

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND DISTRIBUTION FOR ABORIGINAL TOURISM IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

A Focus on the 4WD Market

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STATUTORY DECLARATION

“I declare in lieu of an oath that I have written this diploma thesis myself and that I have not used any sources or resources other than stated for its preparation. I further declare that I have clearly indicated all direct and indirect quotations. This diploma thesis has not been submitted elsewhere for examination purposes.”

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(Doris Schmallegger)

ABSTRACT

In recent years, tourism in desert and Outback regions in Australia had to face a number of challenges. Desert tourism stakeholders have therefore recognised the need to open up new markets and develop new products in order to maintain a viable tourism industry in the future. In this context, four wheel drive (4WD) travellers have been identified as a particularly interesting market for tourism development in the desert. They have continued to grow in contrast to other market segments and are more likely to disperse from high volume tourism routes in order to explore new and remote regions. They have also been considered as a potential market for new tourism products provided by remote desert communities, especially for Aboriginal tourism products.

Aboriginal cultural tourism has been recognised as one of the main pillars and competitive advantages of tourism in central Australia. However, despite substantial investment by government marketing and economic development agencies, the sector is characterised by a lack of product variation and no clear marketing strategy for promoting and distributing products. Available commercial products are largely focused on the organised tour market and are concentrated around major tourist hubs, such as Alice Springs or Uluru/Ayers Rock. Increasing the opportunities for Aboriginal tourism development in central Australia, as well as in other remote desert regions, might require an extended range and diversity of products and new distribution strategies to access new markets.

Very little is currently known about the demand for Aboriginal tourism products from the desert 4WD market and the potential for Aboriginal desert people to develop viable products for this growing market sector. To address this gap in knowledge, this research sought to identify to what extent 4WD travellers in central Australia are interested in getting indigenous cultural experiences on their desert trips and what kind of products they might consume. The study further investigated information seeking patterns and trip planning characteristics of 4WD travellers to find out whether current marketing and distribution methods of indigenous tourism products are appropriate for this market.

A qualitative study with domestic and international 4WD travel parties was conducted in central Australia to assess their demand for Aboriginal tourism products and their information search and trip planning strategies. The findings suggest that Aboriginal cultural experiences only play a minor role in the overall trip experience of 4WD desert trips. In addition, the region's current Aboriginal tourism offer, which primarily consists of highly structured commercial tours, and a perceived lack of authenticity constitute major barriers in marketing Aboriginal tourism products to 4WD travellers. Aboriginal experiences that would be desired by 4WD travellers include for example tours and activities, which incorporate educational aspects, personal and informal interaction with Aboriginal people and individual or "off the beaten track" experiences as opposed to experiences offered to tour bus groups and the mass market.

The findings furthermore suggest that 4WD markets generally do not plan their trips in all details. Decisions about products to be consumed and activities to be undertaken are normally made spontaneously on the way to or at the destination. Information sources are often extensively used prior to departure to enhance the knowledge about a certain region but do not necessarily lead to a purchase decision in advance. In addition, 4WD travellers expect information about tourism products to be readily available at places where they normally tend to get information. Even if they notice a lack of information about a certain product they would be interested in, they do not actively pursue and extend their information search to chase a particular experience but rather substitute it by another activity that turns out to be available at the location.

Aboriginal tourism businesses interested in targeting 4WD travellers will have to consider that information about available products needs to reach the market both prior to departure and at the destination itself. This paper finally emphasises the need for Aboriginal product suppliers to enter partnerships and alliances with existing businesses that are already catering to the current 4WD market to facilitate a more effective distribution process.

ABSTRAKT

Der Tourismus in Wüsten und Outback Regionen von Australien hatte in den vergangenen Jahren mit zahlreichen Problemen und Herausforderungen zu kämpfen. Tourismusvertreter in der Region haben aus diesem Grund die Initiative gestartet, neue Produkte für neue Märkte zu entwickeln, um in Zukunft eine lebensfähige Tourismuswirtschaft in diesen abgeschiedenen Regionen zu gewährleisten. In diesem Zusammenhang wurden besonders Touristen, die mit Allradfahrzeugen als Haupttransportmittel in die Wüste kommen (diese werden in weiterer Folge 4WD Touristen genannt), als potentieller Hoffungsmarkt angesehen. Grund zu dieser Annahme liefert eine Zahl von Marktbeobachtungen, die dem 4WD Markt eine relativ hohe Wachstumsrate in Wüsten und Outback Regionen bescheinigen. Darüber hinaus zeigen 4WD Touristen eine starke Tendenz dazu, die gängigen Hauptreiserouten zu verlassen und auch entlegenere Gebiete zu erkunden. Der 4WD Markt bietet somit eine Reihe von neuen Möglichkeiten für die Entwicklung von neuen Tourismusprodukten in abgeschiedenen Regionen, insbesondere für die Bevölkerungsschicht der australischen Ureinwohner.

Aboriginal Tourismus gilt als einer der Hauptwettbewerbsvorteile in der Region Zentralsaustralien. Trotz anhaltender Bemühungen seitens Regierung und Tourismusverantwortlicher ist Aboriginal Tourismus in Zentralsaustralien weitgehend von einer mangelnden Produktvielfalt geprägt und verfügt weiters über keine klaren Marketing- und Distributionsstrategien für Aboriginal Tourismusprodukte. Kommerzielle Produkte in diesem Bereich spezialisieren sich zumeist auf den organisierten Reiseveranstalterbereich und konzentrieren sich größtenteils auf die Haupttourismusgebiete – Alice Springs und Uluru/Ayers Rock. Um die Entwicklung von Aboriginal Tourismus in Zentralsaustralien nachhaltig zu steigern, werden deshalb vor allem eine Angebotserweiterung sowie die Entwicklung neuer Vertriebsstrategien für neue Tourismusmärkte als notwendig erachtet.

Zur Zeit ist relativ wenig über die Nachfrage nach Aboriginal Tourismus seitens der 4WD Touristen bekannt und Aussagen, wonach insbesondere der 4WD Markt ein potentielles Betätigungsfeld für die Aboriginal Bevölkerung darstellt, basieren weitgehend auf Spekulationen. Die vorliegende Forschungsarbeit hat sich zum Ziel gesetzt,

herauszufinden, in welchem Ausmaß 4WD Touristen in Zentralaustralien an Aboriginal Kultur interessiert sind und welche Art von Produkten besondere Aussicht auf Erfolg am 4WD Markt haben. Diese Studie diskutiert im weiteren Sinne das Informations- und Reiseplanungsverhalten von 4WD Touristen und dessen Auswirkungen auf derzeitige Marketing- und Distributionsstrategien für Aboriginal Tourismus.

Im Rahmen der Forschungsarbeit wurde eine qualitative Studie mit australischen und internationalen 4WD Touristen in Zentralaustralien durchgeführt. Studienresultate weisen darauf hin, dass Aboriginal Kultur nur eine sehr untergeordnete Rolle im Gesamterlebnis einer 4WD Reise spielt. Darüber hinaus gelten vor allem das einseitige Angebot und ein Mangel an authentischen Erlebnissen als Haupthindernisse in der Vermarktung von Aboriginal Tourismus am 4WD Markt. Aboriginal Tourismus Produkte für den 4WD Markt sollten bevorzugt einen hohen Lerngehalt aufweisen, die Möglichkeit bieten, mit Aborigines direkt in Kontakt zu treten und individuelle Erlebnisse enthalten, die klar in Abgrenzung zu den gängigen Massenprodukten positioniert sind.

4WD Touristen treffen viele ihrer Reiseentscheidungen erst im Verlauf der Reise. Obwohl sie sich zumeist ausführlich vor Antritt ihrer Reise über die Region informieren, trägt dieses Verhalten aber hauptsächlich dazu bei, sich einen Überblick über das Angebot in der Region zu verschaffen und führt nur in den seltensten Fällen zu Kaufentscheidungen und Buchungen. Weiters fällt auf, dass Zusatzaktivitäten vor Ort zu einem hohen Grad substituierbar sind. 4WD Touristen erwarten, dass Informationen über mögliche Aktivitäten ohne großen Aufwand vor Ort erhältlich sind, die sie für ihren Entscheidungsprozess benötigen. Falls Informationen über gewisse Aktivitäten nicht vorhanden sind, werden diese spontan durch andere Möglichkeiten ersetzt.

Aboriginal Tourismusunternehmen, die am 4WD Markt interessiert sind, müssen erkennen, dass Informationen über ihre Produkte den 4WD Markt sowohl vor Antritt als auch während der Reise erreichen müssen. Diese Forschungsarbeit weist vor allem darauf hin, dass Partnerschaften mit anderen Unternehmen, die bereits als Hauptinformationsträger für den 4WD Markt agieren, die Grundvoraussetzung für eine bessere Vermarktungs- und Distributionsstrategie darstellen.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

4WD	Four Wheel Drive
ASGC	Australian Standards for Geographical Classification
CAZR	Centre for Arid Zone Research
CRC	Cooperative Research Centre
DK CRC	Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre
DKA	Desert Knowledge Australia
e.g.	exempli gratia, for example
ed./eds.	Editor/Editors
et al.	et alii, and others
F&B	food and beverage
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
i.e.	id est, which means
ibid.	ibidem, in the same place
n.p.a.	no page available
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
NTTC	Northern Territory Tourist Commission
QL	Queensland
SA	South Australia
SME	Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprise
SMTE	Small- and Medium-Sized Tourism Enterprise
VIC	Victoria
VIC	Visitor Information Centre
WA	Western Australia
WTO	World Tourism Organisation

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Schmallegger, D. and Carson, D. (2007); Reaching the Independent Traveller: Product Distribution Issues for Aboriginal Tourism Enterprises in Remote Australia; prepared for the 3rd International Conference on Tourism, 5-6 July 2007, Athens

Taylor, A., Schmallegger, D., Carson, D. and Davis, P. (2007); Information Sourcing by Domestic 4WD Travellers to Remote Australia

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the Study

Tourism has been recognised as one of the main economic drivers in desert and Outback regions of Australia. Much of the main organised tourism activity, however, clusters around the major population centres like Alice Springs or a limited number of iconic attractions in the desert such as Uluru (Ayers Rock) or Watarrka (Kings Canyon). (Tremblay (2006a), p. 2; Carson/Taylor (2006b), p. 17) In addition, tourism in Outback and desert regions has to face a number of challenges. Outback Australia has struggled in recent years to keep level with the tourism performance of the Australian tourism industry as a whole and has experienced a steady decline in visitor numbers from both national and international visitors since the year 2000. (Desert Knowledge Australia (2005b), p. 4) Major key markets, such as the backpacker market for example, seem to be declining (Carson/Taylor (2006b), pp. 1-2; Tourism NT (2006b), p. 1) and other performance indicators like visitor expenditure, average length of stay or repeat visitor rate have also remained flat or continued to decrease. (Carson/Taylor (2006a), p. 19; Desert Knowledge Australia (2005b), pp. 39-40) Similarly, the number of tourism related businesses in Outback Australia has continued to decrease since 1999. (ibid.)

Desert and Outback tourism are also strongly affected by global trends such as rising fuel prices or the trend to shorter and more frequent holidays. (Tourism Queensland (2004), p. 8) This might have particular consequences for remote desert regions due to their isolated location and the long distances to major source markets as it might divert tourists to other destinations which are easier to access.

