



VisitEngland™

Understanding the “Staycation”

Research Summary

Topline Findings

- The uplift in domestic holidays in 2009 was generated by two groups of “Staycationers,” the finance-driven “Switchers” and the experience-driven “Extras,” both influenced to varying degrees by the economic climate, media coverage, and a more general macro trend to the local.
- The vast majority of staycationers enjoyed their breaks, finding them engaging, involving, and at best delivering a more emotionally profound experience than holidaying abroad, though those who sought to directly replace two weeks in the sun with an English equivalent may have been disappointed.
- The 2009 experience has helped awaken a latent pride in England as a holiday destination. As a result, there is scope for domestic breaks to form a larger part in holiday repertoires in future, primarily for short and mid-length trips. Communications around the ideas of rediscovery and enjoyment are well placed to motivate visitors to make this happen

Objectives

In 2009, the economic downturn and weaker pound together drove an increase in domestic tourism, resulting in an uplift of 18% in the number of holiday trips taken in England – the so-called “staycation.”

VisitEngland carried out research in February-April 2010 to understand more about the motivations for last year’s change in behaviour, and to explore how the 2009 experience has influenced perceptions of domestic holidays – and therefore what this is likely to mean for holiday decisions in 2010 and beyond.

Methodology

The research was carried out over two stages. In an initial quantitative phase, 1000 adults aged 18+ were interviewed about their attitudes to the credit crunch, their holiday behaviour in 2009, and their plans for 2010. This allowed key audiences to be identified, and in a subsequent qualitative stage, eight group discussions were carried out in London, Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds among respondents with a variety of orientations towards domestic breaks.

Summary of Findings

The Economic Downturn

Between February and October 2009, concern about the economic downturn fell sharply, but by February 2010, this had started to increase again, as had levels of concern about job security. For many people, the recession is very real, manifested in the need to cut back on luxuries, spend on food and clothes and the holiday portfolio, and these sacrifices can, unsurprisingly, cause resentment.

Over the same period, there has been a continuous increase in the numbers believing that the worst is over, driven by media discussion of “green shoots” and the potential offered by a new government, though some question whether things will ever be as good as they were pre-recession, particularly older age groups who have seen house prices and pension funds eroded by the collapse of the financial markets.

2009 – The Year of the Staycation

The research identified two groups who changed their behaviour in 2009 to generate the uplift in domestic holidays, together making up 25% of the population:

“Switchers” (13%) replaced a foreign holiday with one at home, primarily because of financial constraints (this group included more families than average) and/or the desire to be on hand if needed by work. All types of trips were replaced, including over one in five longer (8+ night) breaks. Switchers took their holidays with a mixture of attitudes – some were resentful, some talked of the “Dunkirk Spirit” of making the best of things, and others were enthusiastic from the outset.



“Extras” (15%) were very different – often younger pre-families, this group were less affected by the credit crunch than others, and had often taken more overseas breaks as well as having taken more domestic ones. Having made a much more positive choice, they had felt excited and intrigued about their domestic breaks, and were motivated by a desire to explore and see somewhere new.

Among both groups, it was clear that the media had played a pivotal role. The term “staycation” was frequently mentioned, and respondents cited news stories about increases in domestic travel. A macro trend towards the local has also helped drive behaviour – for example, TV programmes such as “Coast” and media emphasis on “local produce” have helped foster a latent pride in this country and what it has to offer.

The 2009 Experience - Overall

The experience of holidaying at home was an overwhelmingly positive one – 86% of staycationers described their holiday as “excellent” or “good.” Visitors talked about how fun and engaging domestic breaks were, enabling families to spend time together and bond in a way that didn’t happen on an overseas beach break. Many were also pleasantly surprised by how much they enjoyed their break (especially those who had started by feeling that they were making a sacrifice) and over half of all staycationers said that their break was better than they expected.

It is clear that a break in England is very different to the usual foreign holiday, and while many experienced this as something positive, those who had tried to replicate a traditional sun and sand holiday with an English equivalent were often disappointed, feeling that they couldn’t relax in less-than-perfect weather, and sometimes struggled to find things to do (in contrast to package holidays where activities are laid on).

The 2009 Experience - Value

80% of staycationers described their break as good value, and over half said that it was better value than the overseas holiday it replaced – yet there remains a consensus that England is “not cheap.” Rather, it was chosen as a money-saving option in 2009 in part because the exchange rate makes previously low cost European destinations closer in price to the UK, and at the same time, it is much easier to budget and control spending at home than when using a foreign currency in a less familiar country. Ever increasing flight prices also make domestic breaks seem relatively better value than in recent years.

The 2009 Experience – Weather

Despite press coverage to the contrary, only 10% described their holiday weather as “poor” – the remainder saying that it had been good (39%) or mixed (50%). While those with good weather had enjoyed their breaks the most (90% describing them as excellent or very good), even among those unlucky enough to have poor weather almost three quarters were positive about their holiday experience. In general, people are fairly pragmatic about the weather, and finding activities for one or two rainy days can be part of the fun, though continuous bad weather will spoil the holiday.

Future Intentions

Respondents were optimistic about their plans for 2010, with more expecting to take holidays of all types this year than had taken them in 2009. There may well be a degree of wishful thinking in these responses, though the fact that the greatest uplift (from 56% in 2009 to 67% in 2010) was in overseas breaks suggest that some people really are planning to revert to foreign holidays this year. Nonetheless, 90% of staycationers expect to take at least one England break in 2010 – the 2009 experience has improved opinions of holidaying at home for many, and left them keen to discover more, though this may mean taking shorter breaks rather than a longer holiday.

The continued impact of the recession means that some will have to take domestic breaks again in 2010 for financial reasons, but there are signs that a more permanent shift in attitudes is starting to happen, with almost half the population (and 70% of staycationers) expecting that beyond 2010 they will take more holidays in the UK than they have in the past.

Persuasion

Respondents consistently call for more information, education and inspiration about holidaying in England – they are keen to do more, but want help in making their wishes into reality. A number of messaging options were tested in the research, and those that performed best were those that tapped into positive emotions – “Rediscover Your England” and “Enjoy Every Minute of England.” Highlighting the negatives of overseas travel (hassle, cost and value) is both less credible and less appealing, though providing ways for people to access good value when travelling at home is something that would be appreciated.



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