

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE US FAMILY REUNION TRAVEL MARKET: MOTIVATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

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Family travel has received increasing research attention due to its sheer market size and growth. The *Travel Industry Association of America* (TIA, 2004) reported that families account for 65% of domestic travel, and, on average, spend more money when traveling than individual travelers. Interestingly, TIA reported that one third of family travelers travel to attend family reunions. However, family reunion travelers, as a special segment of family travel markets, have been largely neglected by academic communities. Little is understood about what motivates a family to hold and attend family reunions. How do family reunion travelers make their decisions? What kinds of activities are held at the events? Are family reunions really different from a more typical family trip or vacation?

This study investigated the motives and travel patterns of the family reunion travel market to better understand multigenerational family travelers in general. Although travel motivations have been studied, few researchers examined travel motivation in a multigenerational family setting. Before further discussion, in this study, “family reunion” refers

to the gathering of multiple family units, composed of at least three generations on a recurring basis, not for special events such as weddings or funerals; thus, the main purpose of the event should be getting together with extended family. The empirical portion of this research included two analyses: qualitative and quantitative. For the qualitative study, twenty-two in-depth semi-structured interviews were performed to identify interesting characteristics of family reunion travelers. The interviews highlighted the potential of the market and provided useful insights for the qualitative study design. The data from the larger scale quantitative study of 309 family reunion travelers was analyzed, and resulted in several important findings. To properly assess family reunion travelers' motivations, the Family Reunion Travel Motivation Scale (FRTMS) was developed for this study. The following are some of this study's most interesting findings.

Family Reunion Travel Patterns

Most family reunions were held during the summer (65.8%). Fall (12.6%), winter (11.2%), and spring (10.4%) were significantly less frequent than summer. The reunion frequency varied greatly, and ranged from *less than six months* to 10 years between events. However, over half of the families hold the family reunions once a year (31.9%) or once every two years (26.0%). Most respondents who answered *other* (9.2%) indicated their family just started holding family reunions or only sporadically hold family reunions. Figure 1 is a summary of the family reunion event frequency data. The number of attendees ranged from 4 to 500. As the Figure 2 shows, half of the family reunions in the sample had fewer than 100 attendees.

