

Memorable Experience of Couples' Trips

Experiências memoráveis de viagens de casais

Experiencias Memorables de Viajes de Parejas

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Abstract: The tourism experience is a term which is associated with multiple interpretations that permeate the environment, people and other components of the activity. The objective of this article is to identify the essence of memorable leisure trips of couples, considering that the trip of couples is still little studied. "Couples" is understood as a broad term, consisting of individuals who have a romantic and/ or sexual relationship, such as lovers, legally married persons (spouses), GLBT public, and individuals of different ages and lifestyles. The work method is qualitative and exploratory, composed of three different and complementary studies. The first study included stories of two couples during their travel experience. The second study is composed of narratives of couple trips described by one of the parts of the pair, with semi structured script. The third study covered in-depth interviews with couples who were older than 18 years and traveled for leisure at least once in the 12 months prior to the date of data collection. The data analysis was done through content analysis, through thematic categorization of the text. The results show that the couple trip provides the creation of memorable events, in which the stories and situations lived can be shared later between the couple and their acquaintances. In addition to routine escape, fun and relaxation, commemorative dates and passions in common are also motivating for the couple's travels. Thus, tourism destination organizations should identify common interest of the couple to better serve them. The contributions of the study refer to the group experience approach rather than the individual perspective.

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Keywords: Memorable Tourism Experience. Couple trips. Interpersonal Relationships.

Resumo: A experiência turística é um termo que se associa a múltiplas interpretações que permeiam o ambiente, as pessoas e outros componentes da atividade. O objetivo deste artigo é identificar a essência de viagens memoráveis de casais a lazer, tendo em vista que a viagem a dois ainda é pouco estudada. Entende-se "casais" como um termo amplo, formado por indivíduos que possuem relação sentimental e/ou sexual, como casais de namorados, pessoas legalmente casadas (cônjuges), público GLBT e indivíduos de diferentes idades e estilos de vida. O método do trabalho é qualitativo e exploratório, sendo composto por três estudos distintos e complementares. O primeiro estudo envolveu relatos de dois casais durante a experiência de viagem dos mesmos. O segundo estudo é composto por narrativas de viagem a dois por uma das partes do casal, com roteiro semiestruturado. O terceiro estudo abarcou entrevistas em profundidade com casais que possuíam acima de 18 anos e viajaram a lazer pelo menos uma vez nos 12 meses anteriores à data da coleta de dados. A análise dos dados se deu via análise de conteúdo do texto, por meio da categorização temática. Os resultados demonstram que a viagem a dois proporciona a criação de eventos memoráveis, em que histórias e situações vividas podem ser compartilhadas posteriormente entre o casal e seus conhecidos. Além da fuga da rotina, diversão e relaxamento, as datas comemorativas e as paixões em comum também são motivadores para viagens do casal. Assim, organizações de destino turístico devem identificar interesse em comum do casal para melhor atendê-los. As contribuições do estudo remetem à abordagem da experiência em grupo ao invés da perspectiva individual.

Palavras-chave: Experiências Turísticas Memoráveis. Viagens de casais. Relacionamentos interpessoais.

Resumen: La experiencia turística es un término que se asocia a múltiples interpretaciones que permean el ambiente, las personas y otros componentes de la actividad. El objetivo de este artículo es comprender las particularidades de viajes memorables de parejas, teniendo en cuenta que el viaje a dos todavía es poco estudiado. Se entiende "parejas" como un término amplio, formado por individuos que poseen relación sentimental y / o sexual, como parejas de novios, personas legalmente casadas (cónyuges), público GLBT y individuos de diferentes edades y estilos de vida. El método del trabajo es cualitativo y exploratorio, compuesto por tres estudios distintos y complementarios. El primer estudio incluyó relatos de dos parejas durante la experiencia de viaje de los mismos. El segundo estudio es compuesto por narrativas de viaje a dos por una de las partes de la pareja, con guión semiestructurado. El tercer estudio abarcó entrevistas en profundidad con parejas mayores de 18 años y que viajaron por ocio al menos una vez en los 12 meses anteriores a la fecha de la recolección de datos. El análisis de los datos se dio a través del análisis de contenido del texto, por medio de la categorización temática. Los resultados demuestran que el viaje a dos proporciona la creación de eventos memorables, en que las historias y situaciones vividas pueden ser compartidas posteriormente entre la pareja y sus conocidos. Además de la fuga de la rutina, la diversión y la relajación, las fechas conmemorativas y las pasiones en común también son motivadores para los viajes de la pareja. Así, organizaciones de destino turístico deben identificar interés en común de la pareja para mejor atenderlos. Las contribuciones del estudio se refieren al enfoque de la experiencia en grupo en lugar de la perspectiva individual.

Palabras clave: Experiencias Turísticas memorables. Viajes de parejas. Relaciones interpersonales.

1 INTRODUCTION

Some studies indicate that marketing literature emphasizes the need to study consumers from a group, rather than individual, perspective (Lawson, 2010). Group experience approach, specifically, tourism experience of couples is the focus of this research.

The social justification of this study encompasses a broad perception of the concept of couple. According to the Aurélio Dictionary (s.d.), a couple can be defined as: "1. Pair formed by male and female. 2. Pair formed by spouses. 3. Set of two people who have a romantic and/or sexual relationship. (...)". Given the third definition, this article

appropriates the term couples in their most varied forms, including, dating couples, legally married people (spouses), LGBT members, and individuals of different ages and lifestyles. The purpose is to understand couples' travel experiences in an inclusive approach.

