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# WHAT MOTIVATES STUDENTS TO STUDY ABROAD? A COMPARISON OF AUSTRALIA AND SCOTLAND'S ACADEMIC TOURISM SECTOR

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## ABSTRACT

*This research explores the field of academic tourism, whereby international students study abroad for a period of time. It uses a comparative case study research with primary data being collected at Bond University, Australia, and likened with previous research completed in Aberdeen, Scotland.*

*The main issues include what are the main motivations for university students to conduct a study abroad overseas, are there similarities and/or differences between findings of students attending different universities in different parts of the world (Australia and Scotland) and if their main motivational influences are common.*

*The study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in a survey instrument. Results showed that the main motivational factors that influenced the students included the drive to have a unique experience, escape from daily life, the natural environment and scenery, recreational activities and self-discovery. The largest constraint discovered that negatively influenced a student's exchange was financial restrictions.*

**Keywords:** *Students, Tourism, Study, Australia, Scotland*

## 1.0 Introduction

It is estimated that up to 20% of all international travellers are students and as a consequence they contribute significantly to the economy of a destination (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008). The purpose of this paper is

to conduct an exploratory research study on international students' motivation to complete a portion of their studies abroad. This research was conducted at Bond University, Gold Coast in Australia and will be based as a comparative study with a similar research undertaking at Robert Gordon University, in Aberdeen, Scotland.

Comparison of the results from both studies allows for identification of the similarities and differences between the two destinations.

The research sets out to achieve three main objectives.

- What motivates international students to study abroad in Australia? This will be achieved by determining the push and pull factors (internal and external influences) that drive these students to travel for their academic studies. These factors can then be ranked in importance to determine which elements are more relevant in the decision process.
- In what way are the findings from both studies similar and/or different? What are (if any) the common motivational themes that are important to students'? This will involve comparing and contrasting the study findings from Sales (2015) research in Scotland and this study of Australia. Common motivational themes are identified.
- How can destinations improve their current offerings and what strategies around study abroad students can they use to attract more to their region? This will be achieved by analysing the data results and making recommendations for the local (Gold Coast) and state (Queensland) tourism councils of the region.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

Globalisation has meant that previous restrictions on travel and tourism associated with access are no longer barriers as people move between regions more easily. Along with this increase in tourism the phenomenon of academic tourism developed and in recent decades, there has been a significant growth in mobility of students across global destinations pursuing a foreign study experience (Rodríguez, Martínez-Roget, & Pawlowska, 2012).

However direct focus on this group is minimal in the literature with Rodríguez, Martínez-Roget & Pawlowska (2012) suggesting that in their case study of Galicia, Spain, absolutely no regard had been paid to academic tourism as an addition to their main tourism market in spite of the fact that hundreds of exchange students arrive annually. Potential economic benefits for the region can be huge but this would need supportive collaboration

between educational institutions and tourism councils to directly market the destination to this group (Glover, 2011).

The key to understanding tourist behaviour is to determine their motivation and the reasoning that are seen as important. These stem from push and pull factors driving the individual to make their decision. Push factors are intrinsic and internal needs that reflect the psychological wants of the individual (Crompton, 1979). Reasons such as escaping from daily pressures, perceived social status, socialisation/bonding and self-esteem were identified by Kim & Lee (2002) to be some of the basic push factors. Some research concludes that these internal push factors are more important than pull factors as the primary motivation for academic tourism is to study abroad and it is in fact this first decision that leads them to select the host country (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008).

Pull factors represent the opposite and refer to features of the destination that elicit a pull response or attraction. This is a drawing in of the individual by the external environment. These factors are described as coming from a 'supply side dimension' whereas push factors are more likely demand based (Kim & Lee, 2002). Kim & Lee (2002) identify examples of pull drivers as the destination's natural attractions, cultural resources and recreational activities among others. The two elements of push and pull act together to help form opinions and decisions on destinations.

Academic tourists can be clearly differentiated from the general tourist. Their drivers are unique to the group (Rodriguez, Martinez-Roget, & Pawlowska, 2012). Previous research undertaken in this area has led to identification of common motivational themes and reasoning that appear across multiple studies. However, whilst all study participants consider most motives, research that compares data results of international students from different countries, reflects variances on the importance placed upon these. Xu, Morgan & Song (2009) looked at students originally from China and the UK and found that the motivations and patterns of reasoning differed greatly due to cultural influences. UK students placed a higher value on having fun, doing activities with friends and escaping the boredom of daily life whereas Chinese students placed importance on seeing famous sights and gaining knowledge of the culture (Xu, Morgan, & Song, 2009).

Moving on this study will directly model it's method off and compare its results with Sales (2015), a dissertation submitted as partial completion of MSc International Tourism Management entitled *Academic Tourism: an investigation on exchange student's motivation to explore Scotland while*

*studying in Aberdeen.* This study was conducted at Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, Scotland.

The study sampled participants of two categories: European Union (EU) and Non European Union (NON-EU) students who came to Aberdeen, Scotland to complete a semester exchange. It was a qualitative undertaking using focus groups and based around motivational factors. Some general findings that emerged were that many looked upon their exchange as a great opportunity for travelling, not just for education. The NON-EU students who came from a greater distance and were more unfamiliar to the region reflected a greater willingness to cross borders and visit other European countries to take advantage of the proximity.