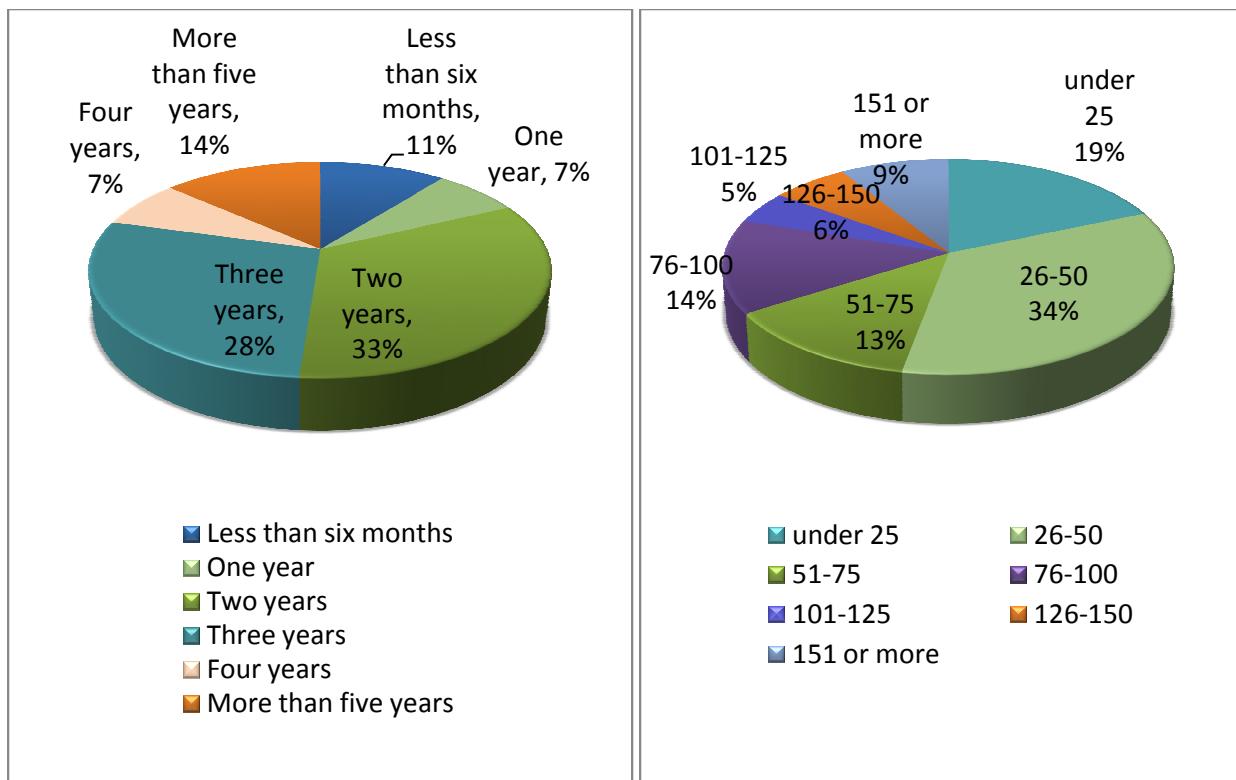


Figure 1 The Frequency of Family Reunion

Figure 2 The Number of Attendees

As shown in Figure 3, events typically contained three (37.8%) or four (45.7%) generations, but some family reunions had more than five generations (15.8%). Almost half of all respondents' families spent less than \$300 (45.4%) during the trip; however, the range of household travel expenditures was widely distributed. The summary is shown in Figure 4. Family members appeared to travel with their parents (22.2%), siblings (21.5), and spouse/partner most (13%) frequently. A small number of respondents (1.5%) answered that they traveled with their pets or nieces/nephews as a guardian.