Concerning the travel habits of Brazilians, 21.6% travel with spouse, second only to family trips, i.e., spouses and children, which total 29.1% (Brasil, 2009). Despite the relevance of studying the peculiarities of couple travel, research on travel experiences of this specific market segment remains scarce in Brazil (Gama & Siqueira, 2010). According to Lawson (2010), few articles in the *Journal of Consumer Research* mention as subject of study a specific demographic group, with most studies focusing on an age group, and among these more on children and adolescents than on elderly people. Thus, there is a gap in the literature on groups of individuals, rather than research on individual perspectives. Among the groups of individuals that can be studied in the context of tourism are the elderly, couples, and people that are at different stages of the family life cycle.

In this context, the guiding question of this research is: What is the essence of the experience of Brazilian couples traveling for pleasure? The purpose is to identify the essence of memorable leisure trips for couples. Among the contributions of this study there are the themes and categories that involve traveling as a couple, as presented in the theoretical framework. In addition, this study is innovative because it examines the travel experience of couples. In other words, by considering the couple's experience together,

the study distinguishes itself from the individual perspective which is prevalent in research on the subject.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Memorable Tourism Experiences

The tourism experience is a socially constructed term and is open to multiple interpretations that permeate the natural and social environment, and other components of the activity (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). The memorable experience also creates an emotional bond with the place visited (Song et al., 2014).

However, not every tourist experience generates memorable memories. A memorable experience concerns the feeling of being present in a place, feeling, experiencing, and absorbing the moment. What makes an experience memorable is, above all, sharing it with people or creating bonds, which reinforces the role of emotions as the focal point of memorable experiences (Knobloch, Robertson, & Aitken, 2014).

Some authors show the impact of interpersonal relationship on memorability, as well as on experience outputs. According to Cohen (1979), tourism experience is the relationship between people and their worldview, depending on the society to which the individual belongs. Therefore, the personal component is central to the delivery of experiences (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013). Schmitt (2000) considers the observation or contact with other individuals a source of experience. In line with Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009), the engagement between people generally acts as a mediator of

the tourist experience, allowing the interpretation, sharing, and resignification of travel moments. Face-to-face interactions provoke strong feelings, thus highlighting the relationship between feelings and personal encounters (Schmitt, 2000). In addition, visitors who interact with local culture build a unique and memorable travel experience (Kim & Ritchie, 2014).

Considering that the main purpose of tourism is to deliver experiences, tourism service providers need to provide consumers with positive functional and emotional experiences (Song, Lee, Park, Hwang, & Reisinger, 2014; Knobloch et al., 2014). This is especially so because travel experiences memories motivate tourists to revisit the place and recommend it (Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

In this sense, several studies relate the multiple dimensions of tourism experience to consumer satisfaction. Oh, Fiore and Jeoung (2007) and Song et al. (2014) used Pine and Gilmore's (1999) four dimensions of experience model - 4Es (Education, Escapism, Esthetics, Entertainment) - as a starting point for studying the satisfaction of tourists with experiences in bed and breakfast (B&B) establishments and in temples, respectively. Oh et al. (2007) found that the aesthetic dimension is the main factor in determining customer satisfaction while entertainment and escapism were not significant, contrary to the findings by Song et al. (2014). In the study by Song et al. (2014), escapism, entertainment, and education affect functional value, and escapism, entertainment, and aesthetics affect emotional value in determining visitor satisfaction.

The results of these studies show that Pine and Gilmore's four levels of experience (1999) need to be adapted by the company or tourist destination according to the service and/or activity to be offered. This leads to the need of providing tourists with a memorable experience that will satisfy them and, consequently, influencing the intention to revisit and recommendation (Oh et al., 2007, Song et al., 2014; Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

It is noticed in the literature that a memorable experience should provide consumers with the development of interpersonal relationships, and aesthetic, environmental, as well as cultural dimensions. However, it is necessary to emphasize the unlikelihood of two people experiencing the same experience or emotions; even if they participate in the same activities or enjoy the same services (Tung & Ritchie, 2011, Knobloch et al., 2014). Thus, we intend to deepen the understanding of interpersonal relationships as a creator of outstanding memories of travel experiences.

2.2 Interpersonal Relationships

By reflecting on the human resources for tourism organizations and for quality tourism experiences, Beni (2004) considers that the key to the experience lies in this interactive process, in which residents, visitors, and tourists decode the natural and cultural distinctive heritage. "It is necessary, through research and interpretation of the tourist differential, to stimulate the attention, the 'look', the feeling, the emotion, the sensations and the perceptions so that the tourist

can experience what was previously unknown." (Beni, 2004, 296).

It is known that tourism studies should, among other aspects, increase the knowledge about leisure, imagery, and interpersonal relationships between different cultures (Beni, 2004). Interpersonal interaction can be positive or negative and is highly recommended in complex services, such as tourism, that depend on face-to-face interactions to generate feelings (Schmitt, 2000). Trigo (2010, p. 31) also relates traveling to people. As reported by the author, "a special trip requires special people and conditions. This implies not only economic power, but essentially social, cultural, aesthetic, and political attitudes and positions".

Since cultural orientation between service providers and customers may be very different, people who are in contact with tourists need to be sensitive to the values and expectations of global consumers (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013). Successful strategies create an emotional link to the consumer's lifestyle through trust, product delivery, and sustainability (Hannam, 2004). That is, the degree of shared empathy and closeness between travelers and employees affects the delivery of the experience to the tourist. An employee can perform the tasks better if he or she has emotional intelligence skills such as interpersonal intelligence and intrapersonal skills (resilience, optimism, commitment) (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013).

