

## TOURISTS' MOTIVATIONS AND OBSTACLES FOR CHOOSING GLAMPING: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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**Abstract:** Although still little-known, glamping has become a nature-based tourism option for people who want a higher level of comfort. The offer of this type of accommodation is growing, namely in Portugal, but there are still few studies that address the motivations and other relevant factors explaining its adoption or refusal by consumers. The present study applied a qualitative approach aimed at exploring consumers' motivations or obstacles for choosing glamping, and their perceptions as tourists on the differences between glamping and camping. Data were collected through the conduction of focus groups held in 2017 and content analysis techniques for contextualized interpretations were used. The most important motivational driver to go glamping is the direct contact with nature. Glamour, comfort, privacy and a different experience are also important aspects that consumers appreciate. Inversely, the main obstacles are the cost, the limited offer, the lack of knowledge, and the non-authenticity, compared to camping, of the offer.

**JEL Classification Numbers:** M31; **DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.12955/cbup.v6.1142>

**Keywords:** glamping, camping, tourists' motivations, tourists' obstacles; consumer behavior, nature-based tourism

### Introduction

The widespread popularity of nature-based tourism (NBT) (Balmford *et al.*, 2009) gave rise to an expansion of several related activities, from which camping is an important example (Winter, 2005). Camping was considered a low-cost tourist sector; however, recently it has been transformed into a sector able to attract different market segments due to its versatility and ability to reinvent what it has to offer (Brooker & Joppe, 2013). Compared to past decades when camping was a tourist option mostly because participants could not afford alternative accommodation, today it emerges as a much more refined tourism experience. An additional option of nature-based tourism that stands out for its innovative character is glamping, defined as "glamorous camping" and associated many times with more exotic destinations such as safaris in Africa, but that includes a growing number of units in several destinations, namely in Europe, and in particular in Portugal.

Despite all these evolutionary trends in NBT, albeit with some exceptions (Ahn & Lee, 2015; Brochado & Pereira, 2017), glamping has scarcely been studied by marketing and tourism literature. According to Horáková and Boscoboinik (2012, p. 162) "there are almost no academic analyses on this tendency". By adopting the consumer behavior paradigm, this study aims to contribute to fill this gap and has as objectives: (i) to identify the motivational drivers behind glamping tourism; (ii) to identify the obstacles that generate a refusal by consumers for this tourism alternative; and (iii) to explore consumers' perceptions as tourists on the differences between glamping and camping.

### Literature review

NBT is a type of tourism that offers tourists the opportunity to indulge in natural, cultural, architectural and landscape heritage. The concerns with nature preservation and environmentally responsible tourism practices are others characteristics associated with NBT (Ardoin *et al.*, 2015). The search for NBT and leisure travel to the wilderness has grown over time in most countries of the world and this trend is mostly due to the traits of modern society, a much more urban community in which individuals tend to keep themselves apart from nature in daily routines (Park *et al.*, 2010; Priskin, 2001; Waite *et al.*, 2003). As mentioned by Honey (2008), it is predicted that NBT will continue to grow worldwide: from 7% of global tourism in 2008 to approximately 25% in 2020.

Regarding consumers' motivations for doing tourism, several authors adopt push-pull motivational factors to examine travel behaviors (e.g. Chen & Chen, 2015; Sato *et al.*, 2018). Specifically, in different contexts of NBT, the appreciation of nature and the desire to escape were frequently identified as motivational factors. Tian-Cole *et al.* (2002), for instance, identified nature, escaping from routine, introspection, achievement, physical fitness and contact with new people as motivational factors. Also, Kim *et al.* (2003) classified appreciating natural resources, health, family togetherness, escaping from everyday routines, adventure and building friendship as push factors. According to

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O'Neil *et al.* (2010), an increasing number of tourists are now preferring natural environments for their recreational pursuits, perhaps disillusioned by an ever-growing urban sprawl, driven by a desire to escape the daily routine, and also a desire to contact with green spaces and/or pristine environments. Despite the increasing popularity of NBT in general, not all consumers are motivated to participate in this type of tourism and leisure activities. Pennington-Gray and Kerstetter (2002) recognized money and time as the main structural constraints on NBT participation, followed by intrapersonal and interpersonal ones. Nyaupane *et al.* (2004) used this three-dimensional leisure constraints model to analyze the behavior of consumers who showed an interest in NBT but did not participate in nature activities for two years and found that the importance of leisure constraints varied among the participants of the same group.

