

LITERARY ENGLAND: A TOURISM DESTINATION FOR THE US TRAVELLER

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ABSTRACT

England is the birthplace of many of literature's well-known authors and their characters: be that Jane Austen and Elizabeth Bennet; Charles Dickens and *Oliver Twist*; or Beatrix Potter and *Peter Rabbit*. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the UK has been constructed as a prime literary destination for international tourists (Iwashita, 2006).

Agarwal and Shaw (2018) present literary tourism as a form of travel for the purpose of visiting sites associated with an author's writing and/or real-life. Within literary tourism research, focus has thus been given to the importance of place. Lee (2012) highlights the demand for visiting fantasy and fictional sites (i.e. Harry Potter's United (Magical) Kingdom), while van Es and Reijnders (2016) examine tourists' activities within cities (i.e. Sherlock Holmes' crime-detective tours). Elsewhere, spotlighting the tourists themselves, research has attended to literary "fans" (Herbert, 2001: 326); with studies foregrounding the demographics, motivations and experiences of what MacLeod *et. al.* (2018) label as the 'touring reader'. However, less attention has been paid to literary tourism through the lens of the non-bibliophile. The question remains as to whether the typical tourist would actively seek out, be interested in, or even aware of, English literary sites and attractions. This has important implications for the tourism industry in terms of how the literary tourism product specifically – and England as a destination more broadly – is presented to the average international traveller.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the likelihood of US tourists visiting England to engage in literary tourism. The paper employs an inductive between-subjects experimental design and compares findings from two surveys: one targeting a General Sample (GS) of the US outbound market (GS, n=2033), and the other targeting a Literary Society Sample (LSS) based in the US (LSS, n=220). The above data is supplemented with interviews undertaken with key stakeholders in the US outbound market, mostly tour operators (n=8).

Analyses from the first set of comparisons focused on whether likelihood to visit England would be affected by the experiment's manipulation variable, which heightened awareness of possible literary tourism destinations in the UK. Results from the paired sample t-tests which examined likelihood to visit, both before and after the survey, indicate that the LSS was unaffected by the manipulation [$t(219)=1.525$, $p=.129$, ($p>.05$)]. This suggests that literary society members possess significantly greater prior knowledge of English literary tourism destinations than the general US tourist, who were found to have been significantly influenced by the manipulation [$t(2032)=25.815$, $p=.000$, ($p<.01$)]. Further

unpaired t-test comparisons demonstrated that likelihood to visit a specific literary tourism destination (e.g. Brontë sisters' birthplace) was higher for the LSS compared to the GS, even when they had little knowledge of an associated book or film [$t(2251)=7.1759$, $p=.000$, $p<0.01$]. This highlights that the general US tourist's potential visit to a literary tourism attraction was more dependent on them having read/watched the associated book/film. The final round of analyses examined the preference of each sample to travel independently or with an organised tour. Results showed that both samples had an identical preference for independent travel instead of guided tours should they engage in English literary tourism in the future, with insignificant differences between the two samples [$t(2251)=0.2844$, $p>0.05$, $p=.776$]. This was supported by interview data, which highlighted that independent travel is becoming increasingly popular with American tourists.

This research contributes to a broader understanding of the US outbound market in relation to literary tourism. The experimental design allowed a closer comparison between US members and non-members of a literary society, in an attempt to understand what drives literary tourism amongst bibliophiles and non-bibliophiles. Overall, the findings suggest that literary society members will likely visit literary attractions regardless of knowledge or a tour-guide; and that non-members – when aware and/or made aware – will not only visit, but will also visit independently. This latter point highlights the importance of improved marketing efforts to better emphasise the literary attractions available in England, in order to best capitalise on the opportunities within the US outbound tourism market.

Keywords: Literary tourism, international tourism, experiment, destination, marketing

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