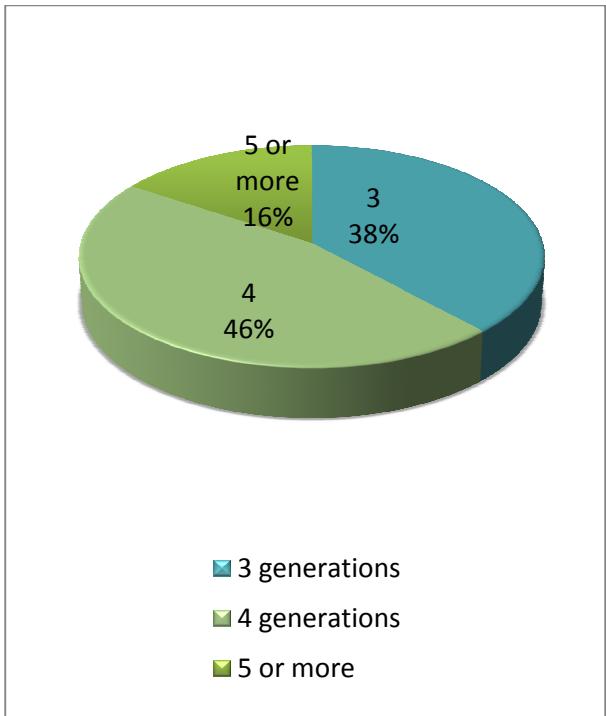


Figure 3 The Number of Generations

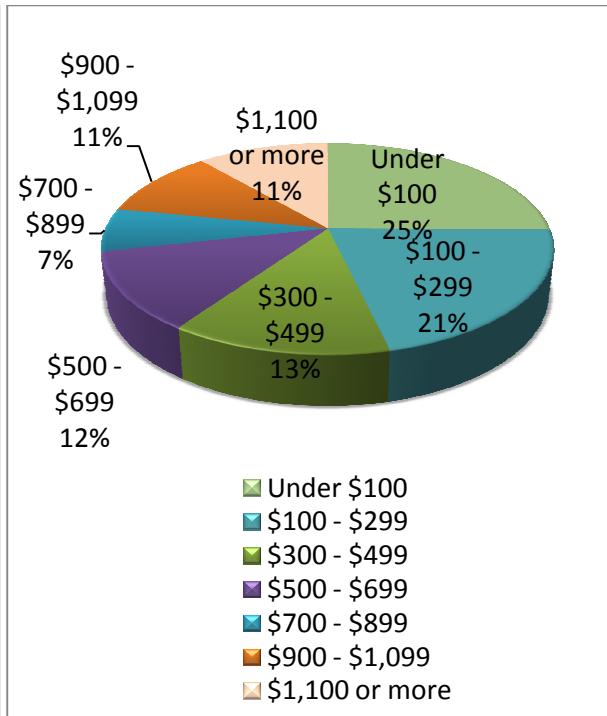


Figure 4 The Travel Expenditure (per family unit)

Participants were asked to explain their choice of season in an open-ended question; the results of the necessary content analysis are presented in Figure 5. People preferred summer (65.8%) due to a preference for *outdoor locations* and the availability of outdoor activities and nice weather (35%). *Kids out of school* (34.4%) was also one of the most frequent responses. Attendance is of paramount importance to a family reunion, the third most common reason for choosing summer was *Easier for most of families to attend* (22.9%). Children's summer vacations and Independence Day helped increase the popularity of summer family reunions. For those who selected *other* (7.6%), family anniversaries, such as a birthday or wedding anniversary, were the main reasons. At 12.6% fall was the next most popular season. Holidays including Thanksgiving and Labor Day (52.5%) were the primary reasons for those who chose the fall. Fall's nice weather (22.5%) was another reason, since it facilitates outdoor activities.

such as “fall leaves” sightseeing. Winter (11.2%) was the third most frequent season for family reunions. Christmas (82.9%) was the primary reason for choosing winter. Spring (10.4%) was the least popular, but those who chose it typically cited holidays like Easter and Memorial Day (52%). Spring was chosen due to the availability of outdoor locations and nice weather (24%), and because of traditions or the families’ schedule (24%). Both spring and fall were also chosen to decrease expenses since those seasons tend to be less expensive.

