Holiday Parks Quality Assurance Scheme

Research Summary

Objectives
Research was carried out to inform the review of the design, structure and content of the British Holiday Park Quality Assurance Scheme in the UK. Specific information objectives included the decision-making process in park choice, perceptions and understanding of park quality, and awareness, understanding and expectations of a holiday park quality scheme.

Methodology
Sept 2008 - Qualitative Research (5 group discussions - 2 with static caravan renters, 1 with campers, and 2 with touring caravan/motorhome holidaymakers)
Oct/Nov 2008 - Quantitative Research (1035 online interviews, quotas set by holiday type to be representative of all camping/caravan holiday takers, and location (nation) of holiday)

Summary of Findings

Decision Making
Choice of park is driven by a mixture of broad “external” and “internal” factors – external factors include location (ease of travel and surrounding area e.g. beach, countryside), and cost of holiday, while the highest ranked “internal” factors are the static caravan accommodation (for those taking this holiday type) and importantly, the quality/condition of facilities / amenities at the park.

The most important amenities are basic facilities such as heated toilets / showers (mattering most to campers), waste disposal / drainage and electric hook-ups. Catering / retail is also important, though a nearby supermarket ranks slightly higher than a shop on site, and while leisure / entertainment facilities are also desirable, they matter far more to families with children than those without.

The availability of a tourist board QA scheme is relatively less important in the decision-making process – but ranks higher among those with children and those taking longer holidays – groups perhaps less willing to take a risk with holiday / park quality.

The Internet is the dominant information source – with the park’s own website and search engine results (e.g. “camping devon”) most widely used. Online user reviews are increasingly referred to, and are widely trusted, though there is recognition that these are not infallible, and can be manipulated or influenced by an atypical bad experience.
What Constitutes Park Quality?

The most important drivers of quality are safety (personal safety and security of tent/caravan/vehicle), cleanliness/maintenance of basic facilities (toilets/shower blocks, park grounds/litter around the site), friendliness of staff, and for those using static caravans, the quality of caravans (both exterior and internal quality/condition).

Across most aspects, quality was more important to static caravanners than others – perhaps reflecting longer stays/less flexibility and different demands of the holiday (campers/tourers can more easily move on, and may in any case be seeking a more “back to nature” experience).

The issue of security was raised spontaneously in the qualitative research, and was proved to be of high importance in the quantitative follow-up, seen as critical/very important to over 80%. In the main, this was about knowing that someone could be on hand at short notice (and for some, restricting access to the camp) – more overt measures such as patrolling security guards or CCTV were less necessary than e.g. a 24 hour emergency phone number, and for some would be an unwelcome invasion of privacy.

The importance of quality/condition of amenities varied by holiday type – toilet/shower block cleanliness and maintenance not surprisingly matter more to campers and tourers than to static caravan users with private bathrooms – for this group, general site cleanliness/maintenance are more important.

Leisure and catering facilities are seen as less of a determinant of quality – with the condition of swimming pools and children’s play areas ranking highest in this area, ahead of restaurants or bars. Site layout too is relatively less important.

Awareness and Understanding of Rating Schemes

Just over half of site users are aware that there is a quality scheme for holiday parks, though more frequent users have higher awareness levels, and 2/3 recognise the quality rose symbol. There is however widespread acceptance of the idea of a rating scheme – 90% would find it at least fairly useful.

When asked, 4 in 5 agreed that accommodation quality should be included in the scheme, and that the scheme should be a balance between amenities available and their condition/quality. The majority felt that a 5-star rating should be reserved only for those parks with 5-star standards throughout.