Portugal is a prime destination for NBT, comprising an enormous variety of landscapes and a high diversity of natural habitats, with 21% of the national territory being constituted as a Classified Area (Turismo de Portugal, 2015). The mild climate all year round allows for the practice of a large number of NBT activities (e.g. hiking, speleology, climbing, mountain bike, paragliding, bird watching, camping, diving, rafting, bodyboard, surf, canyoning). These NBT options may vary according to the intensity and proximity tourists wish to have from nature (Shafer & Choi, 2006). Actually, NBT can range from mass tourism, adventure tourism to small-scale ecotourism (Margaryan & Fredman, 2017).

Camping as an NBT option is quite familiar to the majority of the population, but the concept of glamping is relatively new. The expression glamping results from the combination of two English words "glamour" and "camping". Glamping accommodation types can be divided into yurts, tipis, wigwams, tree houses, safari tents, caravans and other unusual accommodation options with strong innovative design components (Robbins, 2011). It is a luxury way of camping that combines the comfort of a hotel with the privileged contact with nature (Horáková & Boscoboinik, 2012; Robinson *et al.*, 2011) in which people search for authenticity, customized service, and closer attention to the client, along with genuine interaction with the local community, a rare thing in urban environments. The concept of luxury is widely associated by academic literature with quality (e.g. Husic & Cicic, 2009), prestige (e.g. Vigneron & Johnson, 2004), exclusivity (e.g. Berthon *et al.*, 2009), affordability (e.g. Truong *et al.*, 2009), individual meaning (e.g. Tynan *et al.*, 2010) and social meaning (e.g. Berthon *et al.*, 2009; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). Thus, glamping has the ability to attract consumers who search for an alternative accommodation and lifestyle (Brooker & Joppe, 2013), and for whom tangible assets are an essential part of the experience (Brochado & Pereira, 2017).

In-depth studies on the motivational drivers of tourists to do glamping are still missing, and the constraints or obstacles that may prevent them from embracing this option are mostly unknown. Therefore, this study aims (i) to identify the motivational drivers of consumers behind glamping tourism; (ii) to identify the obstacles for choosing this tourism alternative; and (iii) to explore consumers' perceptions as tourists on the differences between glamping and camping.

### **Data and methodology**

From the contributions collected in this literature review and the objectives defined for this study, a qualitative exploratory approach was adopted through the conduction of focus groups. Focus groups are a social research method widely applied in scientific and academic work with the aim of generating information and knowledge (e.g. Morgan, 1996; Sagoe, 2012; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014), and were considered the best option for this study. Originally from the social sciences' field, their application has been spread by different areas, namely those concerned with the study of consumer behavior, and at different levels of usage (Silva *et al.*, 2014). Stewart and Shamdasani (2014) mentioned a myriad of applications of focus groups as a research tool, including the generation of research hypotheses, new ideas and creative concepts, data collection, interpretation of previously obtained quantitative results, and deeper understanding on participants' perceptions with the aim of facilitating the usage of further quantitative-related research tools, among other possible applications.