Desert tourism stakeholders have an interest in addressing these issues in order to secure a viable tourism industry into the future. The Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre (DK-CRC) is committed to creating sustainable livelihoods and viable economic opportunities for remote desert people and settlements through the application of research and training. (Desert Knowledge CRC (2006), n.p.a.) It has directed substantial efforts to

investigate a number of business activities which are considered to have potential for economic, social and cultural development of Australian desert communities - including tourism. (Tremblay (2006a), p. 5)

The DK-CRC funded a desert tourism scoping study in 2005, which recognised that supporting desert livelihoods through tourism will most likely require opening up new tourist experiences and new markets. One of the major recommendations coming from this scoping study was that there is a clear need to develop a comprehensive research project that looks systematically at the developing drive tourism market, which already accounts for over 70% of all overnight leisure trips in Australia. (Taylor/Prideaux (2006), p. 4; Olsen (2002), p. 12) Within this particular market segment the four wheel drive (4WD) self-drive tourism market was considered to present a potential focus for this research. (Tremblay (2006a), p. 3) This market segment has been identified as a particular group of interest mainly because 4WD allows travellers to access more remote locations and therefore may help to disperse tourism more effectively.

As a result, the DK-CRC has initiated the *On Track* research program, which aims at assessing how a 4WD tourism industry in the desert can contribute to better desert livelihoods by examining the potential economic and social benefits of 4WD tourism and evaluating at the same time potential pressures on the fragile environment, culture and infrastructure of the desert. (Desert Knowledge CRC (2006), n.p.a.) *On Track* is supposed to deliver a better understanding of 4WD travel in desert areas by describing the various stakeholders that are involved in this special form of desert travel – 4WD travellers, businesses, organisations and communities. While 4WD markets potentially offer increased dispersal and sustained market growth arising from continuing increases in 4WD vehicle sales, their value to desert destinations is poorly understood. In particular, the capacity for desert communities, many of whom are Aboriginal, to benefit economically from increasing numbers of 4WD travellers is unclear. (Carson/Taylor (2006), p. 3)

Given the relatively high proportion of Aboriginal population in the Northern Territory – about one third of the Northern Territory population identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (NTTC (2004), p. 4) – this part of Australia is closely associated with a

strong influence of Aboriginal culture. The Northern Territory Tourism Strategic Plan 2003 – 2007 (2002, pp. 29-30) recognises indigenous cultural tourism as a competitive advantage over other Australian regions and defines it as one of the main building blocks of tourism which shall provide the foundation for tourism growth in the Northern Territory in the long run. Tourism NT (formerly known as the Northern Territory Tourist Commission) builds its current Indigenous Tourism Strategy on previous research (Australia Domestic Marketing Research (2000) quoted in NTTC (2004), p. 4) which found that the perception of the “ability to explore indigenous culture” is significantly higher amongst visitors to the Northern Territory than in any other region of Australia. In particular, central Australia has been identified a key destination for tourists wanting to experience indigenous culture.

Australian desert regions, such as central Australia, are characterised by a high proportion of indigenous people, who own large parts of desert land. Considerably high proportions of this population live in small communities away from servicing towns (Desert Knowledge CRC (2006), n.p.a.) and are only marginally involved in tourism activity, meaning that benefits received from tourism are rather low. The number of successful indigenous owned tourism ventures (such as Anangu Tours at Uluru for example) is small (Boyle (2001), p. 20) and hence a lack of indigenous involvement in the tourism industry has already been acknowledged (Tremblay (2006a), p. 23; Desert Knowledge Australia (2005a), p. 33). What adds to the problem is that the Aboriginal tourism sector in central Australia is currently characterised by a lack of product diversity and does not provide a clear marketing strategy that proposes concrete actions and advice for promoting and distributing indigenous tourism products.

To develop additional, more specific marketing strategies Tourism NT has acknowledged the need for further research to develop a better understanding of different market segments in order to allow indigenous people to make informed decision about their participation in tourism. Proposed research directions include identifying which markets have an interest in indigenous cultural experiences, what they perceive to be an indigenous cultural experience, where they choose to have these experiences, how much they are willing to spend and how they seek information on such experiences. (NTTC (2004), p. 8)

The research does not only need to understand what products and business types are required by the market, but also how they can best be distributed, making sure that the right quantities of the right product or service are available at the right place, at the right time. (Wynne et al. (2001), p. 425) The role of information in this distribution process is exceptionally important in tourism due to the intangible, perishable, heterogeneous and inseparable nature of tourism products and services. (Bieger/Laesser (2004), p. 357; French et al. (2000), pp. 216-20 Dickman (1999), pp. 10-12) Tourism has often been described as an information intensive industry which heavily relies on constant communication with tourists through various channels to market products and build customer relationship. (Poon (1993), quoted in Pan/Fesenmaier (2006), p. 809)

Information acquisition is necessary for selecting a destination but also for on-site decisions of various trip elements, such as accommodation, transportation or activities (Gursoy/Chen (2000), p. 583; Fodness/Murray (1998) p. 109; Snepenger et al. (1990), pp. 13-14) Consequently, tourists must be able to access the information they need to both develop a demand for the product and to identify opportunities to satisfy this demand during various stages of the trip planning process. Understanding travellers' information search behaviour is therefore critical to develop better marketing and distribution strategies and improve service delivery. (Pearce/Schott (2005), p. 50; Bieger/Laesser (2004), p. 357; Gursoy/McCleary (2004), p. 353; Gursoy/Chen (2000), p. 583)

1.2. Problem Statement

To date, nothing is known about the demand for indigenous tourism products from the desert 4WD market and the potential for Aboriginal desert people to develop viable products for this growing market sector. The research sought to describe how 4WD travellers in central Australia make decisions about consumption of Aboriginal cultural tourism experiences, and whether there are gaps in the nature of the experiences provided and the product distribution processes. To address this gap in knowledge, this study aimed to identify to what extent 4WD travellers in central Australia are interested in getting

indigenous cultural experiences on their desert trips and what kind of products they might consume. The study investigates information seeking patterns and trip planning characteristics of 4WD travellers to find out whether current marketing and distribution methods of indigenous tourism products are appropriate for this market. This research finally identifies current gaps in the supply and in distribution strategies of indigenous tourism products in central Australia.

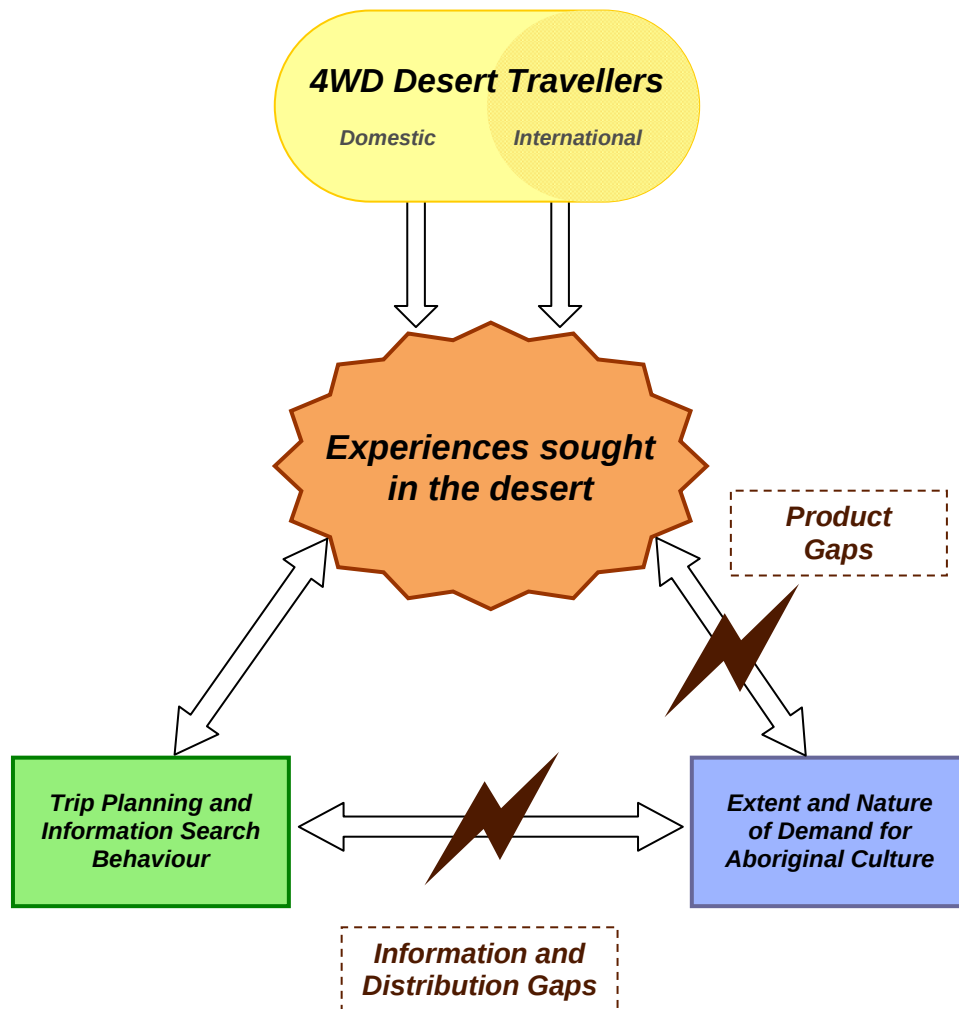
1.3. Research Objectives

Specifically, this study aims to identify: -

1. The information search behaviour and trip planning characteristics of 4WD travellers.
 - What sources of information do 4WD travellers use prior to departure and during the trip?
 - What content and type of information are they looking for prior to departure and during the trip?
 - How much time do 4WD spend on information searches prior to departure?
 - To what extent do they plan specific trip elements prior to departure and finalise bookings (places to visit, accommodation, activities etc.)?
 - Under which circumstances do they decide on specific trip elements en route?
2. The extent and nature of demand for Aboriginal tourism products from 4WD travellers.
 - What kind of Aboriginal tourism products are currently being consumed?
 - What kind of additional Aboriginal tourism products would they be interested in?
 - What are the barriers to look for Aboriginal tourism products they might be interested in?

3. The gaps between current distribution methods of Aboriginal tourism products and information needs of 4WD travellers.
- Do 4WD travellers receive any information about Aboriginal tourism products prior to departure and en route?
 - How do 4WD travellers perceive information about current Aboriginal tourism products?
 - What information mismatches do exist and how might they be addressed?

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study



1.4. Significance of the Study

This study has both theoretical and practical applications. It contributes to an enhancement of the current state of knowledge about 4WD tourism in desert areas, which is at the moment one of the main research focuses of Desert Knowledge CRC. Not only does it contribute to a better understanding of information search or trip planning behaviour of 4WD travellers and their demand for Aboriginal tourism in central Australia, but it also provides additional insights into trip motivations and general experiences and activities sought in the desert. Moreover, this study will add to the constantly growing level of knowledge about information search and trip planning strategies of independent travellers in Australia as well as internationally.

In terms of practical contribution, the research aims to provide guidance and suggestions for the development of Aboriginal tourism products in central Australia that meet the needs and demands of desert 4WD travellers and to give some advice on more effective distribution strategies for this specific target group.

1.5. Scope of the Study

Even though there might be other potential markets for indigenous tourism products in desert regions this study looks only at desert 4WD travellers. Since the dominating market for 4WD tourism is considered to be domestic while the main market for indigenous tourism appears to be from overseas, both domestic and international 4WD travellers have been considered for this study to identify differences between these specific market segments. However, this study does not further segment the complex 4WD market. This research has been furthermore limited to the region central Australia (as described in 2.1.5.1.) and does not explore other geographic regions in desert Australia.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Chapter 2 describes the necessary background knowledge and theory surrounding this study. This chapter is divided into four separate sub-sections. Section 2.1 provides the background of desert tourism, section 2.2 describes the current state of knowledge about 4WD tourism and section 2.3 addresses the topic of indigenous tourism in Australia and, more specifically, in central Australia. Finally, section 2.4 introduces the theoretical background for product distribution in tourism and examines the role of information in this distribution process.