Whilst several authors have emphasized the importance of people to the tourism experience (Carù & Cova, 2003; Kompula, Ilves & Airey, 2016; Quinlan-Cutler & Carmichael, 2010; Walls, 2013) we still lack knowledge about the impact of interpersonal

contact (or lack thereof) on the memorability of a trip. One of the avenues of research is the study of the relevance of interpersonal relationships in the experience. The study of the relationships between tourists and product/service providers, for example, can reveal memorable experiences, whether positive or negative. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the importance of the interpersonal dimension to design activities that provide tourists with memorable moments.

3 METHODOLOGY

With the purpose of answering the research question and meet the proposed objectives, this study is qualitative and exploratory. Thus, the research unfolds in three studies with different procedures and tools. Given that the memorable travel experience is a multifaceted phenomenon, it was deemed necessary to examine it for a better understanding of the field of study. Hence, the research presents three different methodological stages.

The first study is composed of two travel accounts of people traveling with their partner. They were chosen for accessibility and consent to participate in the study. This step included the dissemination of information about the research to find volunteers in a social network (Facebook) of one of the authors. The objective was to find couples who had the intention to travel as a couple and "to monitor the trip in real time", i.e., to understand how the couples' experiences, decision-making processes, and consumption occurred. The participants were chosen because they were non-standard, i.e., couples that were in uncommon situations. In

this context, the first couple is engaged to be married, from different nationalities, living outside Brazil, and traveling with the purpose of starting a business of their own. In turn, the second couple is Brazilian, living in different cities, they are dating and are now in process of moving in together.

Although no structured script was used as an instrument, couples were given orientation on the focus of research, the frequency of submission of reports, and other pertinent information. They were encouraged to send pictures, accounts of visits to tourist attractions, experiences of contact with services (lodging, food, tours); and contact with locals or tourists. In this way, the first study allowed a better understanding of the sensations, discoveries, sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the destinations during the travel experience. Other aspects such as relationship with service providers and positive and negative experiences in the place were also described by the participants.

The narrative was used to collect the data in the first and second studies, because it contributes to the understanding of accounts of experiences in specific settings (Riessman, 2005). As Matos, Branco and Barradas (2005) stated, the narrative is a rich approach to the study of human experience and interaction between people, which are

precisely the two focuses of this work. Arnould and Price (1993), Uriely (2005), and Pearce and Wu (2014), among other tourism experience studies, have also used travelers' narratives to understand the travel experience, which shows that this data collection technique is commonly used in context.

The second study involved the selection of Brazilian travelers who have had memorable travel experiences. The participants were students of an undergraduate degree in Administration from a Brazilian federal university. Participants were invited to write a narrative about tourism experiences they have had with one or more people. A total of 22 individuals wrote narratives based on a semi-structured script. Of this, 9 texts were excluded from the study because they narrated trips with a group of friends or relatives. Thus, only reports of couples' trips were maintained, totaling 13 individual narratives.

As in study 1, study 2 also used as a method for data collection the narrative, but whereas in study 1 the couples made the reports together and while traveling, in study 2 the data are composed by post-trip narratives, written by one of the members of the couple. The second study consists of 13 travel narratives that followed a semi-structured script (Frame 1).

Frame 1 - Script

Date of the interview:

Name:

Age:

Name of partner:

Age of partner:

Relationship status:

Length of relationship:

1. Tell us how often you travel together and what kind of travel you are interested in.
2. In general, what do you consider to be a memorable trip?
3. Think about leisure trips you have made together, what were your motivations for travel?
4. Among the trips together, was there one that was most striking? Why?
5. Tell me a little about this trip (When did it happen? How did you choose the destination? Moments you remember the most.)
6. Was there any contact with other people during this trip that was meaningful to you? Explain.
7. Was any of the places you visited special? Why?
8. How did this trip affect the relationship of those traveling with you?
9. How does this trip differ from others you have already done without your partner's company?
10. Have you ever traveled on leisure to international destinations, alone or with a partner or in group? How was the experience?
11. For what reasons did you choose an international destination instead of another destination in Brazil?
12. Why do you think other people choose to travel outside Brazil?
13. Please, reread your answers. What do you think relates to service marketing in terms of having made the trip a memorable experience?
14. What could have been better?

Source: The authors

Considering the approach to the phenomenon in the first two studies, a third study was made on the experiences of memorable trips of Brazilian couples, in their diversity: married or not, LGBT members, of different ages and socioeconomic situations.

The third study consisted of in-depth qualitative interviews with couples who traveled for pleasure to at least one domestic destination and/or an international. Study 3 involved the snowball technique in which three couples were selected for convenience to start the study and were asked to indicate other couples who could be interviewed to continue the research. Couples were interviewed together, totaling 11 couples (22 individuals). As a delimitation, the couple

should have traveled at least once in a period of up to 12 months prior to data collection and be over 18 years of age. Thus, we studied couples who have traveled recently and with decision-making power over their leisure travel.

The in-depth interview was chosen because it serves well qualitative research with exploratory purpose, and provides detailed data and the formulation of related concepts. The in-depth interview is usually applied individually. However, as this study aims at understanding the experience of memorable couple's trips, the idea was to interview the couple together.