For this study, focus groups were organized within a structured discussion outline involving progressive sharing of ideas and clarification of participants' insights. With this purpose in mind, 7 focus groups were conducted with a sample that comprised a total of 54 participants between 19 and 73 years old. Participants included male and female adults with diversified professional paths and qualifications. In line with relevant literature (Morgan, 2010; Sagoe, 2012; Stewart & Shamdasani,

2014), there was an attempt to avoid inconstancy and a maximum number of 10 participants per group was established. Although the study used a convenience sampling method, participants (see Table 1) were organized in order to meet a balanced homogeneity and heterogeneity in terms of age, gender, professional occupation and education level. FG1, FG6 and FG7 had only graduate participants. FG2 was composed of the youngest participants in this study. FG4 and FG5 comprised only participants that had glamping experience, FG1 included only participants that didn't have glamping experience, while the other groups (FG2, FG3, FG6 and FG7) had both participants with and without glamping experience.

Table 1: Sample characteristics						
	Focus group ID	Number of participants	Age	Level of education	Glamping experience	
	FG1	5	[46;61] years old	graduate	inexperienced	
	FG2	6	20 years old	12th year	both	
	FG3	9	[19;37] years old	12th year	both	
	FG4	8	[48;73] years old	>9th year	all experienced	
	FG5	8	[37;70] years old	>9th year	all experienced	
	FG6	8	[22;29] years old	graduate	both	
	FG7	10	[21;31] years old	graduate	both	
Source: Authors						

Focus group discussions were held between June and December 2017. All participants were invited to discuss each topic freely among themselves, keeping the moderator participation to the minimum. With the consent of the participants, focus groups were recorded (only audio) and content transcription relied on Express Scribe v 6.00 for further analysis. As data collection was in Portuguese, translation was subject to validation by a bilingual. Content analysis techniques for contextualized interpretations were additionally used.

## Results and discussion

### Motivations for glamping tourism

According to the results of this study, consumers' motivational drivers to go glamping are related most of all with comfort, privacy and simultaneously with proximity to nature: *More comfort, more privacy... It's camping, but with luxury* (FG2). In fact, the participants in this study clearly evidenced the main characteristics of glamping tourism, emphasizing luxury and comfort that enable a privileged experience of nature. Hence, participants demonstrated both knowledge about this tourism alternative, and a clear positioning of glamping compared to other NBT, such as camping. One clear example was provided in FG5, using positioning keywords such as glamour and having a clear image of who glampers are:

*I associate it to a type of accommodation in which you can do camping with glamour, where all the interior of the accommodation offers a sort of luxury inserted in a natural setting. Glampers like to stay in a place with all the minimum necessary requirements and comfort, and be in contact with natural life at the same time* (FG5).

The direct contact with nature is apparently the most important aspect, and thus making glamping very different from other luxury accommodations, such as a resort or a hotel:

*Glamping, from what I saw, is a sort of dome with a view to the sky and that's it, with more privacy...* (FG3)

*It's like a bungalow, big structures, but to be glamping it has to have one part in canvas, with space. Associated with nature, it's a luxury resort in nature... it's a hotel with no walls* (FG1).

Still, glampers did compare glamping with hotel accommodation:

*I associate glamping to glamour, it's closer to a hotel. It's a hotel inside nature. It's having the amenities and services of a hotel in the middle of nature, but with an environment of comfort similar to a hotel* (FG4).

Many participants indicated a different experience as a motivational factor for the practice of glamping. For example, during FG1, two participants indicated that they would be particularly inclined to choose glamping in a location very different from their usual ones:

*Glamping... location, spectacular views, fantastic scenarios, activities, disconnect completely, a more mystical thing, snow...(...) I'd like to try but in a different exotic country... (FG1).*

Consequently, according to the participants' narratives, glamping is still markedly associated with hidden places, very different cultural settings, and faraway destinations, and in fact more traditional glamping offers (e.g., in the African desert or savannah territories). Hence, it proves to be particularly challenging for glamping sites closer to urban areas to adequately position themselves as a captivating lodging alternative. It seems that glamour and luxury will work better when combined with an exclusive and quite different location, namely in undeveloped countries where high-quality accommodation offers are scarce and natural attractions are particularly relevant. Participants were not so keen to consider glamping in their home countries – despite this being exactly how most of the experienced participants have had contact with glamping.