Sales (2015) was able to identify that the push factors identified were related to:

- The desire to create new social bonds, develop “cultural awareness”;
- The value of “Freedom” and the satisfaction from “Winning personal challenges”;
- The intrinsic value of a emotionally rewarding and pleasure-seeking experience;
- The excitement of “Discovering another planet” and the desire of “Living a life-long experience”.

The pull factors that emerged from the interviews focused on:

- The attraction of “iconic places” like castles, distilleries, and breath-taking urban and natural sceneries;
- The opportunities for “hiking and walking”;
- The charm of “History and heritage sites”;
- The opportunity to see “Famous places” which they only heard about from others;
- The appeal of “partying with friends”, enjoying pubs and the nightlife.

The study suggests that constraints on the tourism activities are a major element of an exchange student’s experience abroad. Not surprisingly the most important barrier was considered to be financial. The exchange rate was also mentioned as an issue. Transport was another barrier to their mobility and the lack of a personal vehicle proved to be an issue for the students wanting to travel outside and around the Aberdeen area. Other issues were loneliness and

homesickness. The language barrier was also mentioned as an issue that made some students feel further isolated. Finding suitable travel companions was also identified as difficult as they were away from their normal social group where different interests between potential travel companions sometimes meant dissatisfaction with trips taken.

### **3.0 Method**

The purpose of this study is to conduct an exploratory research into international students' motivation to study abroad in Australia and travel whilst there.

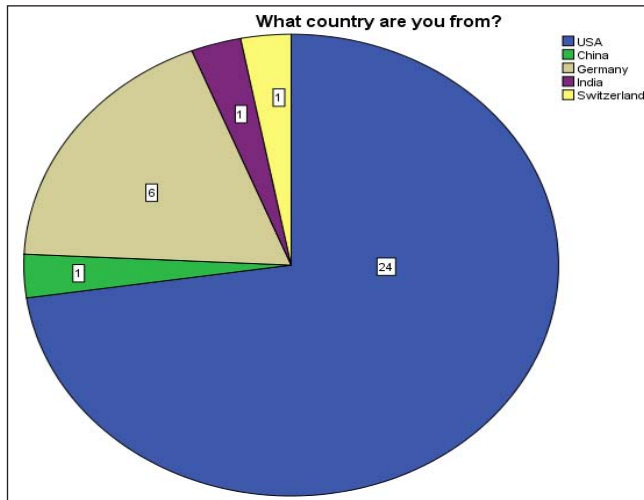
#### **3.1 Participants**

Data was collected from study abroad international students at Bond University, Gold Coast during the September semester of 2015. In this case, study abroad or 'exchange' students are defined as students originating from another university or college outside Australia, coming to study at Bond University for one semester only. This distinction was made between exchange students and other international students' as it was not practical or viable to include all international students who study their full degree at Bond University. This is due to the fact that over this longer period of time, these students' travel behaviour would adapt to those of other local residents and lose their tourist mannerisms and behaviour patterns (Glover, 2011).

Other than this requirement, no other restrictions were placed on potential participants hence responses were invited from all genders, ages and country of origins. The range of participants was selected primarily as the study is investigating international students' motivations to study abroad in Australia. Bond University was chosen due to its high intake of international study abroad students (39% of student population) and their active involvement in tourism activities (Australian Government, 2014).

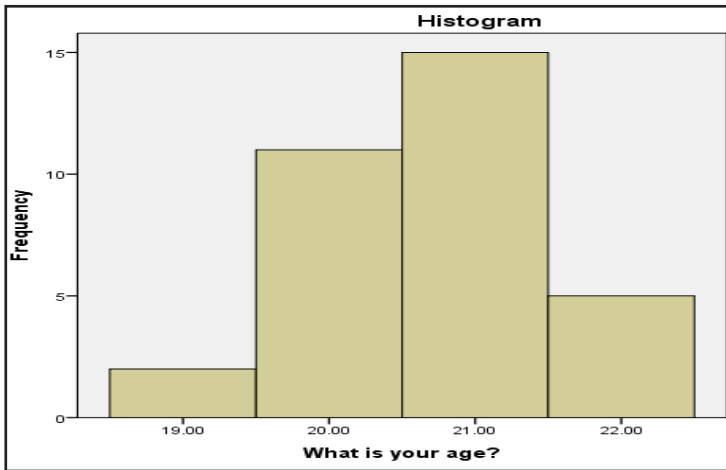
The specific demographics found in this sampling were a relatively balanced gender split, with 60.6% of students surveyed being females.

The majority of participants originated from universities or colleges of the United States, with 72.2% of the sampling. Other nationalities represented in the study also include German (18.2%), Chinese (3%), Indian (3%) and Swiss (3%). See Figure 1 below for breakdown of nationalities:



**Figure 1: What Country are you from**

The range of ages of student participants was between 19-22 years old with the median of 21. See Figure 2 below:



**Figure 2: What is Your Age**

### 3.2 Methodology

The Scottish study used a qualitative strategy and conducted focus groups with exchange students to collect data. Unfortunately that method wasn't

available for the study in Australia; instead a qualitative survey instrument, using both closed and open style questions was used. The questionnaire involved both qualitative and quantitative questions as is common in similar studies, (Sale, 2015) (Rodriguez, Martinez-Roget, & Pawlowska, 2012) (Glover, 2011) (Xu, Morgan, & Song, 2009) (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe, 2008). Using a quantitative approach allows the researcher to draw upon knowledge from literature reviews of the topics, define the most common themes and apply them to a new context (Silverman, 2013). In pursuing a quantitative approach, we were able to set out a set of factors and reasoning for participants to rate their importance. By using this method we are focusing more on patterns of why people do what they do, and not particularly what they actually do (Silverman, 2013). Collecting qualitative data on the other hand, allows some freedom to the participant and can inform us on important factors we may have missed or haven't appeared before in other studies. These open-ended questions allow the student to express their thoughts and views clearly and encourage a deeper participation with the research. The expression of ideas that would have otherwise remained hidden are valuable to furthering this sector of research (Sale, 2015).