2.1. Desert Tourism

2.1.1. Defining Desert and Outback Australia

2.1.1.1. Outback Australia

“Outback Australia” is not easy to define geographically, as it does not officially exist within governmental frameworks or boundaries. “Outback” is often colloquially used for describing any sparsely populated regions of Australia outside of major urban centres that comprise the majority of inland and north Australia. The Outback has also been described as semi-arid and arid regions including savannah and desert landscapes, an extremely small population density and large distances between population centres. (Larson (2006), p. 2) Under this definition, the Outback includes all desert regions, but other environments as well.

In “*Our Outback – Partnerships and Pathways to Success in Tourism*” Desert Knowledge Australia (2005b, pp. 1-4) extended Outback Australia across five States (Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria) and the Northern Territory as a starting point for analysing the potential of cross-border tourism in Outback

Australia. The following regional tourism areas¹ were included in this outline: Katherine, Tablelands, MacDonnell, Alice Springs and Petermann (in the Northern Territory), Australia's North West and the Golden Outback (Western Australia), the Flinders Ranges and the South Australian Outback (South Australia), Mallee (Victoria) and the Outback of New South Wales and Queensland (Figure 2). However, it was acknowledged that this is not a final geographic definition of the Australian Outback and that a number of other regions could still be added to this list in the future.

Figure 2 : Outline of main regions comprising Outback Australia



(Source: adapted from Desert Knowledge Australia (2005b), p. 38)

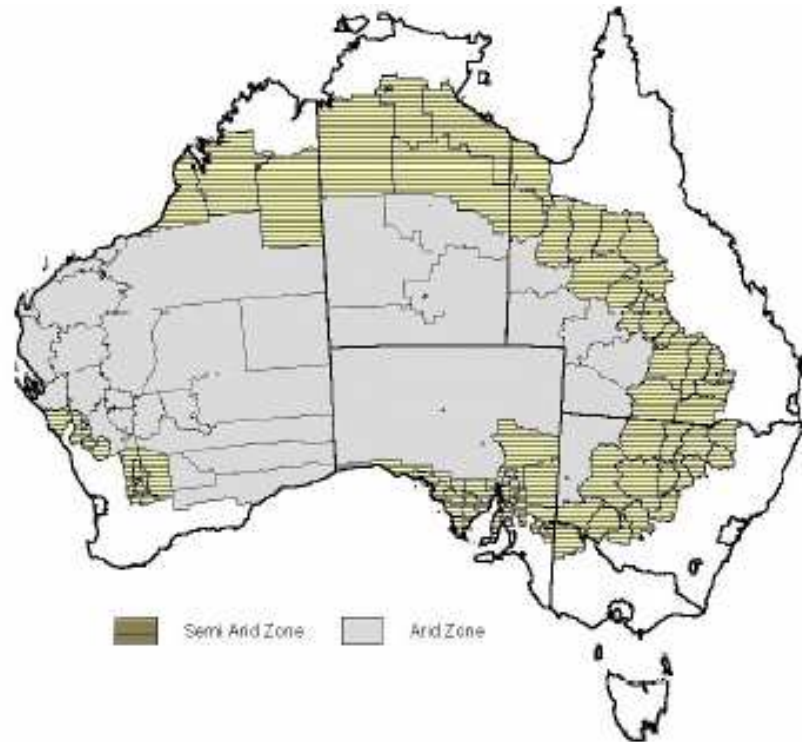
¹ The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines each tourism region by combining Statistical Local Areas (SLA). These tourism regions are also used by the National and International Visitor Surveys. (Tourism NT (2007), n.p.a.)

2.1.1.2. Desert Australia

There is no clear single definition of what constitutes the Australian desert. (Taylor (2002), p. 1) Semi arid and arid lands, which cover roughly 69% (5.3 million km²) of the Australian continent, are often used to describe desert areas (Centre for Arid Zone Research (2007), n.p.a.; Desert Knowledge CRC (2007), n.p.a.), whereas arid zones account for up to 45% of the total land mass (Figure 3). Desert regions in Australia are officially classified as remote or very remote areas under the Remoteness Structure within the Australian Standard Geographic Classification (ASGC), which indicates that physical access to the widest range of goods and services and opportunities for social interaction for the population of a given locality is relatively poor. (Taylor (2002), p. 5) Such regions primarily include large parts of the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia but also smaller parts of Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. (Guenther et al. (2005), p. 1)

The following regions have been identified as the main deserts in Australia: Great Victoria Desert; Great Sandy Desert; Tanami Desert; Simpson Desert; Gibson Desert; Little Sandy Desert; Strzelecki Desert; Sturt Stony Desert; Tirari Desert; and Pedirka Desert (Desert Knowledge CRC (2007), n.p.a.) A detailed map of all major Australian deserts can be found in Appendix D.

Figure 3: Location of semi-arid and arid zones in Australia



(Source: Taylor (2002a), p. 2)

The DK-CRC has defined deserts as “characterised by a low and sparse population spread over large areas of lower productivity land”. The population of desert Australia is estimated to be around 574,000 people which accounts for approximately 3% of the total population in Australia (data refers to the census in 2001). (Desert Knowledge CRC (2007), n.p.a.; Taylor (2002), p. 4) Indigenous people comprise about one fifth of the total desert population (compared to 2% of the population nationally) and are predicted to increase to 23.7% in the next ten years. (Taylor (2002), p. 12) While the majority of non-Indigenous people live in major service centres, such as Alice Springs or Halls Creek, Indigenous people are highly dispersed across the desert region residing in small remote communities. (Guenther et al. (2005), p. 4) Such settlements are already estimated to amount to 1,300 discrete communities which are distributed across Aboriginal traditional lands and often have fewer than 50 residents. (Desert Knowledge CRC (2007), n.p.a.)

2.1.2. Defining Desert Tourism

The phrase “desert tourism” can be referred to as a diversity of products, experiences and environments and it consists of a collection of markets which are “*characterised by their small scale and complex interactions with natural, social and cultural environments*” (Tremblay (2006a), p. 1). Weaver (2001, p. 253-55) outlined a set of attributes that can be used to describe desert tourism: -

- Exceptional geological features and climatic conditions;
- Wildflower and other episodic floral displays;
- Ancient, large or unusual vegetation;
- Caravans or other desert trekking;
- Indigenous inhabitants;
- Oases; and
- Protected areas.

Desert tourism tends to be focused on a relatively small number of outstanding “iconic” attractions or locations and is characterised by a rather sporadic and small-scale tourism development in remoter regions. (Tremblay (2006a), p. 13) In particular, Australian desert regions offer some well established and well marketed high-profile desert locations, with Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park and Watarrka National Park being the most prominent ones. Conversely, areas which are less known or considered as secondary desert destinations are mostly under-resourced for tourism development in terms of access, transport networks or hospitality services. Such locations normally attract smaller numbers of mainly domestic or regional tourists and are very often not protected for nature conservation or tourism purposes. Weaver (2001, pp. 255–56) referred to both destination types as upper-tier and lower-tier desert destinations.

Especially the most frequented top tier destinations tend to suffer from the following issues: (Tremblay (2006a), p. 16) –

- Deterioration of natural and cultural resources around protected areas with strong attractiveness;
- Threats associated with indiscriminate and excessive use of all-terrain vehicles;
- Conflicts emerging from unregulated consumptive activities, such as game hunting, which can occur outside but still near protected desert areas; and
- Resource scarcity and under-funding associated with low priority often given to desert areas.

As fragile arid environments, desert regions are especially susceptible to the forms of environmental degradation caused by tourism. Such threats include: (Weaver (2001), pp. 261-62) –

- Site-hardening in high traffic areas;
- Depletion of water sources;
- Increasing difficulties in fire management;
- Interference in corridors for migratory species;
- Introduction of pest species; and
- Threats to wildlife from excessive hunting and fishing or accidental killings

For a better understanding of various desert tourism markets and the different market opportunities that might arise through them, it has to be distinguished between two intrinsically different types of desert tourism - markets which come to the desert incidentally, for example due to a unique attraction, and markets which consider the desert environment itself as an integral part of the tourism experience. (Tremblay (2006a), p. 13) These “real” desert travellers are most likely to venture to new regions and consequently can help to disperse tourism activity further across remote desert destinations. On the other hand, they are also likely to have different needs in terms of tourism infrastructure, product

development or product marketing. Opening up new markets and more diversified tourist products and experiences in regions other than key attractions might be required to meet the demand of such travellers and benefit communities in remote desert regions.

2.1.3. Desert Tourism in Australia

The economy of desert Australia heavily relies on mining, pastoralism and, more recently, on tourism, all of which are susceptible to external forces and hence constitute a vulnerable economic base (Wand/Stafford-Smith (2004), p. 1). Tremblay (2006a, p. 12) further found that tourism is typically presented as a promising but at the same time dangerous form of development, of which the impacts on desert communities are not entirely understood. Generally, references in academic literature to deserts and arid lands, and specifically to tourism activity in such regions, are very limited. Examples are sporadically included in literature discussing regions that can be classified as either “remote” or “peripheral”. Government and tourism management agencies² sometimes include such regions under the cluster of “regional tourism”, which comprises non-urban forms of tourism across all types of environments: coastal, mountain, island and desert environment. (Tremblay (2006a), p. 12) Other tourism literature relating to tourism in desert environments includes publications on ecotourism in natural and fragile areas.

2.1.3.1. Tourism in Peripheral Areas

According to Sørensen (1999, pp. 21-23) peripheral areas usually comprise areas away from economic, political, educational or social centres, which are also considered to have a number of barriers to economic development. Hence, peripheral areas are relatively remote and situated in a dependency relationship with a centre area. They often find it difficult to attract investments and jobs because of disadvantages such as the remote location, missing infrastructure, low population density, a low level of education or a lack of skilled

² An outline of the structure of tourism organisations in Australia is provided in Appendix C

manpower. Hall and Boyd (2005, pp. 4-20) have identified the following main features of peripheral areas which have a strong impact on economic development: -

- Large distances from mass markets leading to high transport and communications costs;
- A lack of product innovation, with new products being imported and not developed from within;
- A general pattern of out-migration of skilled people;
- Weak economic linkages between businesses leading to low multiplier effects;
- Relatively high levels of local and state intervention for economic support;
- Weak communication and information flows between markets and suppliers; and
- High aesthetic amenity values with low levels of development.

As tourism is often described as a low-skill and labour-intensive industry, many peripheral areas consider it as one of the very few viable economic alternatives and as a sort of “panacea” for economic revitalisation in such regions. (Prideaux (2002b), p. 381; Sørensen (1999), p. 12; Baum/Hagen (1999), p. 302) For many tourists peripheral destinations are particularly attractive, not despite but because of the very peripherality and its perceived attributes, which include notions such as “*authentic*”, “*off the beaten track*”, “*unspoilt*”, “*exotic*” or “*undeveloped*”. (Carson/Harwood (2007), pp. 10-11; Sørensen (1999), p. 12) Carson and Harwood (2007, pp. 10-11) suggest that remote destinations have to continue to promote their uniqueness and the authenticity of the nature-based and cultural experiences they can provide. Similarly, Wanhill (1997, p. 50) argues that the “*strengths of many peripheral areas lies in their strong natural environments and remoteness, which make them increasingly attractive for tourism development at a time when ‘green tourism’ is in vogue*”. At the same time he recognises the downside of tourism in peripheral areas which primarily relates to environmental threat to natural resources through tourism. (ibid.)