This strategy is unusual in the literature, especially in studies of tourism experi-

ences in Brazil, which have not emphasized this unit of analysis. The only exception was the studies by Gama and Siqueira (2010) who proposed only theoretical considerations about honeymoon trips, *i.e.*, they did not present empirical proposals. However, the in-depth interview with the couple is relevant since they are treated as an observation unit, and the technique allows "the interviewees to be as free as possible to express their opinions" (Vieira & Tibola, 2005, p. 14).

A semi-structured interview script was used, aiming to give the researcher flexibility to delve into issues that arose during the interview. The script of study 2 was adapted for the interviews of study 3. The number of interviews was determined by saturation (Malhotra, 2004) after completion of 11 interviews with couples.

In the three studies, data analysis was performed using content analysis of texts, through a posteriori thematic categorization, according to Bardin (2008). After the transcript of interviews and reports was completed, a floating reading was done. We sought to compare the answers of the couples interviewed, looking both for elements in common and specific to each couple. Moreover, besides comparison with tourism experience literature and with the findings in the first two studies, we searched for elements not listed in the literature.

In addition to the categorization by themes and subsequent grouping into code families, it was understood that to capture the main characteristics of couples' travel experiences it was necessary to put forward a theoretical framework. Finally, to increase

the validity of the answers, the cross-validation method was used, in which three researchers evaluated the content of the narratives and transcripts of the interviews.

4 RESULTS

The results are presented for each study and the main thematic categories that appeared in the results of each study are in bold. The discussion of all three studies is presented jointly after the results, together with the thematic summary and theoretical framework resulting from the studies.

4.1 Study 1 – Travel Accounts

Study 1 is the result of two travel accounts of couples who were chosen because of their distinct characteristics. Specifically, both are couples who were undergoing atypical situations, when compared with other couples.

The first couple is engaged to be married, composed of a Brazilian flight attendant woman and a Lebanese man. The couple met in Dubai in 2015 and they experience every day cultural, religious, linguistic, and food differences. Currently, they are setting up a micro business in Lebanon to meet the demands of flight attendants traveling to the country, *Lebanon Road Trips*, so one of the objectives of the couple's travels is to gain knowledge and feed their Facebook business page. The couple's travel account refers to a trip to the Lebanese mountains in the winter, *i.e.*, place that is ideal for practicing winter sports such as snowboarding and skiing and

an opportunity to enjoy the Lebanese cuisine.

The second pair is a Brazilian dating couple, she works in Tourism and he is a teacher, passionate about Brazil's history, music, food, culture, arts, and architecture. The couple, at the time of the trip, was undergoing a special moment in the relationship as they were in the process of moving in together. The trip reported by the couple lasted for 12 days in which they visited the historic cities of Vassouras, Barra do Piraí, Valença, Visconde de Mauá, Penedo, Teresópolis, and Petrópolis, all in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

The findings of study 1 demonstrated that both couples have multiple **passions in common** and traveling together is an opportunity for **sharing these experiences**. Interpersonal relationships may also occur between the couple and other people they meet along the way, thus verifying Beni's (2004) findings that show that the key to the tourism experience is the interaction between tourists and residents. The following excerpt from a report highlights this interrelationship:

"Mr. Patricio is a collector of antiquities passionate about the history of Brazil, as Arlindo and I. We went away only for manners' sake because we felt like staying there longer." Amelia

The **novelties experienced** and **shared** during the trip bring the couple closer. Among the main novelties shared by couples is food, the opportunity for experiencing unknown local cuisine. Kim (2010) points out that involvement with local culture and tourism experiences enhances the ability to remember past experiences.

We always order different meals, so we have the chance to taste two dishes. Amelia

We've chosen Teresópolis because of the restaurant Dona Irene, where Arlindo has always wanted to go. They serve there a six-course Russian banquet. Amelia

I discovered today the difference between *manoush* and *saj* (they are two styles of Lebanese pizza). Tereza

Figure 1 – Russian Banquet



The dinner of couple 2, Amélia and Arlindo

Figure 2 – Preparation of Lebanese pizzas



The meal of couple 1, Tereza and Munir

Another important feature shared by the couples was the **novelty** or unprecedented experience, *i.e.*, travel to places that they as a couple did not know or that only one of them knew. In both cases the sharing of experiences, emotions, and new experiences is noted. This is consistent with the study by Campos, Mendes, Valle, and Scott (2016) which shows that close and intense

relationships, as to affection, are important elements within the travel experience.

I thought it was great because I did not know the city and Arlindo thought I would love it. In fact, I loved it. Amelia

We end up making lots of trips to places he does not even know of, so it's very interesting to see his reaction. Tereza

Figure 3 – Visit to the Imperial Museum, Petrópolis



Couple 2, Amélia and Arlindo

The purpose of study 1 was to understand in real time the behavior of tourists during the trip, however the researchers were faced with several problems. Namely, the drop out of 6 couples of participants who were taking part in the research. The reasons were diverse, such as cancellation of the trip, difficulty in writing, and problems in communicating with the researchers due to lack of access to the Internet. Therefore, it was understood that other research strategies could contribute to the understanding of the particularities of couples' trips.

Figure 4 – Lebanese Mountains



Couple 1, Tereza and Munir

4.2 Study 2 - Narratives

Study 2 is composed of 13 travel narratives made by people who traveled at least once with their partner in the last twelve months prior to data collection.