**International Students Survey**

**Q1)** What destinations have you travelled to, or are planning on travelling to, whilst studying abroad in Australia (excluding the Gold Coast)? (Please print)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Q2)** Did you come on your study abroad with friends or alone?

Friends/knew people  
 Alone

**Q3)** Thinking back to your decision to study abroad, rate these factors on how much they influenced your desire to travel to Australia? (Check one per row)

	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
a) Weather/Climate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Natural Environment/scenery	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Mainmode tourist attractions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Escape from daily life/freedom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Socialisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) Experience a new culture/immersion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g) Unique experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h) Recreational activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i) Self Discovery	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j) Educational component	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q4)** Were there any other major motivators that played a role in your decision to study abroad? (Please print if applicable)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Q5)** Did you find it easy to obtain information about Australia and study abroad?

Yes  
 No

**Q6)** If yes, what sources did you obtain this information through? (Check all that apply)

Australian University Websites  
 Australia and Queensland Tourism Websites  
 Australian Government marketing materials  
 Representative who attended your university  
 N/A

**Q7)** Have any of these factors negatively influenced your experience or restricted you from doing something? (Check one per row)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a) Currency exchange rate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Transport (lock off)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Financial constraints	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Language barrier	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Unable to find people to travel with/different interests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) Lack of information on attractions or activities for students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g) Visa process/issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h) Loneliness/homesickness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i) Other:				

**Q8)** What is your gender? (Check one)

Male  
 Female

**Q9)** What is your age? (Please print) \_\_\_\_\_

**Q10)** What country are you from? (Please print) \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your participation!**

**Figure 3: Survey Instrument Used**

*Department of Hotel Management, BIT-Mesra, Ranchi-835215*

A ten-question survey instrument was developed (See Figure 3 below). The open-ended questions encouraged a greater interaction with the instrument to engage participants before proceeding to the key questions. The introductory question also served as a valuable insight on the students' experiences as tourists on the Gold Coast and Australia overall. Key questions were formulated to address the key objectives of the study, with ranking of both destination attributes and motivations to study abroad i.e. the pull and push factors. Specific questions were also focused on future recommendations and were about obtaining information on Australia as a potential study abroad destination and constraints or restrictions respondents felt hindered their experience in some way. Question types used include open-ended/free writing, 4-point Likert scales, 'check all that apply' and multiple choice. Basic demographic questions were also included to give some context to the data results and allow examination of any patterns or trends that may appear.

### ***3.3 Data Collection***

The data collection took place during November of 2015, over half way through Bond University's September semester (Week 9 of 14). The purpose of conducting the survey at this stage of the semester was to allow a reasonable amount of time for the study abroad students to undertake some tourism activities and also to be ready to reflect more accurately on the true reasons why they took an exchange in the first place.

The survey was piloted and then distributed over two days. The surveys were handed out directly to study abroad participants in two classes of a heavily internationally based subject at Bond University; this ensured a return rate of 100% of eligible students as opposed to encouragement towards an online survey. The completed responses were then collected and prepared for analysis using the statistics software program SPSS.

## **4.0 Results & Analysis**

### ***4.1 Introductory Question – Travel Behaviour Whilst Abroad***

Although these results came from a question simply meant to ease students into the survey, it still provided valuable information that will be useful for stakeholders. Participants were asked to list all the destinations they had travelled to or were planning on travelling to during their study abroad

in Australia. The responses are shown in the word cloud below, the larger the word the more frequent that destination appeared in respondents answers:



**Figure 4: Travel Behaviour Whilst Abroad**

The most frequently named locations included Sydney, Melbourne, Cairns, Byron Bay, New Zealand and Whitsunday Islands amongst others. It is evident that these study abroad students are travelling around Australia as well as taking advantage the proximity of nearby destinations like New Zealand. As the demographic results showed over 70% of participants are from the United States and other locations in the Northern Hemisphere, it seems that they use their study abroad to explore a range of places in the Southern Hemisphere.

Although the study was conducted at Bond University located in the state of Queensland, only 2 of the top 5 destinations are also situated in this state. This demonstrates the willingness and ability for international students to travel outside their specific exchange city and state.

#### ***4.2 Coming with Friends vs. Alone***

The question showed that most participants entered their study abroad experience with friends or knew of other people coming to Australia (63.6%) rather than coming alone (36.4%). This may have influenced the way they thought about and decided to take a study abroad to Australia. It also shows that ‘travelling with friends’ could be a motivator for these participants to come to Australia, this study shows that it is not very important as none of the students suggested this in the open ended motivation question.