There has also been growing interest in the challenges faced by tourism in peripheral areas where acute climatic conditions in combination with issues of difficult access create particular competitive disadvantage. (Baum/Hagen (1999), p. 302) Such challenges include

for example a relatively high seasonality, limited tourism infrastructure and a low value-added tourism economy that is increasingly affected by a lack of innovation. (Wanhill (1997), p. 49) Furthermore, tourism companies in peripheral areas are predominantly micro or small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). They are highly fragmented in market terms and often lack an understanding of market dynamics, which makes them relatively uncompetitive to companies in non-peripheral areas. (ibid.) Such small scale operators tend to be characterised by a relatively low degree of production and service capacity (Morrison (1996), p. 400), a lack of entrepreneurship and qualified staff (Page (2003), p. 264) and limited experiences in the tourism industry (McKercher/Robbins (1998), p. 173). They often use inadequate marketing resources and are not able to establish links with global tourism systems. (Clarke (1995), p. 137) Nevertheless, small-scale businesses are considered to have the potential for contributing to a diversification of regional and remote destinations and enhancing their attractiveness.

2.1.3.2. Ecotourism in Natural and Fragile Environments

Tourism in desert regions has also been mentioned under the umbrella term of ecotourism in natural and fragile environment. Definitions of ecotourism in academic literature are numerous. At the broadest level, ecotourism has been described as synonymous with nature tourism, which implies a symbiotic relationship between tourism and nature conservation. (Clarke (1997), p. 224; Boo (1990), p. 14) Another common definition refers to ecotourism as *“travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations found in these areas”*. (Hall/Boyd (2005), p. 51; Blamey (1997), p. 125; Ceballos-Lascurain (1987), p. 14) Boyd and Butler (1999, p. 128-29) identified the key elements of ecotourism as being focused on the natural environment, having minimal environmental and social impacts, having a non-consumptive character and as being capable of providing desired economic benefits to local residents.

Ecotourism has been considered to have the potential to deliver ecologically sustainable development to any region that has a unique natural environment (Courvisanos (2006),

p. 17) or to contribute to a robust regional redevelopment for areas facing economic decline. (Hall and Boyd (2005), p. 21) During the International Year of Ecotourism in 2002 the World Tourism Organization (WTO (2002), p. 10) explicitly recognised deserts to have great potential for ecotourism development. Ecotourism in desert regions can provide direct benefits for desert communities in the form of alternative revenues and jobs, and indirect benefits such as development of infrastructure. (WTO (2002), p. 26; Weaver (2001), p. 251)

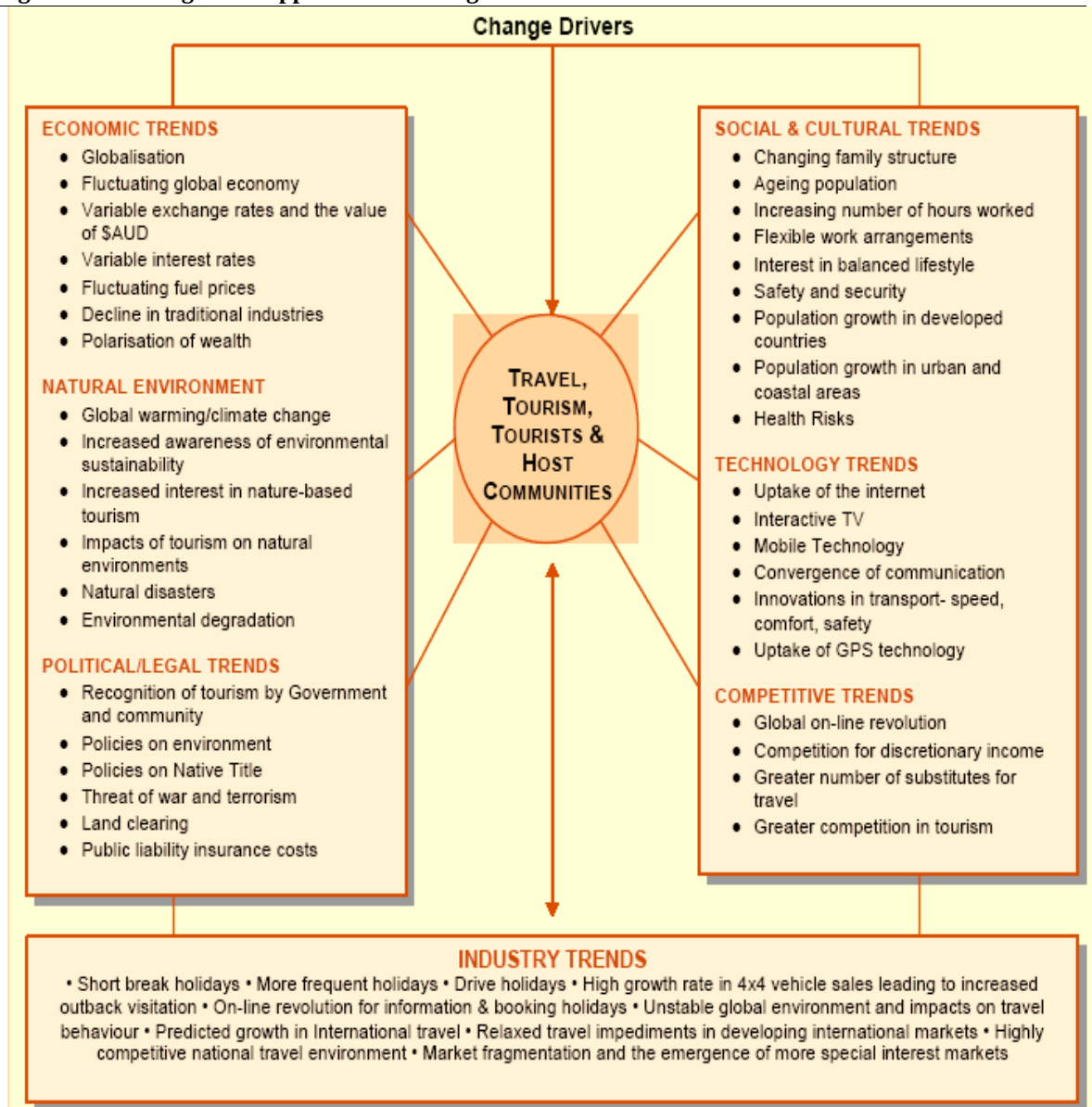
2.1.4. Current Issues for Desert and Outback Tourism in Australia

Desert and Outback tourism recently had to face a number of challenges. As found by Desert Knowledge Australia (2005b, p. 4) the tourism performance of Outback Australia had serious problems in the last years to keep pace with the Australian tourism industry as a whole. The domestic market for Outback Australia has experienced a rather flat development between 2000 and 2004 with a slightly negative growth rate of -0.01% in overnight stays compared with an increase of about 3% for total Australia. International visitor nights in the Outback were even worse affected and have decreased by 16.7% compared with a 22% increase for total Australia in the same period. Similarly, other key success indicators like visitor expenditure, average length of stay or repeat visitor rate have remained flat or continued to decrease. (Carson/Taylor (2006a), p. 19; Desert Knowledge Australia (2005b), pp. 39-40) In addition, major key markets in the Outback, such as the backpacker market for example, seem to be in decline (Carson/Taylor (2006b), pp. 1-2; Tourism NT (2006b), p. 1) and the number of tourism related businesses in Outback Australia, including attractions, F&B outlets, shops, tour operators and transport companies, has continued to decrease in recent years. (Desert Knowledge Australia (2005b), pp. 39-40)

Desert and Outback tourism also feel the impacts of global trends which have particular consequences for remote regions in Australia due to their isolated location and the long distances to major source markets and urban centres. A number of these challenges were outlined in the Outback Destination Management Plan (Tourism Queensland (2004), p. 8) which identified the main economic, natural, political, socio-cultural, technological and

industry trends for Outback tourism (Figure 4). The most prominent of these challenges include rising transport costs for road and air travel due to higher fuel prices, an ongoing trend to shorter and more frequent holidays as well as an increasing competition from cheaper domestic and international destinations (ibid.), all of which might finally divert tourists to other destinations which might be easier to access.

Figure 4: Challenges and opportunities facing Outback tourism



(Source: Tourism Queensland (2004), p. 8)

The Northern Territory, with around 86.5% of its total landmass being considered as “Outback” (Desert Knowledge Australia (2005b), p. 38), is particularly concerned with recent developments in Outback tourism. As outlined in the Northern Territory Tourism Strategic Plan 2003-2007 the Northern Territory, but in particular its Outback, is confronted with a range of potential threats and weaknesses that might have negative impacts on future tourism development. (NTTC (2002), p. 20) These include: -

- Air access constraints and long distances from major source markets;
- Rising petrol costs and air fares;
- Lack of infrastructure;
- Lack of product diversity and renewal with a heavy emphasis on major attractions in a few geographic areas;
- Limited access to key natural attractions including Aboriginal lands, due to land tenure and land management issues;
- Overcrowding at icon locations leading to a decline in visitor satisfaction;
- Increased competition from overseas and domestic destinations; and
- A heavy reliance on a few key markets, particularly internationally.

On the other hand, the Outback Destination Management Plan (Figure 4) outlines a number of change drivers which might provide some opportunities for Outback communities and tourism operators. These include, for example, an increased interest in nature-based tourism, innovations in transport and information technologies or a predicted growth in international travel. Of particular note in this context is a significant trend to drive holidays and a relatively high growth rate in 4WD vehicle sales, which might lead to an increased visitation of the Australian Outback. (Tourism Queensland (2004), p. 8) Based on the numerous challenges and opportunities for tourism development in the Outback, Desert Knowledge Australia proposes in its report “*Our Outback – Partnerships and Pathways to Success in Tourism*” new strategies towards a change in the structure of Outback tourism in Australia. An action plan was developed with five main strategy themes suggesting changes in current organisational structural networks, product development, marketing, infrastructure, investment, research and communication strategies. (Desert Knowledge

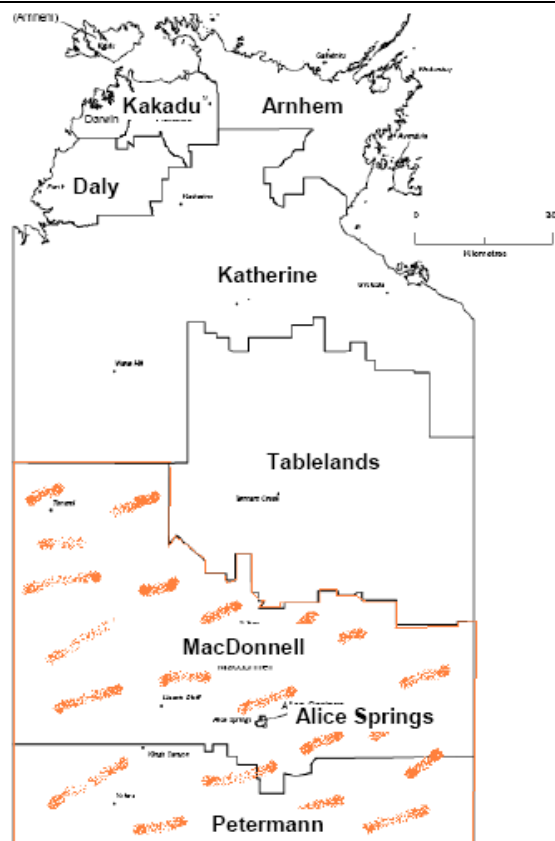
Australia (2005b), pp. 10-31) This report also acknowledged the significant importance of drive tourism, in particular self-drive tourism, for dispersing positive contributions of tourism across remoter areas in desert and Outback regions. (ibid, pp. 18-22)