The frame 2 presents the characterization of the couples and the memorable trip narrated in study 2. The couples are between 20 and 30 years old, which is consistent with the fact that they are university students of a graduation course. Except for two couples, one engaged and one that ended the rela-

tionship, the others are dating. Of the 13 narratives, two participants reported being homosexual and the others heterosexual. Of the 13 memorable travel narratives, 5 were international trips and 8 domestic. Concerning the year of travel, the reports generally

described recent trips, with 2 trips in 2017, 5 in 2016, 2 in 2015, 1 in 2014, 1 in 2013, and the dates of 2 travel narratives were not reported.

Frame 2 – Characterization of Couples of Study 2, Narratives

Narrative	Age (years)	Relationship Status	Sexual Orientation	Type of Travel	Date of Travel
N1	23-21	Dating	Homo	International	May/2016
N2	21-21	Dating	Hetero	Domestic	Dec/2016
N3	22-22	Ended	Hetero	Domestic	Jan/2016
N4	-----	-----	Hetero	International	Feb/2013
N5	21-23	Dating	Hetero	Domestic	----
N6	23-23	-----	Hetero	Domestic	Oct/2016
N7	--- 26	Dating	Hetero	Domestic	Start/2017
N8	23-24	Dating	Hetero	Domestic	Feb/2015
N9	20-21	Dating	Hetero	Domestic	Feb/2015
N10	20-25	Engaged	Hetero	Domestic	-----
N11	22-25	Dating	Hetero	International	Feb/2016
N12	-----	-----	-----	International	Dec/2014
N13	21-23	Dating	Homo	International	May/2016

Source: The authors

One of the topics identified a posteriori in this study concerns the motivations of couples to travel. On the motivations two participants reported: the **novelty** or **unprecedented experience** in knowing new places, new cultures, and having new experiences; **rest** to reduce stress; **escape the routine** and the city and be away from worries; commemorate **special dates**, such as the couple's anniversary; the opportunity to have free time; price; the **shared passion** for some common

interest (type of tourism, activity of interest); **enjoy the company** of their partner, spend some time as a couple.

Desire to know new places or enjoy free time. (N12)

Common interest in travel and opportunity for a vacation spending time together and to escape the routine. (N7)

We wanted a different place to escape the routine. (N5)

The excerpt from a report below is consistent with Kim's (2010) study, according to which relaxation is valued by tourists as a psychological benefit of traveling. In addition, the feeling of rest enhances the ability to remember past experiences.

We love traveling, we seek to relieve daily life stress, enjoy vacations, the desire to explore new places. (N13)

Regarding the reasons why people travel abroad, the participants mentioned: lack of infrastructure to travel through Brazil; prestige/status associated with international travel; price, since some trips to Brazilian tourist destinations are more expensive than an international trip; know new cultures; and convenience of living out of the country at the time of travel. As can be seen, in the passages below:

Brazil, besides being expensive, is often not so appealing, as it presents problems with transportation, violence, and other risks. (N1)

In part due to different culture and places/architecture, and part because traveling to certain international destinations is seen by many as a status symbol. (N11)

However, one report referred that traveling abroad has resulted in a greater valuation of Brazil richness.

Contact with another culture makes us learn and expand our knowledge, and even value what we have in Brazil. (N3)

Another topic identified in study 2 is the impact of travel on the couple's relationship. Among the ways the trip affected the relationship, the participants narrated: i) increased **commitment to the relationship during the trip**; ii) **enhanced closeness**, as the trip allowed the couple to become more united, more intimate, to get to know each other better and for those who lived in different cities the trip was an opportunity for being together; iii) **trust**, since the trip gave them the assurance of having chosen the right partner and, iv) **memorability**, because the trip was an opportunity for sharing moments of joy, experiences, and discoveries and, thus, creating common memories that can be shared between the couple or with others.

It was very positive because we became even more intimate. (N4)

My relationship with Leticia has completely changed, since at the beginning of the trip we were 'in an open relationship' and during the trip we agreed to a committed relationship. (N8)

The trip brought us closer and strengthened the relationship, sure of the choice. (N7)

However, there were also participants who reported that the trip did not affect the relationship.

Not much has changed. (N2)

Despite the elements found that contribute to the characterization of the couples' trip, the adopted method allowed only to assess the view of one member of the couple.

ple. Hence, it was necessary to adopt another research strategy due to the need to understand the couple as a unit of observation.

4.3 Study 3 - Interviews

Study 3 is the result of 11 in-depth interviews with couples over the age of 18 who have traveled for pleasure together in the 12 months prior to data collection.

Frame 3 summarizes the characteristics of the 11 couples interviewed for study 3. The couples are aged between 21 and 38 years; 8 couples are heterosexual and 3 are homosexual; 9 couples are dating, 1 couple is engaged to be married, and 1 is married. The length of the relationship ranges from 5 months to 12 years. Among the most memorable trips described by the couples 7 are international and 4 domestic. As with study 2, trips are also recent, with 1 trip occurring in 2014, 1 in 2015, 4 in 2016 and 5 in 2017.