### **4.3 Motivations to Study Abroad**

The motivational factors that students believed influenced their study abroad decision are identified in table 1 below.

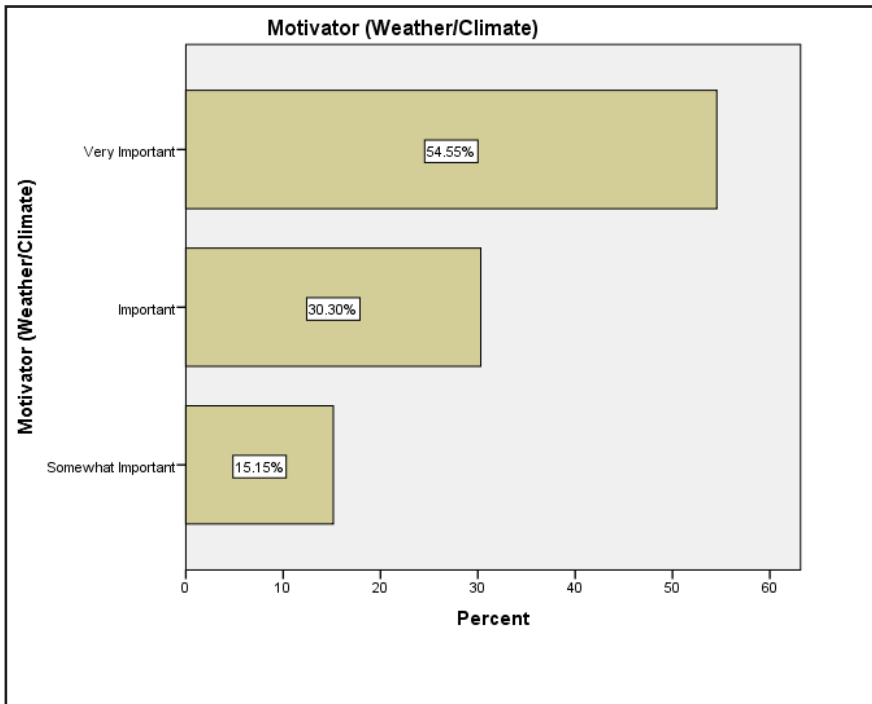
**Table 1: Motivations to Study Abroad**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Motivator (Unique experience)	33	3.7273
Motivator (Escape from daily life/freedom)	33	3.6970
Motivator (Natural Environment/scenery)	33	3.6061
Motivator (Recreational activities)	33	3.5152
Motivator (Self Discovery)	33	3.5152
Motivator (Weather/Climate)	33	3.3939
Motivator (Socialisation)	33	3.2424
Motivator (Experience a new culture/immersion)	33	3.1818
Motivator (Manmade Tourist attractions)	33	2.2424
Motivator (Educational component)	33	2.2424

In this study, participants deemed having a unique experience to be the greatest influence on their desire to travel to Australia with a very high mean of 3.7 out of 4. Ranking the lowest of the factors were manmade tourist attractions and the educational component of the exchange with a 2.2 mean. Overall, the top 5 most important motivations that drove students' to study abroad were to have a unique experience, escape from daily life/freedom, experience the natural environment/scenery, availability of recreational activities and self-discovery.

### **4.4 Motivational Influence of Weather/Climate (Figure 5)**

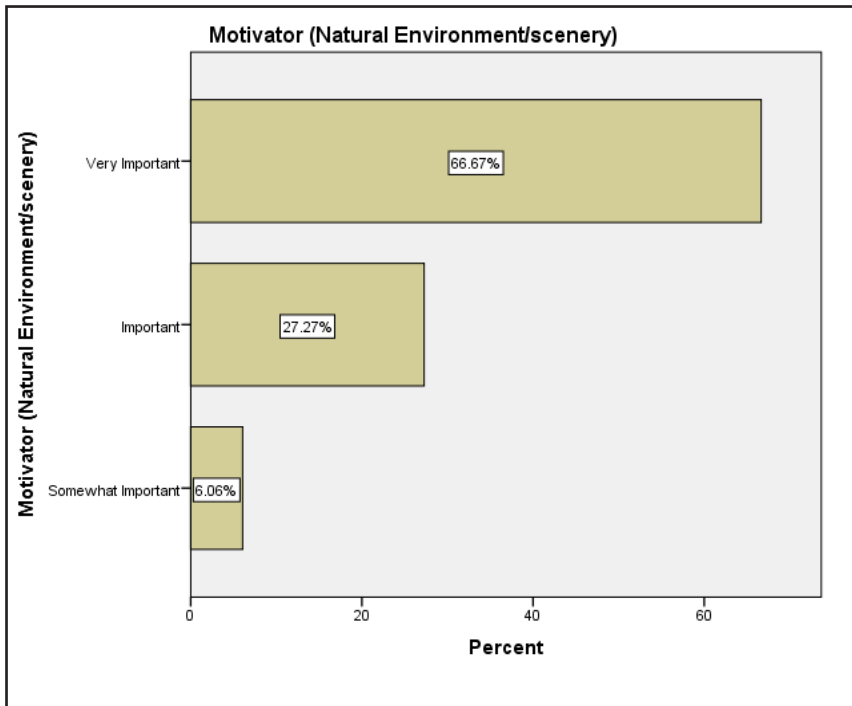
Weather and climate was shown to hold at least some importance to all participants. The majority of 54.5% identified Very Important as high and this was an expected outcome due to Australia being strongly marketed internationally for its mild climate and is a well-known attribute worldwide (see figure 5). This factor acts as a driver or a pull factor for the students as it is an external motivation. This result complements Sales' (2015) study as Scotland has quite opposite weather to Australia however the participants state it does not stop them from travelling.