2.1.5. Tourism in Central Australia

2.1.5.1. Defining Central Australia

The central Australia region includes all parts of the Northern Territory south of Tennant Creek and is composed of the tourism regions of MacDonnell and Petermann combined with Alice Springs, the biggest town and major service centre in central Australia (Figure 5). Alice Springs has a population of about 30,000 people and the wider region including MacDonnell and Petermann receives around 500,000 visitors annually. (Sustainable Tourism Services (2005), p. 2)

Figure 5: Regions comprising the central Australia area



(Source: Carson/Taylor (2006a), p. 9)

The Petermann tourism region incorporates Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park, Watarrka National Park, Erldunda, Yulara, Curtin Springs and Kulgera. The MacDonnell region includes the West MacDonnell Ranges and the East MacDonnell Ranges stretching out on both sides of Alice Springs. The main tourist attractions in central Australia around Alice Springs, besides Uluru and Watarrka National Park, have been identified as follows: (Sustainable Tourism Services (2005, pp. 2-3) -

- West MacDonnell National Park and Ranges, including Simpson Gap, Standley Chasm, Ochre Pitts, Ormiston Gorge, Glen Helen, Redbank Gorge, Tnorala Conservation Reserve and Gosse Bluff.
- East MacDonnell Ranges, including Emily and Jesse Gap Nature Park, Corroboree Rock, Trephina Gorge, N'Dhala Gorge, Arltunga Historical Reserve and Ruby Gap.
- Owen Springs Reserve, Wallace Rockhole, Hermannsburg, Finke Gorge National Park, Palm Valley and Boggy Hole in the Southwest of Alice Springs
- Rainbow Valley, Henbury Meteorite Craters, Hugh River Stock Route, Maryvale Station, Chambers Pillar, Ewaninga Rock Carvings and Santa Teresa in the South of Alice Springs.
- Gemtree, Harts Range, Tanami Road out to Tilmouth Road House in the North of Alice Springs.

A particular attraction in central Australia with regard to drive tourism is the Mereenie Loop, a driving route including unsealed road networks for 4WD trips. The current network of roads includes an inner loop connecting Alice Springs with Hermannsburg and Glen Helen and an outer loop which continues through Hermannsburg to Watarrka National Park before joining the Lasseter Highway 130 kilometres east of Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park. (Carson/Taylor (2006a), p. 8) The loop passes through Aboriginal land-holdings and offers an alternate route for visitors travelling from Alice Springs to Uluru or vice versa. (Tourism NT (2006a), p. 4)

Current key target markets for central Australia include: (Sustainable Tourism Services (2005, pp. 5-6) –

- Self-drive tourism (cars, caravaners, 4WDs, domestic and international fly-drive)
- Budget and backpacker tourism (national and international)
- Package tourism
- Group tours (special interest, school and educational groups)
- Business tourism (meetings, incentives, conventions)
- Event tourism (sporting events, festivals)

2.1.5.2. Tourism Trends in Central Australia

As to central Australia's tourism performance, the region has experienced comparatively low rates of tourism growth over the past ten years and a significant decline in key markets. (Carson/Taylor (2006a), p. 9) Particularly, international visitor numbers were severely affected. In the Alice Springs and Petermann regions, international visitor numbers decreased by around 20% from 1999 to 2005, in the MacDonnell region by even 60%. (ibid.) While there was a slight upward trend between 2004 and 2005 in the number of international visitors to the Northern Territory as a whole, this did not have any impact on central Australia where the decline in international visitor numbers has at best halted. Moreover, central Australia's share of all international visitors to Australia has declined during the past five years in all three regions that comprise the broader area. (ibid., p. 10) Domestic visitor numbers have decreased as well over the same period time for the Alice Springs (by 8%) and MacDonnell (by 3%) regions but experienced an increase of around 4% for the Petermann region from 1999 to 2005.

In addition to the decline in absolute visitor numbers, the proportion of repeat visitors to the region is relatively low and likely to be falling, which indicates that central Australia is often perceived as a "tick and flick" destination, meaning that the majority visits the region once to see the major attractions and to "tick it off the list". (ibid., p. 19) Similarly, the

length of stay in central Australian regions has also been decreasing in recent years from 4.6 in 2003 to 4.3 nights in 2005. Especially the MacDonnell tourism region experienced a harsh decline as the average length of stay fell by more than half from 2004 to 2005 and the trend towards shorter stays is likely to continue in the future (Carson/Taylor (2006a), p. 19)

A number of other structural impediments can be observed in central Australia which have direct impacts on the current tourism performance in the region: (ibid., p. 8) -

- A declining market base due to an emerging trend in the region towards shorter and less independent “standard” trips;
- The relative homogeneity of destinations and experiences for visitors to the region;
- Clustering of attractions and tourism products in locations which are relatively easy to access;
- A fragile economic base which is dependent on public sector investment (for example, parks and other publicly funded initiatives), micro-businesses, and the engagement of Aboriginal land owners for product development; and
- Infrastructure needs and expectations of developing market segments, such as 4WD visitors, which must be balanced with environmental and cultural sensitivities.

There is reasonable evidence that visitors are increasingly on organised tours and less likely to be on independent trips, which are supposed to be longer in duration. The proportion of self-drive tourism as the main form of transport in central Australia has fallen substantially, only the proportion of tourists on 4WD tours has increased in recent years. (ibid., p. 20)

2.1.6. Challenges for Innovation in Tourism in Central Australia

A useful framework for better understanding the issues currently faced by desert tourism systems has been proposed by Carson and Taylor (2006b, pp. 9-12), who argue that managing and facilitating a culture of innovation is necessary for desert destinations, such as central Australia, to address these challenges. This framework is based on the idea of “systems of innovation” established by Carson, Richards and Rose (2004), who found that

regional tourism destinations can be regarded as economic systems where innovation in the sense of managing change purposefully is a key success factor. Such systems place a greater value on knowledge about markets, competitors and the performance of the system itself and hence have a greater ability to identify and recruit new markets. (Carson/Taylor (2006b), p. 9) General barriers to effective systems of innovation in regional tourism, as described by Carson et al., relate to issues such as lack of critical mass, lack of formalised knowledge structures, poor links to product distribution channels and shortage of skilled workforce, which are of particular concern to desert tourism systems. (ibid., p. 10)

Table 1: Key issues for desert tourism innovation systems

Characteristics of successful systems of innovation	Challenges facing desert tourism systems
Economic competence (The skills to identify required resources and to acquire them)	• Small and micro businesses operating on a day to day “survival” basis may lack the capacity to attract resources to support longer term planning.
Resource clustering and critical mass (Physical proximity to customers, suppliers, knowledge providers, intermediaries, private sector and public sector organisations, and a sufficient number of these to allow for experimentation and failure)	• Desert tourism businesses tend to be dispersed but have clusters in the major population centres. A small number of businesses can dominate the marketplace in remote locations. • The small resident population base means that there is no local market to fall back on in tough periods. • Removal of a single business from the system may threaten the marketplace as there is no alternative. This is a particular issue for Aboriginal tourism businesses on Aboriginal lands.
Networks (Social and professional interactions between organisations in the system)	• Key partnerships with organisations physically located outside the destination are difficult to maintain because of isolation, poor telecommunications, and a lack of economies of scale. • Desert tourism businesses have access to a large number of collaborative structures, many of which are small scale, non-persevering and have poorly defined objectives. Selection of appropriate structures for a particular business is difficult.
Entrepreneurship (Leadership which can provide the vision and take the risks necessary for change)	• Tourism entrepreneurship often occurs in the face of accepted conventional wisdom which has become synonymous with the traditional sources of business intelligence (including the national tourism research agencies, State Tourism Commissions and so on). • There is a strong sense that entrepreneurship has driven tourism development in Australia, but that the current environment for tourism development has increased risk for entrepreneurs.

Development blocks (Points of focus including natural assets, cultural assets, outstanding services or specific tourist attractions which inspire alternative views about their use and lead to multiple options for development)	• Current development blocks are primarily natural features which are considered ‘free’ to access. Commercial use and exploitation of these is difficult. • Development that is too concentrated at a few sites is unlikely to be environmentally sustainable. Development that is too dispersed may be difficult to sustain economically.
Public/private sector interactions (Governments not only provide the institutional infrastructure for an economic system through policies and regulations, but often engage actively as users and producers of new products. Interactions must recognise the key role of the small private firm while providing public support for business and staff development.)	• The desert comes under the purview of many government agencies (local, state and federal) along with international conventions that often have conflicting agendas. • Land management in the desert has been about preservation and extraction. Using land for tourism provides a different challenge for the public sector stakeholders. • Tourism in small destinations often involves conflicts of interest with government. The government is regulator, planner, marketer, business manager and hence often in competition with the private sector. • Remote area governments experience high levels of staff turnover and continuity is difficult to maintain.
Production and distribution of knowledge (Effective systems capture data about their performance, their markets, their competitors, and the environment in which the system operates. They also produce and distribute new knowledge to inform decisions about the need for change.)	• There are generally poor systems of tourism knowledge production and distribution in regional Australia, which are even worse in sparsely populated regions with comparatively low visitor numbers. • A high value has been placed on tacit knowledge, which is inherently unstable.
Social, political and cultural capital (New initiatives require social “will” and energy. The critical role of the host population in tourism means they must be engaged in system development)	• Community organisations play a significant role in tourism development, especially in smaller communities, and also have to act as operators (organising events etc.) • There is a strong feeling that communities do not appreciate the value of tourism’s contributions to economic, social, and environmental objectives.

(Source: adapted from Carson/Taylor (2006b), pp. 9-12)

2.2. 4WD Self-drive Tourism

2.2.1. Self-drive Tourism in Australia

The self-drive tourism market in Australia has been defined as “*those travellers away from home for at least one night on holidays or visiting friends and relatives using their own or a rented vehicle*”, which does not include any business travel or those travelling on bus or tours. (Olsen (2003), p. 332) The motor vehicle is considered to be the predominant means of transport for leisure trips in Australia and driving holidays constitute a significant tourism activity, which is estimated to account for around 70% of all overnight leisure trips taken in Australia by both domestic and international travellers. (Taylor/Prideaux (2006), p. 3; Olsen (2003), p. 332) The drive tourism market across Australia also offers considerable potential for promoting and dispersing travellers to regional and remote areas. In particular in regional destinations outside of the mainland State capital cities the drive market has been identified as a key market where it represents up to 85% of the total market. (Olsen (2002), p. 12; Carson/Waller (2002), p. 7)

The significance of self-drive tourism has been recognised by all State tourism marketing authorities and the promotion of self-drive leisure travel has already been established as a main focus in their marketing strategies. (Desert Knowledge Australia (2005b), p. 3; Prideaux (2002a), p. 36) The Australian self-drive tourism market is primarily considered to be domestic. Over 75% of all overnight trips by domestic tourists included self-drive as their main mode of transport, whereas the percentage of international visitors ranges between 40% and 50%. In particular longer self-drive trips (over 4 nights) and trips to regional and rural areas are dominated by domestic travellers who account for almost 90% of this market. (Olsen (2003), p. 332) New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria have the largest shares in the national drive market (Olsen (2002), p. 19), whereas the Northern Territory attracts a relatively small proportion of self-drive tourists, which comprised around 4% of the total leisure self-drive market in 2005 including international and domestic drive tourists. (Tourism Research Australia (2005), n.p.a.)

2.2.1.1. Types of Drive Holidays

It has been argued that the drive market in Australia is not a homogenous market segment but includes a whole range of diverse subgroups with different characteristics. Scott (2002, p. 86) suggested that there are two distinct markets in drive tourism consisting of those for whom the vehicle and the travel itself is the most essential element of the trip and those who are using the vehicle as a mere form of transport, where the destination or certain activities play the most important role. Prideaux (2002a, p. 35) also suggests a third form of drive tourism which incorporates a mix of the above mentioned types of drive holidays. Olsen (2002, p. 19) classified drive tourism based on the length of trip which resulted in four different sub-groups with a short break ranging from 1 to 3 nights, a short tour ranging from 4 to 7 nights, a big tour extending to 21 nights and a grand tour being more than 22 nights.