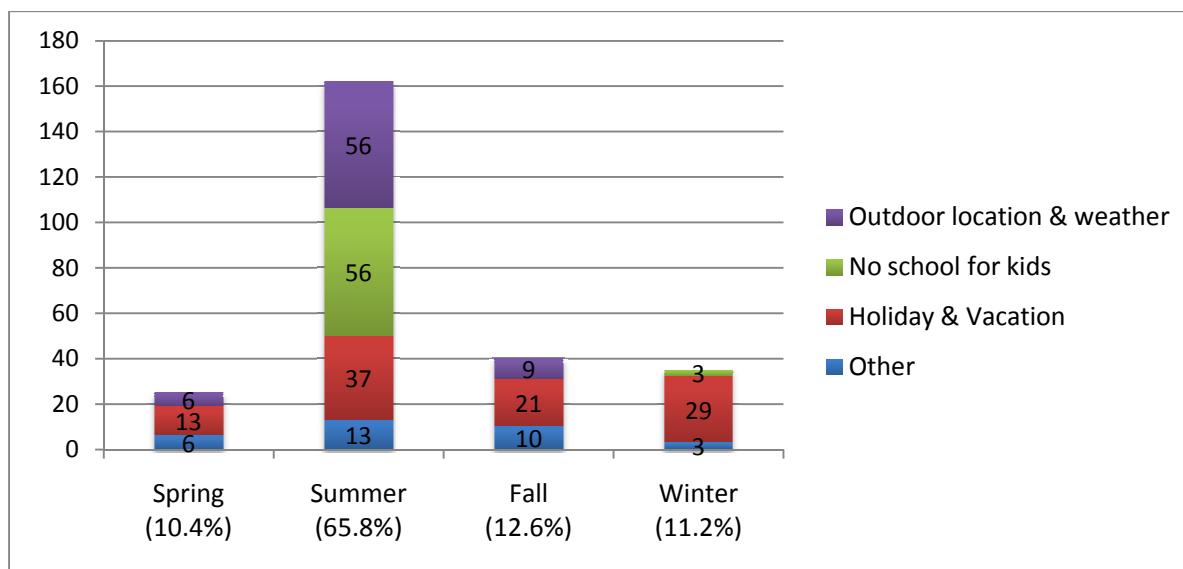


Figure 5 Family Reunion Travel Patterns: Reasons for the Season Choice

Content analysis was used to identify the reasons for destination choice (Figure 6). The majority of family reunion travelers chose a destination closest to most attendees (36.5%). The next most common choice was a place with historical value to family (18.6%). Having a variety of activities (14.7%) and having family-oriented activities’ available (12.1%) were also important factors for the destination choice. Approximately 10.7% of families rotate who hosts the family reunions.

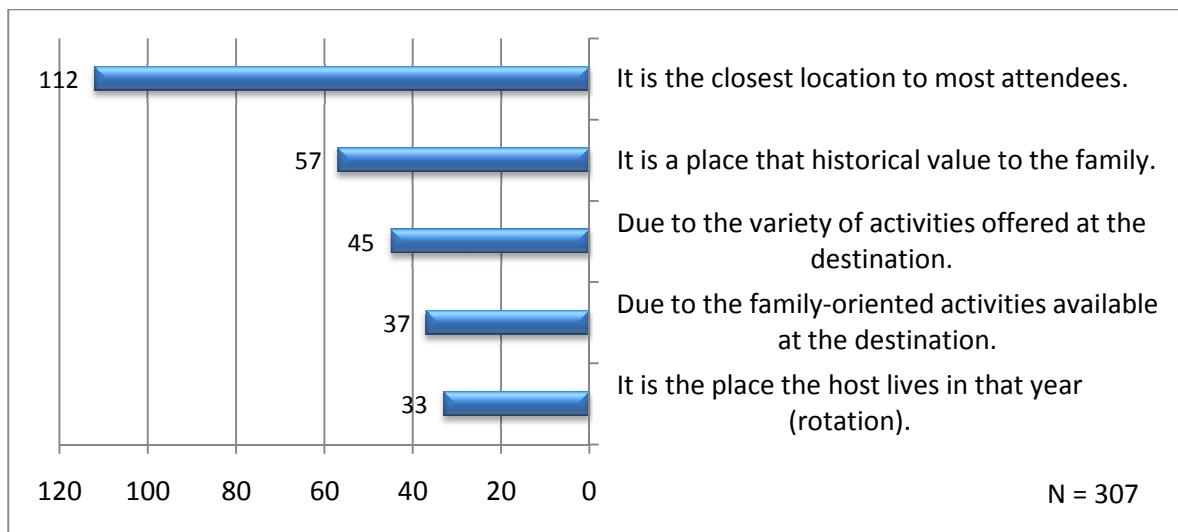


Figure 6 Top Five Reasons for Destination Choice

Motivations and Activities for the Family Reunion Travel

The results of this study highlighted six key motivations for family reunion travel: Tending to Immediate Family Needs, Family Communication, Family Closeness, Family Adaptability, Maintaining Family History, and Personal Relaxation. These motivational factors were analyzed to identify differences based on demographic characteristics. According to the findings of this study, there were statistically significant differences by gender, household roles, household types, and ethnicity. Travel characteristics, including information about decision-making and family activities at family reunions, were also collected and analyzed. Family reunions play a significant role in fulfilling family needs. Table 1 provides a summary of the factor loadings from the statistical analysis of the FRTMS.