**Figure 5: Motivational Influence of Weather/Climate**

#### ***4.5 Motivational Influence of Natural Environment/Scenery (Figure 6)***

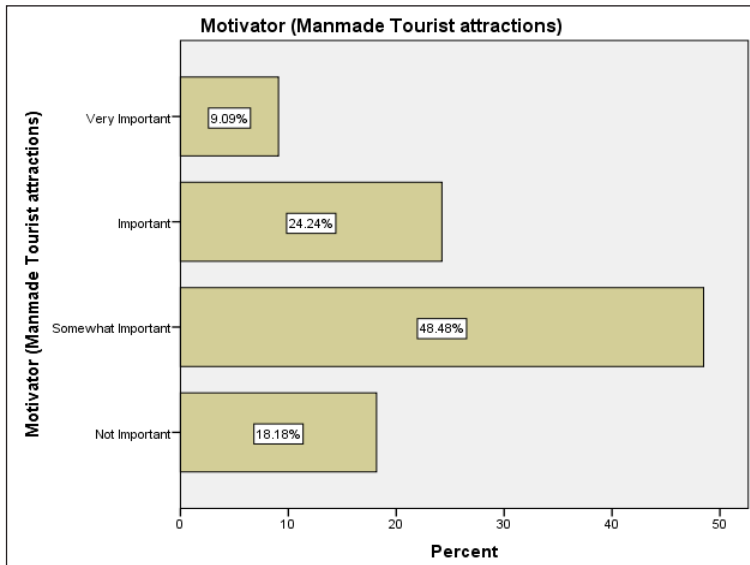
Also as expected the natural environment and scenery of Australia was a draw card in some way to 100% of the students with a lot of importance placed on it (Very important to 66.7%). This could be due to the unique landscape and flora and fauna Australia holds, which is a pull factor for study abroad students. Similarly the unique natural environment of Scotland made the data show 'hiking and walking' were a major activity done by students (Sales, 2015).



**Figure 6: Motivational Influence of Natural Environment/Scenery**

#### ***4.6 Motivational Influence of Manmade Tourist Attractions***

Visiting manmade tourist attractions wasn't rated very high by participants (which was a surprise) with the majority of 48.5% of responses only ranking it as somewhat important. Only 18.2% ranked it as not important at all in their decision to come to Australia. This is surprising given the iconic built Australian landmarks such as the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Opera House. This suggests that the respondents such are more drawn to the unique natural environment of Australia. Scotland differed here as reports showed an equal weighting between visiting manmade architecture and the natural scenery (Sales, 2015).



**Figure 7: Motivational Influence of Manmade Tourist Attractions**

#### ***4.7 Motivational Influence of Escape from Daily Life/Freedom***

This factor shows a great importance to student travellers with a large majority of 75.8% rating it ‘very important’. The push factor of escapism from boredom and the routine nature of the student’s home lives suggests that travel is very much about experiencing new activities and places so each day can be different. The independence that an international exchange brings is clearly a large motivation for students to undertake the study. Likewise, the freedom of independence and living alone is reflected as a great incentive for exchange travel by the Scottish study (Sales, 2015).

#### ***4.8 Motivational Influence of Socialisation***

Study exchanges aren’t necessarily done for the sole purpose of the educational component and this is reflected in these results. All responses showed a strong affinity for the social aspect of exchanges with the party atmosphere very important to their entire experience, a total of 81.8% rating socialization either important or very important. Likewise, social aspects had varying importance depending on the individual in Scotland, one participant remarking that partying was “fine to do but I can live without it” (Sales, 2015).

#### 4.9 Motivational Influence of Experiencing a New Culture/Immersion

It is interesting to note that all participants suggested a desire for culture immersion in their responses. Australia shares many similarities with the majority students' origin country, the United States. The lack of a language barriers and the general similar Western world lifestyle makes it intriguing to see the importance they place on this factor. A majority of 45% deem experiencing a new culture important.



**Figure 8: Motivational Influence of Experiencing a New Culture/Immersion**

#### 4.10 Motivational Influence of Unique Experience

The idea of having a unique experience was rated very high with respondents with 72.7% suggesting it was very important with. This factor relates to the overall experience, so participants are showing a desire to travel and encounter new unfamiliar experiences they couldn't get at home. . Sales (2015) identified this factor as the main push element in his research as well.