Other attempts to segment the drive market include for example the work by Yann et al. (1999, quoted in Olsen (2002), pp. 13-14) who suggested segmentation not only by the length of the journey but also by the number of destinations visited and the number of stops on the way. He distinguished between “short break” and “long-haul” drive markets, where the long-haul drive holiday is again characterised by three different travel patterns: multiple destination touring, A to B travel with stops in between and A to B travel without stops. Especially the third kind of drive holiday tends to use the motor vehicle as a means of transport only. (ibid., pp. 21-22) Furthermore, family and household structures were said to have an influence on the type of travel chosen. For example young singles and families with children were more likely to drive to a specific final destination without having stops in between, whereas older adults tended to take their time and make multiple stops. (ibid.)

2.2.1.2. Motivations for Taking Drive Holidays

Even though drive tourism is not a homogenous market there are still certain characteristics that the various market segments have in common and which separate them from other forms of tourism. Olsen (2002, p. 12) identified a set of external and internal

key factors that influence travellers to take self-drive holidays. External influences include for example travellers' disposable income and economic condition, which indicates that drive holidays are often preferred as a cheaper option to other holiday types. Internal influences play another important role in the destination and trip choice of drive tourists. Drive tourists often have a distinct desire or motivation to take drive holidays, which satisfy special needs that other types of holidays do not fulfil. Drive holidays convey a certain feeling of freedom, independence and flexibility and those taking drive holidays often consider themselves as "travellers" rather than "tourists". This purposeful separation from other mainstream tourists is significant for drive tourists because it indicates that they might prefer "real and local experiences" away from routes and products that are generally perceived as very touristy. (Olsen (2002), p. 13)

2.2.2. Self-Drive Tourism in the Northern Territory

Compared to other states in Australia the Northern Territory has a relatively small self-drive tourism market. In 2005 about 30% of all visitors to the Northern Territory travelled either by private or rented vehicles as against to about 50% across all other states and territories. (Carson (2007b), p. 2) This fact can be related to the comparatively long distances from major source markets, nevertheless, the self-drive market is still perceived as a significant market for the Territory. Visitors to the Northern Territory are more likely to travel by air or by long haul bus or coach. (ibid.) On the other hand, coach tourism in Australia has been declining in recent years due to cheaper airfares and the only regularly serviced commercial airports in the Northern Territory are in Darwin and Alice Springs. As a consequence, self-drive tourism may still have some potential to grow in the future and might help to disperse visitors across the Territory. (ibid.) Given these factors, Tourism NT has recognised drive tourism as a key market and has committed to develop a strategy for the drive tourism market, which aims at providing themed pre-visit information and enhancing the self-drive experience through specialised tourism drive programs. (Tourism NT (2002), p. 97)

Self-drive trips to relatively remote areas such as desert Australia or the Northern Territory are likely to take longer than trips to other destinations given the greater distances between

attractions and amenities. (Carson (2007b), p. 2) As an example, the shortest distance by road between Sydney and Darwin, the capital of the Northern Territory, is over 4,000 kilometres. The nearest urban centre with a population greater than 100,000 people outside of the Northern Territory is Adelaide, which is still 1,500 kilometres by road from the Northern Territory's most southern city, Alice Springs, and 3,000 kilometres from Darwin. Also within the Northern Territory distances between various points of interest are often enormous and there can be hundreds of kilometres between towns or service centres that offer fuel, roadhouses or stores for supply. A map of the road and highway network in the Northern Territory is provided in Appendix D. The most prominent roads are the Stuart Highway from north to south, the Barkly Highway east to Queensland and the Victoria Highway west to Western Australia. Additionally, there are many more minor roads, some of which have limited access through Aboriginal land or may be closed during the wet season from December to April due to floods. (ibid., pp. 2-3)

2.2.3. Current State of Knowledge about 4WD Tourism

Leisure travellers in 4WD vehicles are considered as a particular sub-group of the overall drive tourism market in Australia which has experienced considerable growth in recent years. (Taylor/Prideaux (2006), pp. 2-4) However, the current state of knowledge about 4WD tourism in Australia is still very low and it is only recently that systematic research to examine the potential benefits and effects of this type of tourism has been implemented. References to 4WD travel and tourism in the existing literature are very limited and largely discuss environmental impacts of 4WD vehicles on particular types of terrain (see for example Priskin (2003); McKercher/Robbins (1999) and Hercock (1999)) or mention 4WD transport in the context of tourism in a particular destination. Other research (Hamilton/Barbato (2005)) has focused on understanding attitudes and characteristics of 4WD owners compared to other vehicle owners but did not address attributes or preferences of 4WD travellers relating to trip characteristics or the activity of 4WDing. (Taylor et al. (2007), p. 3; Taylor/Prideaux (2006), pp. 4-5) As a consequence, Carson and Taylor (2006, pp. 12-13) suggest that gaining better market insights need to be a priority for destinations that attract or wish to attract 4WD markets in order to establish or improve their competitiveness.

2.2.3.1. Defining 4WD Tourism

Given the lack of a widely accepted definition of 4WD tourism Carson and Taylor (2006b, p. 2) proposed a simple product market definition to describe this particular type of tourism, while pointing out that other definitions might be possible:

“Tourism experiences which the consumer and supplier perceive as heightened in value by the use of 4WD vehicles.”

This definition was based on the concept that separating the vehicle from the overall trip experience is difficult when discussing self-drive tourism and its various sub-groups. While in many cases the vehicle is just the mode of transport to access a destination but not directly related to the real experience of the trip, other segments consider the vehicle itself as an essential part of the total experience (Taylor et al. (2007), p. 3) Derrett (2002, p. 26) established a connection between self-drive tourism and special interest tourism where the vehicle is used to enable the pursuit of certain interests and activities, such as fishing, fossicking or bird watching for example. These groups value in particular benefits such as adventure, excitement, escape, discovery and learning, which are related to the vehicle or the experience of driving itself. (Scott (2002), p. 86)

Consequently, it was argued that 4WD travel may have a particularly strong link between transport, destination and experience because the vehicle is often considered as a prerequisite to access specific destinations or undertake desired activities, which could not be realised by the use of other conventional vehicles. (Carson/Taylor (2006b), p. 2; Prideaux et al. (2006), p. 3) It was also found that ambient environment-based attractions such as unique landscape, tracks, terrain or fauna and flora are more important to the overall trip experience of 4WD travellers than for the general self-drive market. (Taylor et al. (2007), pp. 3-4; Prideaux et al. (2006), pp. 2-3; Macbeth (1998), n.p.a.) Similarly, 4WD travellers appear to identify strongly with their vehicles and the activity of “4WDing”, which is further underlined by the proliferation of 4WD recreation clubs across Australia and internationally. (Carson/Taylor (2006b), p. 2)

Furthermore, destinations and product suppliers promote specific tourism experiences with the explicit term “4WD” in their labels and 4WD vehicle manufacturers as well as accessory providers market their products and services by establishing a purposeful connection between the vehicle and such experiences. What emerges from these findings is that 4WD consumers, suppliers but also destinations share a certain set of concepts and a specific language about 4WD experiences that facilitates interaction in the 4WD marketplace. This allows the tourism industry to create, offer, promote and manage experiences associated with “4WDing” or “4WD trips” and at the same time enables consumers to identify opportunities to engage in such experiences and develop a demand for it. (Carson/Taylor (2006b), p. 2) Thus the definition of 4WD tourism provided by Carson and Taylor builds on this interaction and allows 4WD trips to include experiences that are either on or off-road as well as experiences that are either completely dominated by the use of a 4WD vehicle or include it as part of a larger trip experience. (ibid.)

2.2.3.2. Segmentation of the 4WD Tourism Market

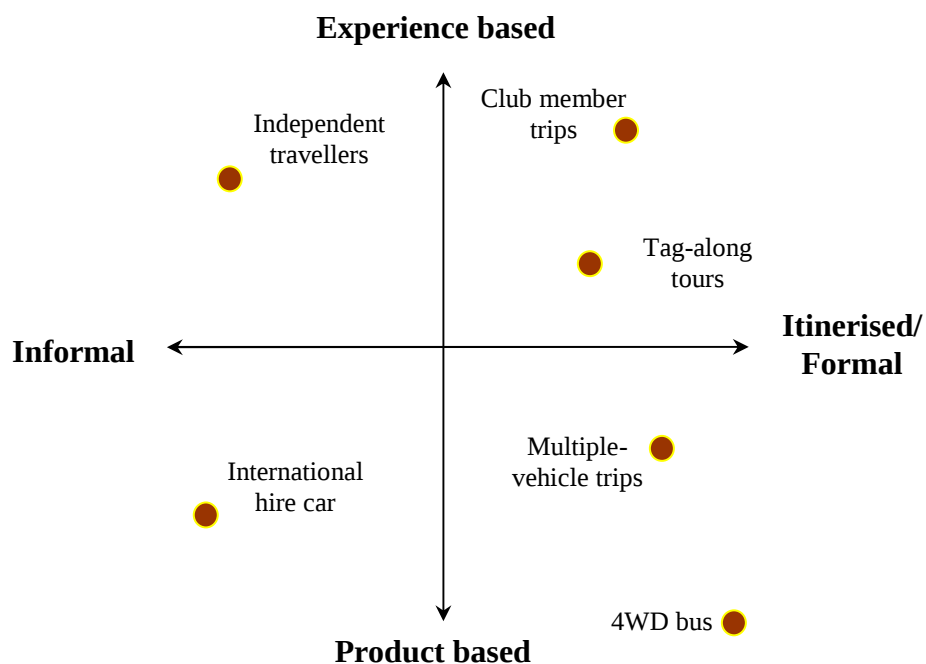
In order to better understand consumer preferences and needs Taylor and Prideaux (2006) have undertaken research to identify a range of different segments within the 4WD market and their particular characteristics. A number of aspects were considered important in differentiating various 4WD segments from each other, including the main purpose of the trip, the type of travel party, the proportion of the trip spent 4WDing, the preference for off-road driving or the preference for certain terrain or environments. As a starting point for segmentation, Taylor and Prideaux have classified 4WD trips based on the composition of the travel party and attributes of the vehicle to understand the interrelationships between attributes of 4WD trips and the composition of 4WD travellers’ itineraries (Figure 6). (Taylor/Prideaux (2006), p. 6)

The most common types of trips taken by 4WD travellers were clustered as: -

- Independent travellers (travelling independently in their own vehicles);
- Multiple vehicle trips (travelling in groups of two or more vehicles);
- Club member trips (travelling in groups, organised by a 4WD club);
- Tag-along tours (individual drivers follow a guide);
- International hire car trips (internationals travelling in rented 4WD vehicles); and
- 4WD bus tours (groups travelling in a bus, organised by a 4WD bus tour operator).

It was found that independent 4WD travellers on single-vehicle trips tend to have less formal and more flexible itineraries and try to get desired experiences during the trip. Conversely, 4WD tour buses are on a relatively organised and consistent itinerary and are largely focused on products and attractions.