Table 1 Summaries of Factor Loadings of FRTMS

Factors	Number of Items	Mean	Std.	Eigenvalue	Variance (%)	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Factor 1: Tending to immediate family needs	6	4.08	.671	10.128	38.954	.866
Factor 2: Family communication	5	3.55	.867	1.700	6.539	.875
Factor 3: Family closeness	5	4.50	.515	1.618	6.225	.832
Factor 4: Maintaining family history	4	4.40	.586	1.286	4.947	.838
Factor 5: Family adaptability	4	3.67	.743	1.159	4.459	.716
Factor 6: Personal relaxation	2	3.82	.863	1.086	4.177	.667

Note: N=309. Kaise-Meyer-Olkin measure=.927; Bartlett's test=2473.879 ($p=.000$).

- a. Total variance explained=65.3%
- b. 5-point Likert Scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree)
- c. FRTMS: Family Reunion Travel Motivation Scale.

Table 2 shows the top ten activities at reunions by generation groups. The most popular activities in each group (i.e., casual chatting, taking family photos, and sharing family photos) overlapped between generations, indicating those are the common intergenerational leisure activities. *Cooking* was a largely adult-oriented activity while children had a tendency to participate more often in *outdoor sports* and *Swimming*. Comparing parents to grandparents, *outdoor sports*, interestingly, were participated in more often by the senior group with their grandchildren. The parents group was more involved in activities involving *family videos*. Passive activities, including *indoor sports*, were more likely to be an intergenerational activity.

Table 2 Top 10 of Family Reunion Activities by Age Group

Rank	Children	Parents	Grandparents	Great-grandparents
1.	Casual chatting	Casual chatting	Casual chatting	Casual chatting
2.	Taking family photos	Taking family photos	Taking family photos	Taking family photos
3.	Outdoor sports	Sharing family photos	Sharing family photos	Sharing family photos
4.	Board/table games	Dining in a restaurant	Board/table games	Cooking
5.	Sharing family photos	Sightseeing	Cooking	Board/table games
6.	Swimming	Cooking	Outdoor sports	Church service
7.	Dining in a restaurant	Shopping	Church service	Sightseeing
8.	Church service	Church service	Dining in a restaurant	Dining in a restaurant
9.	Sightseeing	Outdoor sports	Sightseeing	Outdoor sports
10.	Shopping	Board/table games	Shopping	Shopping
Rank	Children & Parents	Children & Grandparents	Parents & Grandparents	Children & Parents & Grandparents
1.	Casual chatting	Casual chatting	Casual chatting	Casual chatting
2.	Sharing family photos	Taking family photos	Sharing family photos	Sharing family photos
3.	Taking family photos	Sharing family photos	Taking family photos	Taking family photos
4.	Dining in a restaurant	Board/table games	Church service	Dining in a restaurant
5.	Sightseeing	Dining in a restaurant	Board/table games	Sightseeing
6.	Outdoor sports	Church service	Dining in a restaurant	Church service
7.	Church service	Sightseeing	Sightseeing	Board/table games
8.	Board/table games	Outdoor sports	Cooking	Shopping
9.	Shopping	Shopping	Shopping	Outdoor sports
10.	Family videos	Family videos	Outdoor sports	Family videos

Note: N=232.

A new intergenerational activity classification system was developed, allowing activities to be classified into four categories: Indoor-based group/individual activities and outdoor-based group/individual activities. This study provides valuable insights into multigenerational family travel in general by using family reunion travel as a case study. The results of the study form a suitable foundation for additional research into family travel and other types of multigenerational family travel and events. The analyses also produce results destination marketers may find valuable for developing targeted advertising materials.

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This document was produced to share several key findings from the study with those who helped voluntarily distribute the family reunion survey conducted in 2009. The results of the study may be used and reprinted provided the original article is referenced. As of this writing, the complete manuscript is not available online, but, in the near future, it will be accessible by visiting www.proquest.com.