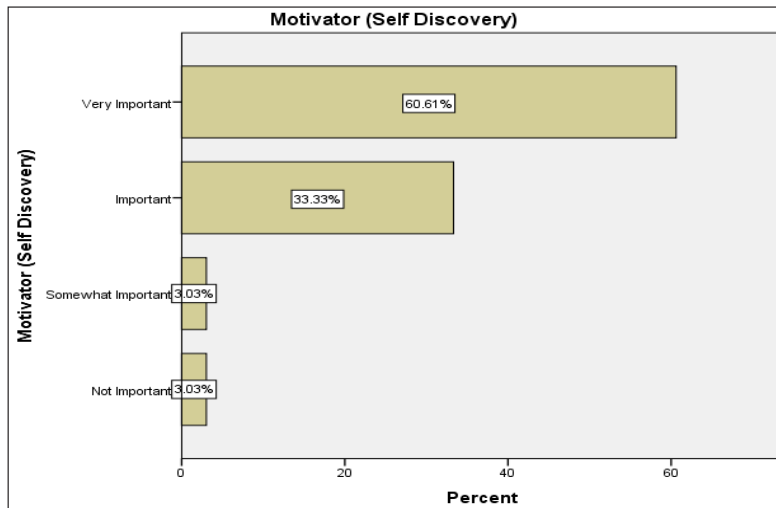
#### 4.11 Motivational Influence of Recreational Activities

The activities available in not just the close proximity of the Gold Coast and SE Queensland, but also Australia as a whole was rated quite high when students where looking at possible destinations to visit. 60.6% deemed

the availability of these activities as highly important in their destination selection. This shows that if a destination wants to encourage and entice more international students to study abroad, there must be availability or the creation of activities that directly appeal to them and what they want to get out of the destination. For example Australia, as some of the above charts show, natural environment and scenery is a desirable attribute so activities in these areas would be greatly utilized by study abroad students.

**4.12 Motivational Influence of Self Discovery**

The internalized push factor of taking yourself out of your usual environment and experiencing new places and experiences is a way to experience self discovery and this was a quite prevalent factor for students wishing to study in Australia. The strong results of a 60.61% majority rating ‘Very Important’ demonstrates that personal internal motivators are just as important as the pull motivations. This result could also be reflective of the participant’s cultural or social values where self-discovery and internal journeys are encouraged or valued. This value wasn’t specifically highlighted in Sales’ (2015) Scotland study so perhaps not as influencing on those student participants.

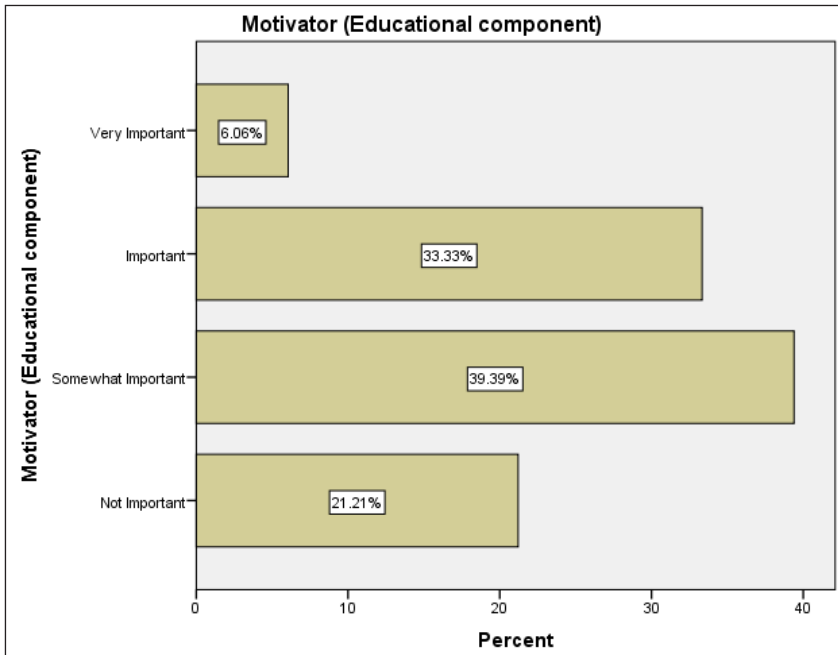


**Figure 9: Motivational Influence of Self Discovery**

**4.13 Motivational Influence of Educational Component**

Not surprising, the education aspect of a study abroad was actually relatively important to those students sampled (see figure 10 below). A total

of 39.4% of the students ranked the educational component of their exchange as either Very important or important. Although not as high, students still valued the learning and education they would receive whilst on exchange and looked to encourage opportunities to take something away from their experience. Furthermore, they also had the chance to suggest any factors they felt were personally important to them and their experience and these answers are displayed in table 2 below.



**Figure 10: Motivational Influence of Educational Component**

**Table 2: Motivational Theme**

“I want to experience different culture”
“Break from the academic rigor, live elsewhere for extended time”
“A break from school at home”
“Completing my minor”
“Curiosity”
“Getting away from family issues”
“Never left America”

“English Speaking”
“Desire for adventure”
“Going to the Great Barrier Reef”
“Friends have been to Aussie before and said it was beautiful and my friends over here”
“Easy semester”
“Travelling, friends telling only good things about Australia, getting away from home, language”
“Previous experiences from friends, working and travelling”
“Going somewhere by myself”
“Self discovery”
“A more relaxed, slower pace of everyday life”
“Needed a change”
“Lifestyle of country”
“Stand out to future schools and employers”
“Putting myself in an uncomfortable position”
“Love travelling, always wanted to move/live in Australia”

#### 4.14 Obtaining information on Australia

The overwhelming majority of participants (97%) responded that they found it easy to obtain information about their study abroad and Australia prior to arrival in their decision making process.

