

# **Girlfriend Getaway vs Mancation: Exploring hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing from a gender perspective.**

## **Abstract**

The potential of tourism to contribute to wellbeing is well documented. The girlfriend getaway and mancation markets are predicted to grow exponentially with the importance being placed on wellbeing. While the GGA market is under-researched, mancation is yet to be explored. There is a need for research to examine the links between this form of travel and individual wellbeing. Therefore, this paper aims to address this research gap by conducting exploratory research on the GGA and mancation markets with a focus on their links to wellbeing. Adopting a qualitative research approach, a content analysis of Instagram posts from GGA and mancations will be conducted with the objective of identifying gender differences in the activities and how they contribute to hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing. This study contributes to wellbeing research in tourism and broadens GGA/mancation tourism literature. Gender differences in how wellbeing is expressed will have practical implications.

**Keywords:** Girlfriends getaway (GGA), mancation, hedonic wellbeing and eudaimonic wellbeing, Instagram

**Track:** Tourism Marketing

## 1. Introduction

*“Travel and change of place impart new vigor to the mind.” – Seneca*

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which an individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and can make a contribution to his or her community.” The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) acknowledges the link between tourism, health and well-being and powerful role that tourism plays in reducing stress and improving well-being (SDG 3.4/3.5). Recent industry trends to recognize this link as the global wellness tourism market size in 2022 was valued at 838.78 billion and is predicted to reach 1974.18 billion by 2031 at a 10.17% CAGR (InsightAce Analytic, 2023). Having established that travel has become the ultimate for mental health and wellbeing (Buhalis 2022), the aim of this study is to explore how wellbeing manifests in shared tourist experience, with a particular focus on girlfriend getaways (GAA) and mancations as expressed by tourist in their Instagram posts.

Research provides evidence of the linkages between wellbeing, friendships and shared travel experiences (Berdychevsky et al., 2013, 2016; De Bloom et al., 2017; Kong et al., 2022; Matteucci et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023; Nikjoo et al., 2023). The GGA market has caught the attention of both the media and academic community in the last two decades. The GGA market refers to all-female groups travelling only with their female friends and families for holiday purposes (Khoo-Lattimore and Prayag, 2015). This trip can be in various forms: short trips, weekends to longer trips, can be domestic or international; a trip for friends, daughters/mothers, sisters, teammates, leisure-based women groups and gay friends (Gibson, Berdychevsky and Bell, 2012). It is a fast-growing market segment which is projected to grow further as facilitated by greater social acceptance of women to pursue all kinds of travel, changes in societal values, sense of entitlement and sanction to travel with female friends (Berdychevsky, Gibson and Bell, 2016; Gibson et al., 2012).

However, much of the focus has been on GGA, while the topic of mancations is yet to be explored. There appears to be a gap in research on the effects GGA and mancations (Durko et al., 2013), particularly in relation to its impact on wellbeing. We attempt to address this gap by exploring the extent to which GGA and mancation contributes to wellbeing as expressed by tourists in their Instagram posts. In doing so, we put forward our research questions: how do GGA and mancations contribute to hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing? In particular, we aim to explore gender differences in the activities and how this connects to hedonic versus eudaimonic well-being, using Instagram reels and posts as a source of data.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Girlfriend Getaway and Mancation**

The GGA market refers to all-female groups travelling only with their female friends and families for holiday purposes (Khoo-Lattimore and Prayag, 2015). This trip can be in various forms: short trips, weekends to longer trips, can be domestic or international; a trip for friends, daughters/mothers, sisters, teammates, leisure-based women groups and gay friends (Gibson, Berdychevsky and Bell, 2012). It is a fast-growing market segment which is projected to grow further as facilitated by greater social acceptance of women to pursue all kinds of travel, changes in societal values, sense of entitlement and sanction to travel with female friends (Berdychevsky, Gibson and Bell, 2016; Gibson et al., 2012). Fundamental to GGA is the women's friendship and their social interaction (Chen and Mak, 2020) and distinguishes it from other forms of travel participated by women only. Compared to men, women's friendships are more supportive, intimate, emotionally involved and interdependent (Baril, Julien, Chartrand, and Dubé 2009; Rawlins 2017). The absence of men in a GGA was an opportunity for women to be freed from the gaze of men, be less conscious and pay less attention to standards of femininity such as make-up, and clothing (Nikjoo, Zaman, Salehi, Hernandez -Lara 2022). GGA is a space for them to talk, listen and share experiences with each other, providing them with feelings of safety and belongingness, which they would not have achieved by travelling solo (Chen and Mak, 2020). The potential therapeutic effect of bonding during GGA will have positive impacts on health, managing stress and cumulative effects on longer lives (Berdychevsky, Gibson, Bell, 2013). Moreover, the work of Durko and Stone (2017) demonstrated how GGA could potentially improve a couple's relationship satisfaction as women can escape from everyday roles in the relationship (e.g., wife,

girlfriend, mother), pursue individuality, female bonding and avoidance of partner's personal travel constraints or preferences.