Table 3 – Characterization of Interview Couples in Study 3

Couples	Age (years)	Relationship Status	Length of Relationship	Sexual Orientation	Type of Travel	Date of Travel
C1	22-28	Dating	1 year	Hetero	National	Nov/2016
C2	22-24	Dating	1 year and 2 months	Hetero	International	Dec/2016
C3	22-23	Dating	1 year and 9 months	Hetero	International	Jan/2017
C4	29-27	Dating	1 year and 2 months	Homo	International	Mar/2017
C5	26-28	Engaged	2 years and 4 months	Hetero	International	Feb/2015
C6	21-23	Dating	5 months	Homo	National	Feb/2017
C7	22-24	Dating	4 years	Hetero	International	Jan/2016
C8	38-36	Married	12 years	Hetero	International	Oct/2014
C9	24-23	Dating	1 year and 6 months	Hetero	International	Feb/2017
C10	25-25	Dating	1 year and 6 months	Homo	National	Jan/2017
C11	22-22	Dating	1 year and 9 months	Hetero	National	Jul/2016

Source: The authors

Consistent with the findings of study 2 on the motivations for couple travel, respondents from study 3 mentioned: **novelty**

of knowing new places, living new experiences and doing something different; **rest**, to escape the routine, the city and stress; the

opportunity to travel in terms of variables such as **free time**, **price** and ease with the **language**; the **common passion** for travel, the football team or simulations; and enjoy the company of the partner, since the trip was an opportunity for having some couple time. Finally, for those living in different cities, the trip was a chance for being together. The following excerpts from the transcripts show some of these motivations.

... we wanted to know the city and a Galo [soccer team] match was happening there, we joined the match and a city tour, and on top of that a special offer on flight tickets, it was cheap ... (C1)

Escape the chaos of BH [Belo Horizonte], this crazy city and have new experiences. (C4)

The question of language, too, to understand, although not speaking Spanish I can understand. (C8)

... we like to travel to learn new things, to have different experiences, to rest, to date, to stay a little more together and alone in other places and something new. (C5)

... in the case of the carnival we decided to go to Brasilia to see each other and be together ... (C6)

Moreover, special occasions such as Valentine's Day, anniversaries or a festive season are also motivations for a couple trip.

It was the date. We celebrated our first dating anniversary on the plane, coming back. (C11)

The interviewees also addressed the possibility of visiting the same place several times and always discover something new or live new experiences, especially if the previous visit to the place was without the partner. This is because traveling as a couple, even if it is to known places, allows the sharing of past experiences with the partner.

... I learned a lot, and then when we went together I taught him a lot and also discovered more things. So, I think you go somewhere, you can go several times and always find something new. (C2)

Because I lived in Berlin, there I said 'I want to show you Berlin, we'll go there'. (C9)

Couple travel motivations are different from motivations for traveling solo or with family and friends. The planning and the places frequented on a couple's trip differ from individual or group trip. Participants reported that when traveling alone they ended up wishing their partner was there to share experiences.

For me the difference is mainly the company on these trips, when I travel alone or with friends it's to near places... and when I travel with F. we go to capitals... the motivation is different, the reason for traveling alone is one and for traveling with company is another. Very different. (C6)

... you visit different places, eat in different places, I mean, I don't go to a 5-star restaurant with friends or visit a romantic place with friends. (C5)

Traveling apart is not so cool anymore, I do not know, we miss each other and have to say 'oh, if you were here it would be so much better, I keep picturing you here' or 'what are you doing?' (C7)

Another sub-theme highlighted in study 3 is the **memorability**, i.e., the aspects that make the couple's trip remarkable. Among the aspects reported by couples there are: i) **special occasions**, for example, a trip to celebrate the dating anniversary is more memorable; ii) the **environment** was reported by several interviewees as a memorable aspect, be it the physical environment such as the hotel, a restaurant or a bar, as well as nature (volcanoes, deserts and beaches) and the atmosphere of the place that made the couple feel welcome; iii) the **novelty or unprecedented experience**, as it was the first trip of the couple, the first international trip, the first trip that the couple has paid for, or contact with the culture, traditions, cuisine, people and places different from those where the couple usually lives; iv) the **company**, the fact that the trip was with the partner makes it remarkable, the people they met during the trip also marked the couple; v) the **expectation/realization**, because it was a trip that the couple planned and dreamed of for a long time ago, and, the commitment to the relationship that happened during the trip or soon after it.

... it seemed like an alternative reality because the beach is in a fishing village where just few people can go camping and I had never camped. (C10)

Because Prague has a magical atmosphere, I can't explain. (C2)

What is more important is if we take a trip for our dating anniversary, it is more remarkable. (C5)

I think it was the fact that we were planning and dreaming about it for long time, it was a long-standing plan. (C4)

... I do not care what we're going to do in theory, I care about company. So if I'm with her, I'm good. (C9)

... it's because we were just friends and after that trip we started dating, so I would say that the trip helped, even though we did not have any physical contact during the trip... (C5)

It was our first snow ever... it was the first time that we saw a volcano that we did not know either. I think it was because of this and because it is a very organized country and it welcomed us very well, and everything came together... we were very delighted even with the place. (C8)

The results of study 3 are in line with study 2 regarding the impact of the trip on the relationship. Interviewees said that the trip **brought them closer as a couple** because they got to know each other better and they felt that the trip was a "sample" of the future of the relationship. Moreover, in some cases the couple **committed to the relationship** during the trip, since the pair began dating during or soon after the trip, and the **memorability** because couples experienced moments that were later shared with friends or between themselves.

It is a different level of responsibility and commitment... it was a way of getting to know each other, the things we discovered about each

other, we had some arguments also about things we didn't agree on and in general I think our relationship grew. (C3)

We shared a kitchen, had to do the laundry together, clean the room, clean the bathroom, so it was a glimpse of a possible future. I also encouraged P. 'come on, let's do it, let's get out'. J. got there and was a bit of a mess and I was more systematic. But she returned more organized and I livelier. (C7)

In addition, the trip contributed to build **trust** between the partners. Specifically, there are indications that the trip generated bonding and trust between the couple. Trust is an aspect that has not been demonstrated in previous research and therefore is a contribution of this study.