Figure 6: Trip party – vehicle typology of 4WD trips



(Source: Taylor/Prideaux (2006), p. 6)

Further segmentation according to trip motivations, trip preferences and characteristics, and the relative importance of 4WDing as an activity was deemed necessary for a better

understanding of the needs and preferences of 4WD travellers. (Taylor and Prideaux (2006), p. 7) In this context it was found that motivational drivers for 4WD trips and for the activity of 4WDing include three main push factors: -

1. **Psychological factors** – the main reasons for 4WD trips are the possibility to “get away from it all”, personal self-discovery, socialising and making new friends or facing challenges.
2. **Activity driven factors** – the primary motivation for 4WD trips is to use the vehicle for accessing locations where favoured activities can be undertaken. The trip is mainly based on the desire to undertake the activity.
3. **Thrill seeking factors** – travellers desire adventure-based experiences which involve testing the vehicles’ and their own capabilities and applying a range of formally and informally obtained skills.

A further analysis of trip preferences and characteristics – in short, tripistics – was undertaken to get an insight into trip frequency, length, destination selection, travel party and planning activities. In combination with the motivational push factors described above Taylor and Prideaux (2006, p. 17) have identified three possible segments of 4WD travellers:

- **Explorer travellers:** This segment has a strong preference to experience the isolation and natural attributes, in particular of remote areas in desert or Outback regions. They go on relatively infrequent and extended trips with family, friends, relatives or club members, mostly to places decided by the group or to new places. Their main motivations are likely to include “getting away”, socialising and self-discovery.
- **Activity seekers:** This segment is composed of recreational travellers who utilise the vehicle primarily for its ability to access places where they can undertake

certain recreational activities, such as bushwalking, fishing, fossicking or bird watching. They take relatively short trips and tend to repeat visits to destinations. They are motivated by the desire to undertake the activity.

- **Adventure-thrill seekers:** This segment prefers relatively frequent and short excursions to nearby environments which provide challenging experiences including challenging terrain and driving conditions and/or where they can test the capability of the vehicle and the skills of the driver and passengers. Modifying the vehicle for such environments is accordingly considered important. They are mainly motivated by the challenges of 4WDing and the opportunity to put their skills into practice.

A fourth segment could be proposed in this context which includes destination focused travellers who mainly transit from destination A to B. This segment is mainly interested in getting to a certain destination and the 4WD vehicle is generally used for its ability to traverse tracks which reduce travel time or distances.

2.2.4. Potential Advantages of 4WD Tourism Markets in the Desert

In its quest to investigate new potential business solutions for economic, social and cultural development in desert regions of Australia, the DK-CRC has recognised the need to open up new experiences and markets to enhance the performance of tourism. In this context, 4WD tourism has been identified as a particular group of interest for future development. DK-CRC has initiated the *On Track* research program, which aims at examining the potential economic and social benefits of 4WD tourism in the desert while evaluating potential pressures on its fragile environment, culture and infrastructure. (Desert Knowledge CRC (2006), n.p.a.)

It has been suggested that interest in Australia for leisure-based 4WD trips is growing. (Taylor/Prideaux (2006), pp. 2-3; Taylor et al. (2007), p. 2) This assumption was based on both statistical and anecdotal evidence outlining the increasing popularity of 4WD tourism. Especially in desert regions, 4WD self-drive tourists are considered to have a number of

advantages over other segments of the self-drive tourism market: (Carson/Taylor (2006b), p. 3; Taylor/Prideaux (2006), p. 2) -

- They have a tendency to look for new destinations and get away from the well-established high volume tourism routes. They are willing to disperse and can access more remote places.
- The journey itself is an essential part of the overall trip experience and is at least as important as the end destination. Distances are no obstacles for most off-road 4WD travellers but are often regarded as an attractive element of the trip.
- The number of desert travellers in 4WD vehicles has continued to grow within recent years in contrast to the market as a whole for desert and Outback Australia.
- There has been a dramatic increase in 4WD ownership and in 4WD club memberships in recent years and chances are that the 4WD travel market will continue to grow in the future.
- 4WD ownership has particularly increased among retired and early-retired people. These age groups represent one of the fastest growing traveller groups globally. (Tourism NT (2002), p. 13)
- 4WD travellers are potentially more loyal to desert destinations and can generate sufficient repeat visitation to sustain the desert tourism industry over time.
- They show a stronger commitment to their vehicles, their modes of travel and their holiday experiences. They might be willing to spend more money on a wider variety of consumables than other groups of self-drivers and might be more resilient to changes in the marketplace (such as rising fuel prices).
- Due to their desire to explore new destinations and get new experiences on their trips, 4WD travellers might be a particularly interesting market for new tourism products provided by Aboriginal people in remote desert locations.

Additional market observations suggest a strong and growing demand for 4WD leisure-based experiences in desert areas of Australia. Numerous state and regional tourism organisations, for example Tourism South Australia, Tourism Northern Territory or central Australian Tourism, have developed marketing campaigns focusing on the promotion of 4WD tracks or experiences. Desert images are also prominently featured in popular Australian 4WD consumer magazines, such as 4x4 Australia, 4WD Monthly or Overlander 4WD. (Taylor/Prideaux (2006), p. 2) Desert Knowledge CRC (2006, n.p.a.) suggests that

there might be opportunities for desert communities and businesses to derive economic and social benefits from a growing 4WD tourism market.

2.2.5. Potential 4WD Market Segments for Desert Environments

Of the segments described in section 2.2.3.2., Explorer-travellers are considered to be the group with greatest potential to contribute to growth in the desert 4WD tourism market. (Taylor/Prideaux (2006), p. 20) The majority of Explorer-travellers show a strong preference for trips in remote desert or Outback regions and due to their inherent desire to get to new and remote places they might be particularly interesting markets for remote desert settlements. However, for individual destinations and attractions in the desert repeat visitation will likely be rather low since the majority favour trips to different or new locations. (Taylor et al. (2007), pp. 12-13) It was furthermore found that desert trips tend to be longer than trips in other environments – typically between two and three weeks – and are taken by more experienced 4WD travellers. Desert travellers are also more likely to be travelling in groups with multiple vehicles or 4WD club members. Older couples (aged 55 and over) are the dominant age group of desert travellers due to the fact that they generally have more time and budget available for longer desert trips. Core destinations for desert 4WD travellers are very often 4WD tracks such as the Canning Stock Route, Tanami Track and Gunbarrel Highway. (Carson (2007b), p. 2)

To a lesser extent, Activity Seekers and Adventure-thrill Seekers were found to have some potential for tourism development in the desert, with around a third of each segment indicating a strong preference for desert environments. (Taylor et al. (2007), p. 21) However, it is argued that these segments might require a different approach in promoting and delivering products and experiences to get attracted to the desert. Activity Seekers, for example, are considered to be more likely to create their itineraries around iconic attractions and destinations or groups of desirable activities and might therefore provide opportunities for desert businesses to offer new or challenging activities in the desert environment. On the other hand, Adventure-thrill Seekers will require a different approach

which gives them the opportunity to test their vehicle on challenging tracks, including for example sand driving or river crossings.

2.2.6. Current Shortcomings in Understanding Desert 4WD Markets

Despite a purportedly growing demand for 4WD tourism in desert Australia and a growing interest in 4WD tourism in general, Carson and Taylor (2006b) advise against too optimistic expectations from this market in terms of economic benefits. They argue that growing numbers of potential 4WD travellers alone will most likely be insufficient to automatically expect economic benefits for desert people and that further research will be required to develop a holistic understanding of the true potential of this market.

Even though 4WD enthusiasts have indicated a strong preference for travelling to desert regions it still remains to be seen whether these stated preferences will in reality convert into increased visitation of desert destinations. For example, Taylor et al. (2007, pp. 12-13) found that 4WD travellers also indicated relatively strong preferences for other regions in Australia, such as rainforests, alpine regions or coastal environments. From the current level of knowledge it is not clear under which conditions 4WD tourists might prefer desert regions over other environments. (Carson/Taylor (2006b), p. 4) The only things that are commonly known about 4WD desert trips are that they tend to be longer, due to longer distances that have to be covered to reach the desired environment, that they are engaged in less frequently and that it takes longer to plan them (Carson/Taylor (2006b), p. 4; Prideaux et al. (2006), pp. 2-3) This research will further enhance the level of knowledge about trip preferences of 4WD desert travellers by analysing initial motivations to visit desert regions and to explore the range of experiences sought in the deserts. (See sections 4.2.2. - 4.2.4.)

Furthermore, current research has been limited to understanding the domestic 4WD market only and to date, nothing is known about motivations and trip preferences of international 4WD travellers and whether they might provide different opportunities for desert settlements. (Carson/Taylor (2006b), p. 5) The international market is likely to be different from the domestic market segment in many ways. They are primarily clustered around the

4WD hire car segment, are more likely to have less experience in the desert environments and might generally be on shorter desert trips. On the other hand, there is also evidence that international travellers generally have greater interest in conventional tourism experiences, including Aboriginal culture. (Schmiechen (2006), p. 8) Even if the main market for 4WD tourism in Australia is composed of domestic travellers (73%) there are still important international markets from Germany, the UK or Japan, which might provide opportunities from an economic point of view. (Carson/Taylor (2006b), p. 2)

Another major concern in this context was that 4WD travellers might not have a strong demand for commercial products. 4WD travellers, especially long haul travellers, prefer to be isolated and have a tendency to be relatively self sufficient on the way. Consequently, there might not be such a strong demand for products other than food and fuel, including tours, souvenirs, attractions or even accommodation. (ibid.) At the same time, it was acknowledged that other sub-segments of the desert 4WD market, such as short haul travellers or international hire car travellers, might be more receptive to these sorts of products and services.

It has been observed that current visitor flows and travel patterns in the desert just focus on a relatively small number of iconic attractions and touring routes. (Carson/Taylor (2006b), p. 4) However, it has been observed that 4WD travellers tend to visit more destinations on a trip than other desert travellers (NTTC (2005), n.p.a.). Given that they have the necessary technical capacities to drive off-road to remote regions, it has been assumed that this market might have more potential to disperse tourism activity to remoter and less frequented destinations in desert Australia. However, this has been based on speculations only and there was no clear understanding of how likely 4WD travellers are to be attracted to new destinations. This study further investigates trip characteristics and the composition of itineraries of both domestic and international 4WD travellers in central Australia and explores their level of interest in accessing remote destinations.

Despite current developments in 4WD tourism it can not be guaranteed that the trend for 4WD desert trips will continue to grow in the future. The impacts of ongoing trends in the society, such as rising fuel costs and changing travel patterns towards shorter and more

frequent holidays (Desert Knowledge Australia (2005b), p. 5) are poorly understood and based on speculations only. At the same time it is argued that the current global trend of an ageing population might be an area for market growth. (Carson/Taylor (2006b), p. 4) For example, Prideaux (2002a, p. 34) found that especially the size of the senior's travel market will grow substantially in the near future as the so-called baby-boomer generation, people who were born during a period of increased birth rates after World War II (Muller/Cleaver (2000), p. 154), will retire. Due to the increasing propensity of this particular age group to undertake leisure travel and to learn and experience new things (Prideaux (2002a), p. 36) this might present opportunities to sustain a growing 4WD market.

Carson and Taylor (2006b, p. 4) argue that growth in the desert 4WD market might be limited by a lack of effective product distribution. Product suppliers and destination marketers alike need a better understanding of information needs and preferences of the 4WD market to deliver their information to the market in the appropriate form and channels. It was outlined that this might be particularly challenging for the distribution of indigenous tourism products, which do not have access to mainstream distribution channels (ibid.) or where the match between consumer demand and the interests of indigenous product suppliers is often poorly understood. (Tremblay (2006b), p. 1642) This study will build on the current state of knowledge and will explore information needs and trip planning patterns of desert 4WD travellers as well as analyse their demand for Aboriginal tourism products.

