an answer to complex and contentious questions regarding management of recreation use. However, over the last 20 years there has been growing disenchantment with the carrying capacity concept, despite its intuitive appeal (Manning 1986; Stankey and McCool 1984). In this research note, three crucial limitations of traditional carrying capacity are presented in brief, followed by a description of the requirements that must be met for it to be a useful framework. Alternative frameworks, with more realistic requirements, are then presented.

The first limitation is that carrying capacity definitions often provide little guidance for practical implementation. Carrying capacity exists only in relation to an evaluative criterion that reflects an objective or a desired condition. If the criterion is imprecise or unworkable, it will not be possible