

Understanding the decision-making process of European international students to study abroad in Australia and their ensuing travel behaviour during their stay in Australia

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Overall, it is well documented that international students are a growing market for the educational and tourism industries in any country where they plan to study. The benefits of educating international students and the fact that these students are a vital component of the tourism industry are now well recognised in Australia. However, the politicians, policy-makers and education and tourism providers in Australia could benefit from gaining a better understanding of what motivates students to undertake educational study in Australia (Llewellyn-Smith & McCabe 2008). To attract a wider variety of international students, education and tourism providers require a comprehensive understanding of the different expectations, needs and views of prospective educational tourists from not only the Asian international student market, but from the European market as well. An understanding of students' formative education and travel experiences and their travel demands while studying in Australia is likely to give some indications of the kind of marketing offers that would successfully attract them or their friends in the future (Morgan & Xu 2009). Additionally, an insight into their favourite travel experiences while studying in Australia can be not only a useful indicator of emerging travel trends, but also an indicator of what motivates and attracts potential students beyond the immediately perceived educational benefits.

This paper is based on a doctoral study that aims to explore the correlation between international education and tourism from the differing perspectives of European students who are undertaking educational travel within Australia. A review of the literature provides a general background of the international higher education market from the global and the Australian perspective. It also identifies the economic significance of international students to the education and tourism sector within Australia. In addition, initial findings extracted from interviews with 29 European international students before and after their study abroad program in Australia will be presented during the Doctoral Consortium.

Key Words: International education, International students in Australia, International students from Europe, Travel behaviour of international students