The GGA market has caught the attention of both the media and academic community in the last two decades. The mass media has reinforced the GGA term with the 2014 comedy film, *Lost Girls* website from TravelChannel.com in 2006 and travel guides focused on GGAs (see work of Chen and Mak, 2022). In addition, girlfriend getaway packages in certain destinations have been promoted by the industry that includes experiences combining spa-sun and fun with dine-wine, and shop-till-you drop (Chen and Mak, 2022). Academic research in this market is still in its infancy. Table 1 below summarises the extant research on GGA:

**Table 1.** Extant literature on GGA

| <b>Authors</b>                                    | <b>Focus/key findings</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Gibson, Berdychevsky and Bell (2012)              | GGA fulfil various psychological needs at four different life course stages (adolescence, early adulthood, middle adulthood, and later adulthood). Motivations for GGA: getting away from the stress and routine; bonding and connecting with female friends and dealing with life events that signify transitions and could be understood as rites of passage.                                       |
| Berdychevsky, Gibson and Bell (2013)              | Based on focus groups and interviews with 83 women, it revealed that link between GGA and wellbeing can be classified into four interrelated domains: escapism, different gender dynamics, existential authenticity and empowerment,                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Khoo-Lattimore and Prayag (2015)                  | Five clusters of accommodation attributes for GGAs were identified: safety conscious; safety and amenities driven, food and beverage driven, safety and activities driven, desires                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Berdychevsky, Gibson and Bell (2016)              | GGA is a term with contested and polysemous situated meanings. Some participants found the term stereotypical as it was perceived as a narrow bundle of spa-wine-and done and shop-till you-drop activities whilst others described a sense of intrapersonal existential authenticity associated with GGA. However, some participants also reports that the term fails to identify adventurous women. |
| Durko and Stone (2017)                            | Identified reasons why women travelled without their partners: female bonding, partner's personal constraints, escape from daily routine and a need for individuality. It was reported that participants were satisfied with the vacation (and would have been less satisfied if partner joined them) and that their relationships with travel companions were also enhanced.                         |
| Mirehei, Gibson, Khoo-Lattimore and Prayag (2018) | Main reasons for going on GGA: spend quality time with friends/relatives, a break from routine, to celebrate special occasion predominantly in the beach or urban location. Preferred types of hotel: budget, mid-range, luxury and                                                                                                                                                                   |

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|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                 | puts importance to cleanliness, general safety and communications regardless of hotel type                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Khoo-Lattimore and Prayag (2018)                | The examination of the relationship between motivation and accommodation of both Western and Asian women who have been on GGA revealed that motivation and accommodation performance factors were heterogenous by nationality and ethnicity.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Khoo-Lattimore, Prayag and Disegna (2019)       | Three motivation clusters which significantly depends on the type of accommodation, travel company, age and nationality of respondents were identified: a. rejoicers (prefer bed and breakfast, resort and luxury accommodation; mainly Americans ), b. enjoyers (F& B lovers, and assign importance to extra facilities such as airport transfer, free transport and loyalty cards, mostly Singaporeans, Malaysians and Australians and c. socializers (attracted to budget/midrange accommodation, assign importance to good quality of meals and healthy options in restaurants; mainly from UK and New Zealand) |
| Chen and Mak (2020)                             | Based on the examination of blogs from Chinese GGA, two types of power relations (the degree to which an actors outcome are influenced by the partner's actions) were revealed: power over (suppressing of personal preferences and completion of undesirable tasks) and power to (personal empowerment); used interdependence theory                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Kong, Guo and Huang (2022)                      | Identified three characteristics of Chinese women's GGA: a pure intimacy, freeing women from oppressive social expectations and gender norms; individualised intimacy that spans individualised boundaries and togetherness and a feminist intimacy stretching into sisterhood; used intimacy theory                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Nikjoo, Zaman, Salehi and Hernandez-Lara (2023) | Based on observing and interviews with Muslim women, it was revealed that being away from family responsibilities, routine life and gender-related restrictions, and advancement in their social and personal selves contributed to their wellbeing,                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

Despite the popularity of the GGA in the media and increasing interest from the academic community, the male counterpart of this market segment (mancation or brocation) has remained underexplored. Collinsdictionary.com (2023) defines mancation as a holiday for a group of men, especially one that involves typically masculine pursuits whilst brocation cannot be found in any dictionary. Except for Durko and Stone (2017) who mentioned mancation and described it as men travelling with male friends, the only other relevant literature on males travelling with other men are those on stag tourism (see work of Thurnell-Read, 2012a, Thurnell-Read, 2012b). This is a research gap that should be addressed given the evidenced connection between GGA and wellbeing.

## 2.2 Tourism and Wellbeing

Academic research on tourism's contribution to wellbeing has increased exponentially in the last decade (Zins and Ponocny, 2022; Yu, Smale, and Xiao, 2021; Vada et al. 2020), with the primary emphasis being on fulfilment, hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing, self-development, and authentic living (Saari et al., 2023; Yu, Sirgy, and Bosnjak, 2021). Hobson and Dietrich (1994) detail that there is an “underlying assumption in our society that tourism is a mentally and physically healthy pursuit to follow in our leisure time” (p. 23), and therefore is an important factor in enhancing people's wellbeing. As travel experiences consist of physical and cognitive activities (Dolnicar et al. 2012) and provide opportunities for escape and freedom (Gilbert and Abdullah, 2004), it has direct and indirect positive impacts (Neal et al. 2007) on those taking vacations.