### **Obstacles to glamping tourism**

In respect to the tourists' obstacles to go glamping, participants mentioned primarily the cost: *The only reason I didn't go it's because it was very expensive. But, on a special date, yes. Celebrate a special occasion, yes (FG2). I already knew about it, I've searched on glamping, but the prices kept me away definitely. It's very expensive (FG4). Glamping would make part of my preferences if it were not expensive. Glamping accommodation should be more affordable (FG5).*

In line with Pennington-Gray and Kerstetter (2002) concerning NBT, it appears that the structural constraint of money is more important than intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints on glamping tourism.

Moreover, another constraint to go glamping is the lack of knowledge. Actually, some participants recognized that only recently had they heard about these offers: *I'd never heard about it, I checked because I was curious (FG1).*

The limited offer is indicated as another obstacle for this tourism option: *There's a shortage of offers, the price is high. And it's always fully booked. I searched everywhere. Couldn't make it (FG2).* In this specific case, the participant provides an interesting clue for practitioners in this sector, by underlining the need to create more similar offers to attend tourists' demand.

Besides this, participants questioned the authenticity of contact with nature and commented on the fact that it may undermine socializing with other people: *We wanted to experiment but we think it's expensive and there's no communion with nature, people, next-door neighbors (FG4).* Obviously, this is one very clear difference from camping, as explained in one of the conversations: *For me, glamping cuts off all that camping is about, we lose contact with nature (FG7).* In fact, this aspect generated a lot of controversy in some groups. Some of the tourists most experienced with glamping devaluated socializing when doing glamping, while others questioned glamping's authenticity in providing a nature immersion experience, as noted by one of the participants:

*I believe the advantage of socializing has nothing to do with glamping... for me, glamping is a gourmet camping... it's like beer without alcohol or tobacco without nicotine. It's a fashion. Camping is camping, it's going back in time (FG4).*

Therefore, for some consumers, the main constraints on glamping tourism are intrapersonal and interpersonal. These results are according to Nyaupane *et al.* (2004) and reinforce the idea that the importance of each constraint depends on the person.

### **Consumers' perceptions on the differences between camping and glamping**

The distinction between camping and glamping was stressed in several focus groups, particularly by participants without glamping experience that emphasized the lack of social contact: *In camping sometimes there's interaction with several families, we even create friendship bonds, and perhaps glamping is not like that... (FG2).* Experienced glampers asserted that campers and glampers have very different needs and wants, despite the common enjoyment of being in contact with natural settings, as explained during FG4:

*In my opinion, we can only compare glamping to a hotel, not with camping... the atmosphere is totally different. I cannot imagine someone going to this type of accommodation and have the interaction a camper has. Camping means contact with nature, relate with others and talk to your next-door neighbor. A glamper wants to be isolated, with privacy (FG4).*

Two distinct groups, one of campers and another of glampers, emerged from the focus group data: (i) the absolute devotees of camping who consider glamping a quite divergent tourism option, even questioning its authenticity; (ii) those who have no experience in camping and clearly prefer glamping. In the first group, participants state assuredly that camping means to accept and overcome challenges that are not compatible with glamping offers. Take for instance the explanation provided by FG3 participants:

*Camping is about what you have to overcome (...) I think that people who really do camping, enjoy it because... it also has those disadvantages and they like to deal with that, it is part of the experience. In my opinion, [glamping] is not for the same type of people.*

*Glampers are not campers. They are completely apart, really. Whoever likes to camp, is not a glamper.*

Glampers agreed with this view, looking at campers as very different tourists as compared to themselves. They did not see camping as glamping competitors. In fact, they considered glamping an alternative to hotels, not to other forms of NBT, as explained in detail by FG5 participants:

*Glamping is a luxurious camping... I don't even consider that camping... for me it's a hotel, anyway, despite the natural environment, but I can also have a hotel in the wilderness. You end up having a fake sensation of sleeping in a tent, with bed, mattress, bathroom, instead of brick walls. It's not camping anymore and starts to be compared to a hotel (FG5).*

*Glamping is a luxurious camping with a hotel touch. In other words, it's like staying in a hotel but the tent has all the luxury and comfort in design, decoration, charm; it's a hotel in the shape of a tent. The camping atmosphere totally disappears, what makes the difference is the structure, which is a tent. Glamping or going to a hotel, the difference in price is not relevant. Who goes Glamping wants to enjoy a fictitious camping experience (FG5).*

Campers tend to refuse the association between camping and glamping, considering it misleading and potentially disappointing, as stressed during FG6:

*Glamping is a luxurious camping, they want to be associated with camping to attract people that like being comfortably in the wild. But in a way they are misled, selling an idea that you're going to have privacy, luxury, and at the same time contact with nature. It seems like an evolution, an upgrade of camping for more selective people, bungalows with luxury with some parts in canvas. I don't know what's the difference from a hotel, the difference is the disposition of the rooms; generally in hotels the door opens to the corridor, there the bedroom door opens to the outside. It's romantic and attractive, but it's hugely expensive (FG6).*

While camping adopters manifested their refusal to go glamping, the opposite was also noticeable, as some individuals seem more prone to go glamping, considering their preference for commodity:

*As a matter of fact, glamping attracts me more than camping. There you have... glamour, there is comfort also and I think it's because... the pictures I saw, I think... it attracts me more than camping. Because you have to set the tent and stuff... I'm not very good at it (FG3).*

However, unpredicted natural conditions do not correspond to the expectations of participants who search for glamping's comfort and luxury. One negative experience was narrated as follows:

*I tried to go glamping once, booked in the north of the country, it was composed of 4 or 5 yurts; we got there in the middle of August and it was raining, cold, the weather was not on our favor... it was like a deserted land, we had to park on a slope, climb a muddy road with our luggage, it was a tent with bathroom far away... and as we are not campers, we didn't like it at all, we were not expecting that and it was really disappointing (FG4).*

In brief, the motivational factors such as nature, escaping from routine, introspection, achievement, physical fitness, contact with new people, family togetherness, adventure and building friendships identified by Tian-Cole *et al.* (2002) and Kim *et al.* (2003) were also present in focus groups' discussions.

## Conclusion

From the results, it was possible to identify interesting clues for managers of this type of tourism businesses, both for product development and for increasing communication effectiveness.

The direct contact with nature is apparently consumers' most important motivational driver to go glamping, and thus makes this type of accommodation very different from other luxury resorts and hotels. The comfort and privacy are considered important aspects of the practice of glamping, but a different experience is an extra motivational factor. Glamping is still markedly associated with hidden places, very different cultural settings, and faraway destinations. It seems that glamour and luxury will work better when combined with an exclusive and unique location. Inversely, the main obstacles for this tourism option by consumers are the cost, the limited offer, the lack of knowledge, and the perception of non-authenticity of the offer. Indeed, the expensive price established for glamping options is expectable, once this type of accommodation has a high-end target market.

In short, one of the main contributions of this study is the evidence provided that despite the common aspects with camping, glamping is positioned very differently, and was understood by all participants in this study (both campers and glampers) as a very distinct offer, for clearly different consumer groups. Hence, past experiences with camping do not act as facilitators for trying a glamping facility. On the contrary, it creates negative images and resistance to glamping. Thus, future research opportunities include the further exploration of the lack of synergies between the two forms of NBT that were evidenced in this study.

### Acknowledgements

This work was financially supported by the research unit on Governance, Competitiveness and Public Policy (project POCI-01-0145-FEDER-006939), funded by FEDER funds through COMPETE2020 – Programa Operacional Competitividade e Internacionalização (POCI) – and by national funds through FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia.

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