... I trusted P. more, because whether I liked or not he wanted to push me out of my comfort zone, right, because I do not like the beach, I do not like the sea and 'no, you will go, you will learn swimming and such', and I think in terms of trust in each other, at least for me, it was very important. (C10)

... I feel safe with J., which is not common, I'm always insecure, but with her I have confidence, I know she's going to be with me and that's important for me, so I enjoy things more, I have freedom to do other things. (C7)

On the other hand, there were couples who reported that the trip was an opportunity for deepen the relationship, particularly for those who usually are not together or do not know each other well. However, in cases where the couple is very close, there

are reports that the travel does not significantly affect the relationship.

We are already very close. Yeah, we were already very intimate. It was very quiet, very practical, you know. (C11)

... the trip is interesting to unite couples in general, in the sense that you spend more time together, you know? But if you already spend a lot of time together, it turns out it's just a different place... but in terms of knowledge and such, it only brings more impact when you do not spend a lot of time with the person ... (C9)

Respondents also reported that traveling together has either raised or increased the desire to travel together whenever possible. In addition, because they are always traveling, couples end up becoming a reference for friends who seek them for tips, suggestions, and inviting them to travel.

Yes, I don't know, we started to have that thought, this philosophy of always wanting to travel. Whenever possible, try to travel, which we didn't have before this trip. (C2)

... it also ends up that for our circle of friends we end up becoming a reference, people always ask us tips, invites us to go along too ... (C8)

In addition, the feelings described by couples when traveling together are often positive, such as happiness, pleasure, completeness, love, satisfaction, joy, and trust.

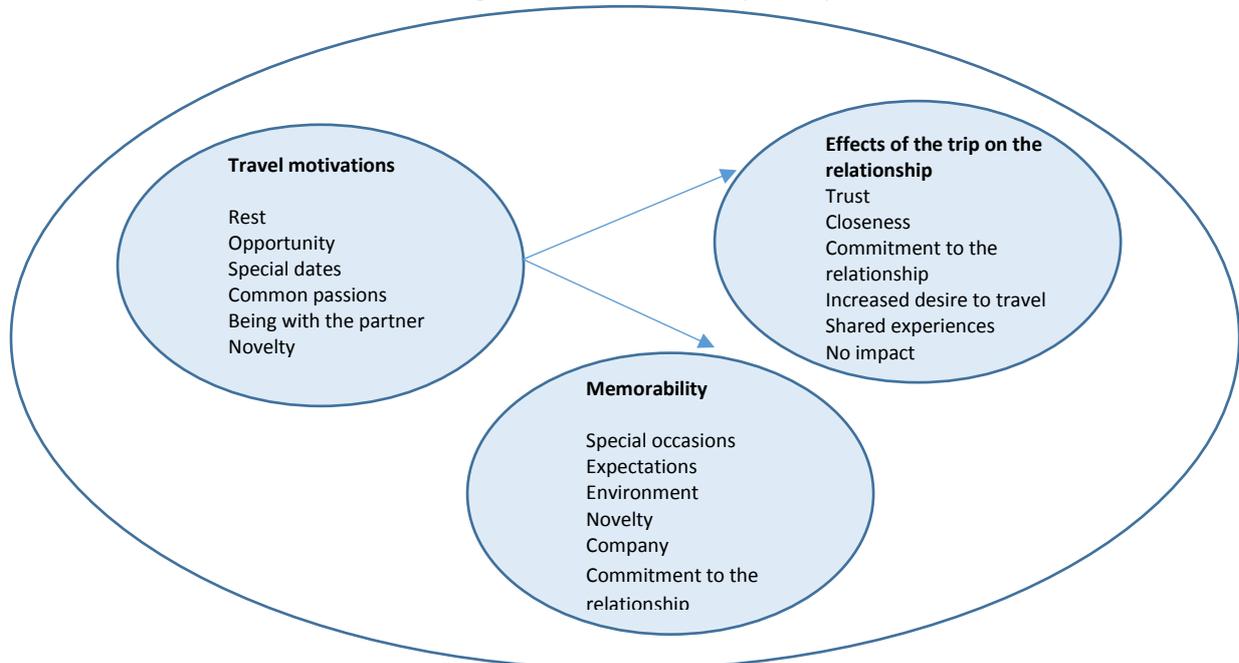
5 DISCUSSIONS

This study delved into the specific features of couple travel and examined what differentiates it from trips with friends, family, or alone. The couples pointed out that traveling as a couple allow them to choose freely, making their own decisions about what to visit, where to stay, when to travel, and schedule of activities, since these aspects are decided only by the two of them.

On the contrary, group or family trips require joint decision-making and consensus is not always possible. When on a trip without the partner, the interviewees reported that it was common to wish sharing that special moment with the partner or imagine how the moment would be if he or she were there.

Figure 5 presents the travel motivations, the memorability, and the impact on the relationship.

Figure 5 – Memorable couple's trips



Source: The authors

Another difference between couple's trips and other trips is sharing remarkable moments, which thus provides a common repertoire of experiences and stories that can be shared later, either between the couple or with relatives, friends, and acquaintances.

The motivations for traveling as a couple or traveling with family, friends, or

alone are also different. Couple travel entails the desire to spend time together, enjoying each other's company, talking, getting to know each other, and doing activities that they both enjoy. The couple's travel planning is also different from trips with other people since it is done by and for two people. Thus, the places visited are often romantic sites or of mutual interest. Conceivably, the place to

be visited may be of interest to only one member of the couple, but the other understands the importance it has to the partner and helps to fulfill his or her wishes. The places or types of meals are also different and hotel or room booking is specific to the couple.