Despite the attention that wellbeing has received in research, there is no agreed definition of the concept (Simons and Baldwin, 2021; Mansfield et al., 2020; Goodman et al., 2018). In the absence of an agreed definition, the term wellbeing is often used interchangeably with synonyms terms such as wellness, happiness, quality of life, the good life (Zins and Ponocny, 2022; Global Wellness Institute (GWI) 2021; Simons and Baldwin, 2021). In general, the concept of wellbeing deals with what constitutes a good life and is sometimes referred to as authentic living or living well (McCabe and Johnson, 2013). There is consensus amongst researchers from various backgrounds that there are two main approaches to wellbeing – objective wellbeing (i.e., GDP, wealth, socioeconomic status) and subjective wellbeing (i.e., happiness, life satisfaction quality of life) (Zheng et al., 2022; Filep et al., 2022; Voukelatou et al., 2021). The focus on the current study is on subjective wellbeing as tourism represents an experiential form of consumption that enables people to express positive emotions, build social relationships, and engage in activities that collectively enhance their subjective wellbeing and quality of life (Zheng et al., 2022; Bimonte and Faralla, 2015; McCabe, 2009).

Tourist wellbeing is defined as “the tourists' affective pleasure and inner feeling of self-growth in the process of satisfying various sensory needs and achieving travel goals” (Su et al., 2021, p3). Tourism research on subjective wellbeing acknowledges two streams – hedonic and eudaimonic (Zins and Ponocny, 2022; Su et al., 2021; Buzinde, 2020). Hedonic wellbeing relates to the pleasure or happiness aspect of wellbeing (Gedecho et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2023; Su et al., 2020; Lengieza et al., 2019) while eudaimonic wellbeing relates

to aspects such as personal growth, realizing individual potential and self-fulfilment (Al-okaaily et al.2023). Relaxing and comfortable tourist activities trigger hedonic wellbeing while effortful tourist experiences trigger eudaimonic wellbeing (Huang et al., 2023; Su et al., 2020; Rahmani et al., 2018; Laing and Frost, 2017). Although associations between wellbeing and tourism experiences is well documented in research, there is scope for more research that explores the contribution of various tourism contexts and activities to hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing (Huang et al., 2023; Laing and Frost, 2017). We attempt to address this gap by exploring the extent to which GGA and mancation activities contributes to hedonic and to hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing as expressed by tourists.

### **3. Methodology**

Image-based social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Pinterest etc., have gained prominence as visual forms of communication (Volo and Irimiás, 2021). The value of visual content in the form of pictures, postcards, moving images, reels and so on, has established legitimacy for visual representations to be considered an important source of data in tourism (Balomenou and Garrod 2019; Matteucci, 2013; Rakić and Chambers, 2011; Chambers, 2011). Instagram is one of the most prominent and successful platforms and have been used to examine tourist photographic practices such as the work of Ulrike (2017). Adopting a qualitative research approach, we will conduct a content analysis of Instagram posts of GGA and mancation. For this study, we will use a purposive sampling approach that is consistent with previous studies that used Instagram content analysis (such as the work of Cohen, Irwin, Newton-John et al, 2019). To acquire the sample frame for this study, we will collect images/reels and captions on Instagram by searching for posts with hashtags “#girlstrip”, “#boystrips”, #girlfirmedgetaway and other variations of the term. To roughly match the work of Lucibello et al (2021), we will allocate 10 days to collect Instagram posts at the following times: 10:00 and 18:00. This data collection aims to capture as many posts as possible during the weekdays and a weekend. Using NVivo, the posts will be coded following the inter-related four domains linking well-being and GGAs proposed by Berdechesvky et al (2013): escapism, different gender dynamics, existential authenticity and empowerment. Images/reels are analysed together with captions which may reflect how individuals explicitly used language and hashtags to relate their trips to wellbeing and mental health. Detailed description of the coding categories will be provided at the conference

presentation. The content analysis will aim to compare these domains of wellbeing for GGAs and mancation.

#### **4. Analysis**

The research team is scheduled to collect data from January 2024 and will be ready with preliminary findings for presentation at the conference.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The research findings will provide insights on the underexplored market of GGA and mancation. Theoretically, the research will also contribute to a deeper understanding of the links between GGA/mancations and hedonic/eudaimonic wellbeing. In terms of methodological contribution, this study will respond to the call of Pera et al., (2020) for research that examines photo-sharing and subjective wellbeing using Instagram as a rich and valuable source of data. From managerial perspective, findings on gender differences in how wellbeing is expressed can inform marketing and communication strategies. Practitioners can design activities and travel packages that will match the needs of the GGA/mancation market.

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