**Table 3: Did you find it Easy to Obtain Information about Australia and Study Abroad?**

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	32	97.0
	No	1	3.0
	Total	33	100.0

This is a positive result for stakeholders as it means Australia is projecting itself as an accessible country to visit and that information is widely available through the various distribution channels. Although almost all stated they found it easy to locate information on their Australian study abroad. Table 4 identifies these sources of information.

**Table 4: Sources of Information**

INDICATED THEY USED THIS SOURCE FOR INFORMATION	
Australian University Websites	72.7%
Australia and Queensland Tourism Websites	42.2%
Australian Government marketing materials	9.1%
Representative who attended your university	60.6%
N/A	9.1%

The most used channel was Australian University Websites with 72.7% usage, which in this case was primarily Bond University's official website. There was a low response to Australian Government marketing materials perhaps demonstrating a low political involvement or interest in this tourism market; perhaps the potential of this group of travellers is not understood.

#### ***4.15 Negative Influences and/or Restrictions on the Study Abroad Experience***

Overall, the ranking of negative factors affecting or restricting the study abroad experience were quite low, with the means of all factors between 1 and 2.6 reflecting the answers Strongly disagree, disagree and agree (See table below, ordered Highest to lowest mean).

In this study, participants reported that financial constraints had the largest negative influence on their experience with a high mean of 2.6 out of 4. Ranking the lowest of the factors was language barriers with a 1.2 mean. This was expected as Australia is an English speaking country and the majority of participants also originate from English Speaking countries. Overall, the top 5 most negative influencing factors of their exchange experience were financial constraints, lack of transport, currency exchange rates, the visa process and issues related to it, and finally the lack of information on attractions or activities for students.

**Table 5: Restrictions on the Study Abroad Experience**

	N	Mean
Negative influence/restriction (Financial constraints)	33	2.6061
Negative influence/restriction (Transport (lack of))	33	2.1515
Negative influence/restriction (Currency exchange rate)	33	1.5152
Negative influence/restriction (Visa process/issues)	33	1.5152

Negative influence/restriction (Lack of information on attractions or activities for students)	33	1.4545
Negative influence/restriction (Unable to find people to travel with/different interests)	33	1.4242
Negative influence/restriction (Loneliness/Homesickness)	33	1.3636
Negative influence/restriction (Language barrier)	33	1.2424
Valid N (listwise)	33	

#### ***4.16 Negative Influence or Restriction of Currency Exchange Rate***

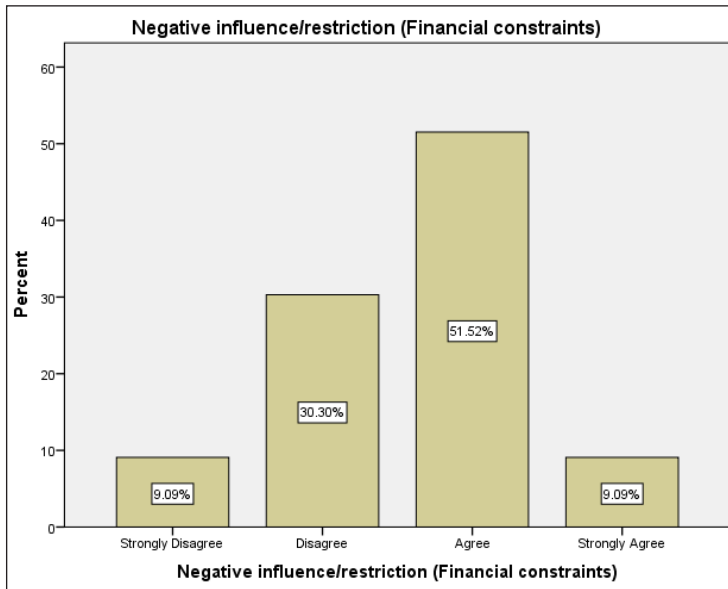
Overall, the exchange rate wasn't seen as having a lot of negative effects on the student experience with 54.5% strongly disagreeing that it had an impact. This result could be biased due to the fact that the Australian dollar is currently, as of December 2015, not strong in the market (against the US dollar) meaning it is advantageous for overseas tourists as they can get more value for their currency. In Sales' (2015) study, his results reflected the opposite as living and travelling in the UK could be twice as expensive as compared to their country of origin.

#### ***4.17 Negative Influence or Restriction of Transport (Lack of)***

It was interesting to see the responses to the lack of transport, which referred the majority of students not having a personal vehicle to use whilst abroad. The results showed a low majority of 39.4% suggesting it had a the negative effect, although almost the same number of respondents suggested it had no effect. In the Scottish study more of their respondents suggested that not having easy access to a personal vehicle like a car was restrictive and impacted their experience (Sales, 2015).

#### ***4.18 Negative Influence or Restriction of Financial Constraints***

Financial constraints were reported as the highest levels of negative influence on the students with 60.6% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. This shows that the student's limited budgets posed a restriction on what they can do or experience whilst abroad. This is especially true due to the expensive travel associated with flying to a destination such as Australia. The Scottish study also reported this as their main barrier and the most difficult one to overcome (Sales, 2015).



**Figure 11: Negative Influence or Restriction of Financial Constraints**

#### ***4.19 Negative Influence or Restriction of Language Barrier***

The results showed that language barriers didn't have a negative effect on the participants with 78.8% strongly disagreeing with the statement. This was expected, as Australia is an English speaking country and most participants also originated from an English speaking country. The case in Scotland however showcased the barriers of this as their exchange student demographic speak a wide range of languages and reflected feelings of isolation, especially in the first weeks of their exchange (Sales, 2015).