Among the motivations for couple's trips reported in the study are: novelty, rest, special dates, the opportunity to travel together at a convenient date, common passion, and company. The couples reported the need to escape the routine, reduce stress, stay away from worries, and bring a sense of renewal to the relationship. Previous research had already identified rest, feeling of renewal, and peace as important features for a memorable tourism experience (Trauer & Ryan, 2005; Kim, Ritchie & McCormick, 2012; Kim & Ritchie, 2014).

As to the effect of the trip on the relationship, participants reported that the it affected the relationship to the extent that they became closer, committed to the relationship, strengthened the trust between them, and shared memories. There were also couples who reported that the trip did not affect the relationship. In addition, there was an account of how the trip have strengthened the desire to travel.

About the memorability of couple's trips, factors such as special dates, novelties, visited environment, company, commitment to the relationship, and their expectations contributed to make a given trip special vis-à-vis others without the partner. The couples' common passions included history, gastronomy, arts, culture, and a travel micro-business. Examples of common passions that

motivated the trips were the soccer team, themed simulations at specific events. Special dates can also be considered both as a motivator and as a memorable aspect of couple's trips. Both common passions and special dates are aspects little explored in the literature, being therefore, contributions of this study.

Another contribution of the research concerns the effects of the trip on the relationship, namely, the factor trust. Traveling together has created or strengthened the bond of trust between the couple. In addition, sometimes the trip adds to the certainty of partner choice. Other effects of the trip in the relationship pointed out by the participants are the increase of intimacy, the sharing of travel memories, and commitment to the relationship (which is also a factor that adds to the memorability of the trip). Tung and Ritchie (2011) had already pointed out the development of the relationship with the partner and the increase in the intimacy as the focal point of the memorable experience of couple travel, which is also emphasized in this research.

The aspect of novelty, which refers to knowing new places, new cultures, and living new experiences, is consistent with previous studies that suggest that experience is the main product of the tourism market. Specifically, unique experiences are related to the satisfaction of tourists and the unprecedented experience becomes fixed in their memory (Tsaour, Chiu, & Wuang, 2007; Song et al., 2014; Pezzi & Vianna, 2015).

The environment was a factor of memorability portrayed in aspects such as the natural beauties of the place (desert, vol-

canoes, beaches); establishments frequented as bars and restaurants; and the atmosphere. Pezzi and Vianna (2015) had already emphasized the aesthetic dimension, especially the architecture and natural beauties, as a key dimension of the memorable trip.

This research showed that regardless of sexual orientation, age, or the length of the relationship couples have several characteristics in common, such as the motivation for travel based on special dates and interests of one or both members of the couple.

6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The guiding question of this research is: What is the essence of the experience of Brazilian couples traveling for pleasure? Thus, to answer this question, three different studies were carried out to address different and complementary perspectives. Study 1 was composed of 2 travel accounts made by two couples while traveling. Study 2 was composed of 13 narratives, made after the trip by one of the members of the couple. Study 3 is composed of 11 in-depth interviews with couples, i.e., 22 people of different ages, gender, and sexual orientation were interviewed. The intent of the study was never to compare or segregate couples of different sexual orientations. On the contrary, the study contributes to demonstrate that regardless of sexual orientation, age, and relationship status, there are common characteristics that characterize couple travel.

This research advances the field of tourism studies by addressing couple leisure travel, as there are few travel-specific studies

that address issues such as common passion and interests; the specific travel planning for a couple's trip; and the factor trust that has not been addressed in previous tourism experience surveys, but several couples reported as an effect of the trip. Thus, sometimes the couple's trip reinforces their decision to be together and increases trust between them, as well as creates moments and life experiences that can be shared between the couple and/or relatives, friends, and acquaintances.

The survey results show that tourism destination organizations, such as travel agencies, receptive tour operators, restaurants, hotels, among others, should identify the couple's shared passions. In addition, tailor-made vacation packages and special services for special dates such as dating or wedding anniversary can positively influence the couple's consumption and memorability of experience. This can lead to the provision of unique and remarkable moments for the couple, affecting recommendation and the intention of repeat visits (Triantafillidou & Petala, 2015; Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Tsaor et al., 2007).

Among the theoretical limitations of the research is the fact that couples are the focus of research, whereas the theory of tourism experience has emphasized individual aspects, influenced by physical and social factors. Future research may, for example, contribute to a better understanding of couple's trip within the family life cycle.

Another methodological limitation of research is the fact that the participants can add elements and fictional situations to the narrative. In addition, it is difficult to combine all the elements that can be analyzed.

Therefore, it is recommended that the narrative be combined with other forms of qualitative research (Matos et al., 2005). In addition, the fact that qualitative research is not neutral may also have caused unintentional biases during handling and collection of material.

One avenue for future research is to address the intimacy and sexual behavior of couples during the trip, as this was one aspect that was not directly exposed by couples during the studies although it has implicitly emerged in some interview questions. Some points that may have inhibited couples from mentioning sexual intimacy explicitly in interviews are: the couple did not feel comfortable discussing this issue with the interviewer, the couple did not discuss it openly or did not want to expose their partner, since they were together in the interviews or because sexual intimacy was not directly addressed. In addition, studies of couples of other age groups and married for different lengths of time may be of interest in future studies.

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