

## **ABSTRACT**

This research investigates how cycling tourists use online technology to help choose their desired destination for cycling away from their home base. It provides an insight into cycling tourism in Australia, and, in particular, the online world of cycling tourists. The thesis examines the academic literature in respect to tourist motivation, information search models and destination choice modelling. It constructs two conceptual models on the motivations of cycling tourists and their information search patterns.

Whilst we know from statistical data collected over a number of years that cycling is a significant activity for a large number of Australians, we do not have a good knowledge of how many of these cyclists are cycling tourists, either in Australia or overseas. This work, together with that of a small number of other research efforts, is expanding this knowledge base. There is a body of work now that provides some evidence that this is a significant niche sector in tourism.

The elements of online technology explored in this thesis included the use of websites, online maps, blogs, wikis and social media. The research employed a mixed methods approach using focus groups, an online survey and data discovery through a number of online sources. The approach was one of “dominant/less dominant design” where the primary technique used was a quantitative method using an online survey with focus groups and data discovery taking a secondary role.

Much of the previous research in this field has been focussed on a narrow definition of cycle tourism, concentrating on the exploits of recreational cyclists. This research, together with a small body of other research, indicates that cycle tourism is much more than just recreation, with mountain biking now a significant sector. Competitive cycling events and challenge events attract substantial numbers of tourists and are significant contributors to tourism income for regions where they are held.

Through this research the information needs of cycling tourists and how they want to access this information are now better understood. The research has shown that maps are an important information source for cycling tourists and that the cyclists who responded to the online survey used for this research are very active in online forums

dedicated to cycling. Social media is identified as an important emerging source for gathering and sharing information about cycling for this group.

Whilst this research has addressed a number of questions related to the use of online technology by cycling tourists, it gives an indication of the role and importance of online technology and online mapping as information sources in the decision-making processes in the broader tourism market. The outcome of this research has the potential to assist urban planners, event managers, cycling associations and clubs, regional tourism bodies and researchers to better understand their constituents and markets and how to service them better using modern technology.

This research is a first step in exploring the use of online technology by cyclists as tourists. This is a rapidly evolving world with the uptake of this technology being fanned by lower costs of entry, more effective tools and a rapid expansion of mobile communications. The results reported here are from data captured in 2009-10 and if the surveys were repeated now at the time of writing (August 2013) some significant changes would be evident. This field of research is deserving of more attention to understand better the use of this technology, and the related access and information requirements of users.