#### ***4.20 Negative Influence or Restriction of Being Unable to Find People to Travel with/Different Interests***

Again it was interesting to see that most respondents (93.9%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement of being unable to find people to travel with whilst completing their study abroad. When compared to the fact that 36.4% travelled alone to Australia it shows the collectivist nature amongst students and how it is easy to find travel partners amongst this group. Scotland, conversely, reflected the difficulties of finding suitable travel companions and the constraints of these partners having different interests

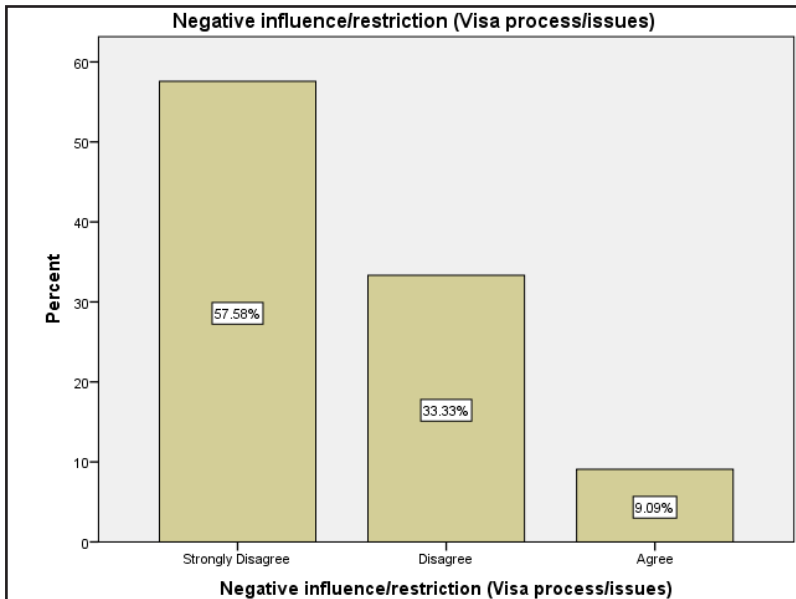
and hence, participants being disappointed at missing out on something they were interested in as their travel companion was not (Sales, 2015).

**4.21 Negative Influence or Restriction of Lack of Information on Attractions or Activities for Students**

60.6% of participants strongly disagreed that there was a lack of information on attractions or student activities. This is a positive and in this aspect, tourism bodies seem to be meeting the demand and wants for particular activities which appeal to the academic tourist market.

**4.22 Negative Influence or Restriction of Visa Process/Issues**

The difficulties associated with the exchange student visa was not a hindrance as only 9% of those surveyed experienced some kind of issue with this process. This is a positive outcome for the destination of Australia as it encourages more international students to come, as the process is not too arduous.



**Figure 12: Negative Influence or Restriction of Visa Process/Issues**

#### ***4.23 Negative Influence or Restriction of Loneliness/Homesickness***

In terms of loneliness, only 9% of the respondents suggested it had some negative impact and 72.7% disagreed with the statement. This could be due to the time the study was conducted during the semester, as most students may feel more homesick during the first week or two so if the research has been conducted earlier, the results may have reflected a difference. The Scottish study reflected this as their respondents commented upon their homesickness in the beginning of their exchange and it made them have negative feelings about the experience (Sales, 2015).

Using an open-ended questions there was also an opportunity to identify any factors that weren't covered in the list. The main factors mentioned by respondents were the negative impact of illness whilst studying abroad and the restriction of the short timeline associated with their exchange.

### **5.0 Conclusion**

This study drew from previous research and literature about tourist motivation and applied it to the sector of academic tourism in the context of Gold Coast, Australia. The aim of the research was to identify key motivators that were a direct influence on the exchange students' decision to commence a study abroad in a certain destination, this being Gold Coast, Australia specifically.

The primary motivators that emerged from the surveys were to have a unique experience, escape from daily life, the natural environment and scenery, recreational activities and self-discovery. The data also found a major constraint to an exchange experience was financial restrictions on the students, which ultimately had a negative impact on their entire study abroad experience.

In order to further take advantage of this growing tourism segment, tourism bodies and other stakeholders need to analyse the needs and wants of academic tourists and formulate their strategies to meet them. This growing tourism market has extreme potential for all destinations worldwide to capitalise on, so real endeavours to understand the sector need to be completed. Some suggestions are included below:

- Improve upon collaboration between local or state tourism bodies and national universities to spread information and develop activities and products that fit the needs of the students.
- Provide more available sources of information specifically for study abroad students in the form of websites, blogs, brochures and travelling university representatives.
- More marketing and involvement by government bodies on a national scale to directly create promotional material for academic tourists that is distributed to countries globally.
- Use data for more effective marketing initiatives at all levels by developing new niche products and packaging initiatives for this sector. These products and activities need to be at a reasonable price for student budgets.
- Create more connections with universities worldwide, to create direct and convenient channels to receive students'. This establishes global links for Australia that will carry on in to the future.
- Local councils and tourism groups to continue building a positive image of the destination that appeal to the students.
- Conduct more extensive research into the field of study abroad sector.

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