2.3. Indigenous Tourism in Australia

2.3.1. Definitions

2.3.1.1. Indigenous Peoples

The term “indigenous peoples” is used as an umbrella term to describe races of people who are endemic or native to a destination. (Hinch/Butler (1996), p. 9; Xie (2006), p. 558) They are considered to be original tribes or first peoples, who are still living in their homeland areas and have unique cultural beliefs and practices which are closely linked to local ecosystems and the use of natural resources. (Furze et al. (1996) quoted in Zeppel (2006), p. 3 and Boyle (2001), p. 15) Russel (2000, p. 93) described indigenous peoples as those who are *“generally minority groups in their territories, have developed a unique culture which may include social and legal systems, and whose ancestral connections to a region are pre-colonial”*.

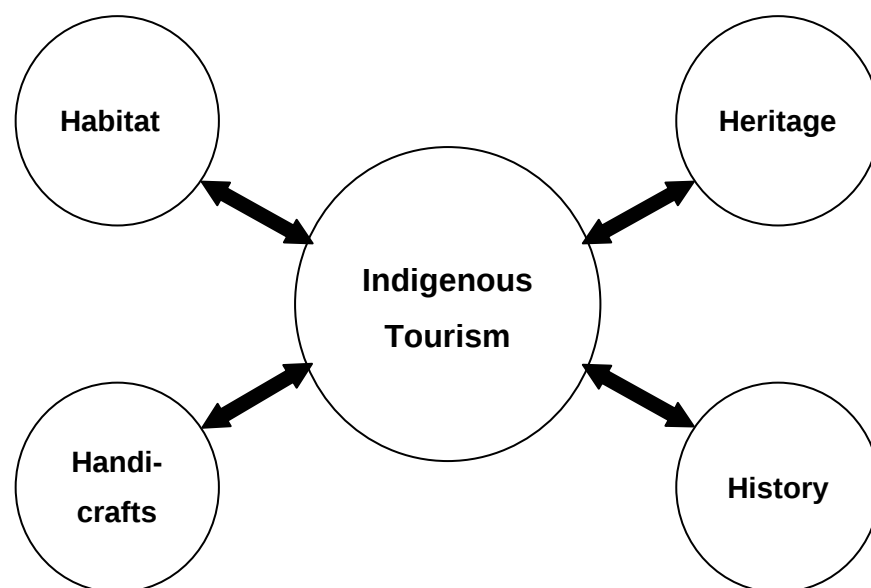
A whole range of alternative terminologies is used in the literature to describe tribal or native groups of people who fall under the indigenous concept including terms such as Indian, Aboriginal, Native or First Nations. (Hinch/Butler (1996), p. 9; Cunningham/Stanley (2003), p. 403) The selection of which expression to use varies according to the geographic context, the specific cultural group or the objective of the author. For example, in Canada the term First Nations is preferred to describe Indian or Inuit populations, in North and South America indigenous peoples are often referred to as Native Americans, Indians or Amerindians, whereas in Australia they are commonly known as Aboriginal people. (Hinch/Butler (1996), p. 9; Zeppel (2006), p. 4; Cunningham/Stanley (2003), p. 403) More specifically, in Australia the term “indigenous” comprises people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, whereas the term “Aboriginal” is more commonly used in marketing applications, due to the greater understanding of this expression in the Australian and international marketplace. (NTTC (2004), p. 7) This thesis will use the term „Aboriginal“ and “Aboriginal tourism” in

connection with Australia and, more specifically, central Australia as it is the preferred term in this region.

2.3.1.2. Indigenous Tourism

According to Smith (1995, p. 287) indigenous tourism is based on four interrelated elements, which have been identified as the four Hs of indigenous tourism: habitat, heritage, history and handicrafts (Figure 7). These elements describe the indigenous tourism phenomenon as culture-bounded visitor experiences which depend on the geographic setting, the ethnographic traditions, the effects of acculturation and the marketable handicrafts.

Figure 7: The 4 Hs of indigenous tourism



(Source: Smith (1995), p. 287)

In Australia, indigenous or Aboriginal tourism is defined as a tourism product which is either Aboriginal owned or operated, employs Aboriginal people, or provides consenting contact with Aboriginal people, culture or land. (South Australian Tourism Commission (1995) quoted in Zeppel (1999), p. 21 and in Sharma/Carson (2002), p. 82) The terms

“Aboriginal tourism” and “indigenous tourism” are used interchangeably (Tourism Western Australia (2006), p. 3; Zeppel (2006), p. 8) although Pitcher et al. (1999, p. 3) argue that “indigenous tourism” offers a more comprehensive term than “Aboriginal tourism”, as it means *“All forms of participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in tourism as employers, employees, investors, joint venture partners, providing indigenous cultural tourism products or providing mainstream tourism products”*. (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (1997) quoted in Boyle (2001), pp. 15-16)

Hinch and Butler (1996, p. 9) define indigenous tourism as *“tourism activity in which indigenous people are directly involved either through control and/or by having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction”* They argue that the factor of control is critically important for the sustainable development and management of indigenous tourism and classify various types of indigenous tourism according to two key aspects – the level of indigenous control and the extent to which the attraction is focused on indigenous culture. (ibid., pp. 9-10) They identified four different scenarios (Figure 8) and further derived four different categories of tourism activity from this typology.

Figure 8: Classification of indigenous tourism

		INDIGENOUS CONTROL	
		<i>Low Degree of Control</i>	<i>High Degree of Control</i>
INDIGENOUS THEME	<i>Indigenous Theme Present</i>	CULTURE DISPOSSESSED	CULTURE CONTROLLED
	<i>Indigenous Theme Absent</i>	NON-INDIGENOUS TOURISM	DIVERSIFIED INDIGENOUS

(Source: Hinch/Butler (1996), p. 10)

- ***Culture Controlled:*** Tourism activities are controlled by indigenous interests which feature indigenous places and/or indigenous themes.
- ***Culture Dispossessed:*** Tourism activities are controlled by non-indigenous interests which feature indigenous themes and/or indigenous places. Examples would be guided tours by tour companies to Aboriginal sites where tours and interpretation are conducted by non-Aboriginal guides or art galleries owned and operated by non-indigenous people.
- ***Diversified Indigenous:*** Tourism activities are controlled by indigenous interests which do not feature indigenous themes but which may occur at indigenous places. Examples would be native-owned attractions such as casinos.
- ***Non Indigenous:*** Tourism activities are controlled by non-indigenous interests which feature neither indigenous themes or places within which indigenous people may or may not be employed. This category falls into the classification non-indigenous tourism.

2.3.1.3. Indigenous Cultural Tourism

Indigenous cultural tourism is often mentioned in the context of cultural tourism and is often used as an overarching term for ethnic tourism, tribal tourism, anthropological tourism or any form of tourism that involves contact with indigenous peoples or their culture. (Smith (2003), p. 117; Boyle (2001), pp. 16-17) For example, Harron and Weiler (1992, p. 84) describe “ethnic tourists” as tourists seeking first hand, direct and authentic experiences with people whose indigenous or cultural background is different from the tourist. This might involve visits to native homes and villages or the observation of or participation in traditional activities, such as rituals, ceremonies or dances. (Smith (2003), p. 118) The definition of “ethnic tourism”, however, always involves some direct contact with the host cultures and their environments. (Moscardo/Pearce (1999), pp. 416-17) The

human element and authentic contact is central to this form of tourism, as against to general “cultural tourism”, where the element of culture can also be involved in an indirect way. (Boyle (2001), pp. 17-18) Indigenous cultural tourism usually involves visiting native or indigenous people, such as tribal groups or ethnic minorities, in their natural environments, which might be in a designated cultural landscape, a national park or in a mountainous, rainforest or desert region. Such locations comprise, more often than not, remote regions and relatively fragile environments which are not easily accessible to the average tourist. (Smith (2003), p. 118)

Parsons (2002, p. 14) argues that there are various types of indigenous cultural tourism enterprises, each allowing a different kind of interaction between host and guest. Such businesses can be characterised in terms of degrees of intimacy and, defined by their core business, may be distinguished in terms of having low, medium and high levels of intimacy. The lowest level of intimacy is provided by forms of indirect tourism, where no face-to-face encounter takes place, and where the cultural experience is entirely delivered by non-indigenous people. In Australia, the main example of indigenous indirect cultural tourism is in the purchase of Aboriginal art and craft products from non-Indigenous retailers in capital cities. The typical example of an indigenous cultural tourism enterprise with a medium level of intimacy is the Indigenous-owned art and craft retail outlet. There is a face-to-face encounter between the Indigenous salesperson and the customer, which is limited to the sales process only, rather than sharing a cultural experience. Businesses with a high level of intimacy invite tourists into their communities or onto their traditional lands. They include, for example, interpretive guided tours of sites by traditional owners, and the equivalent of “farm-stay tourism” experiences in Indigenous communities or homelands. There are generally more opportunities for unstructured interaction and free-flowing questioning and discussion between host and guest. Such opportunities obviously increase with the extension of the time frame. (Parsons (2002), p. 14)

Harron and Weiler (1992, pp. 85-87) suggest that the motives of tourists seeking and engaging in indigenous cultural experiences are only poorly understood. Smith (2003, p. 118) argues that the profile of indigenous cultural tourists is changing rapidly. Some can be characterised as adventurous or intrepid individuals who are motivated by curiosity and

the pursuit of elite peer approval and always tend to seek the unexplored and the untouched. This type of tourist is more likely to seek indigenous cultural experiences while engaging in activities such as hilltribe, mountain or desert trekking. Others prefer rather short-time and not-too-close encounters and are susceptible to more passive forms of indigenous tourism that involve cultural heritage, arts and crafts or village tourism. They are also more likely to respond to mainstream tourism packages featuring indigenous culture. (Smith (2003), p. 118)

2.3.1.4. Aboriginal Tourism Product

Zeppel (1999, p. 124) referred to an Aboriginal tourism product as an attraction featuring: Aboriginal people; Aboriginal artefacts; Aboriginal bushcraft skills; Aboriginal cultural practices; and Aboriginal spirituality or the “Dreaming”. This terminology has a sacred meaning for Aboriginal people and is used to explain the myths and legends of the creation of the universe, nature, humanity and the cycle of life and death. (Aboriginal Tourism Australia (2007), n.p.a.) While Aboriginal tourism may or may not have a cultural component, the term “Aboriginal tourism product” is used to describe the actual offer made to the market and features some aspects of Aboriginal culture. (Tourism Western Australia (2006), p. 3) An Aboriginal tourism product has been defined as follows: -

- A tourism product, which is wholly owned and operated by Aboriginal people; or
- A tourism product, which is in partnership with non-Aboriginal people and has the ongoing consent of the appropriate Aboriginal people and recognised Aboriginal authorities, such as local Aboriginal Land Councils, local Traditional Elders’ Councils or local registered Aboriginal Corporations; and
- Includes those businesses that are owned and/or controlled by Aboriginal people, as well as those non-Aboriginal businesses (i.e. mainstream businesses) that deliver authentic Aboriginal cultural experiences developed by way of joint ventures or collaborative marketing.

In Australia, the range of Aboriginal tourism products includes for example cultural tours, art and craft galleries or cultural centres and performances. Other diversified indigenous tourism products include accommodation facilities, boat cruises or additional visitor facilities, such as roadhouses, regional airlines and transport companies. (Zeppel (1999), pp. 21-22)

Based on the discussion above, Zeppel (2006, p. 9) provides a list of key features that are relevant for describing indigenous cultural tourism: -

- Tourism connected with indigenous culture, values and traditions;
- Tourism products owned and operated by indigenous people;
- Tourism based on indigenous land and cultural identity, controlled from within by indigenous groups;
- Tourism which includes indigenous habitat, heritage, history and handicrafts;
- Tourism that typically involves small businesses owned by tribes or families; and
- Tourism focused on indigenous knowledge of culture and nature.

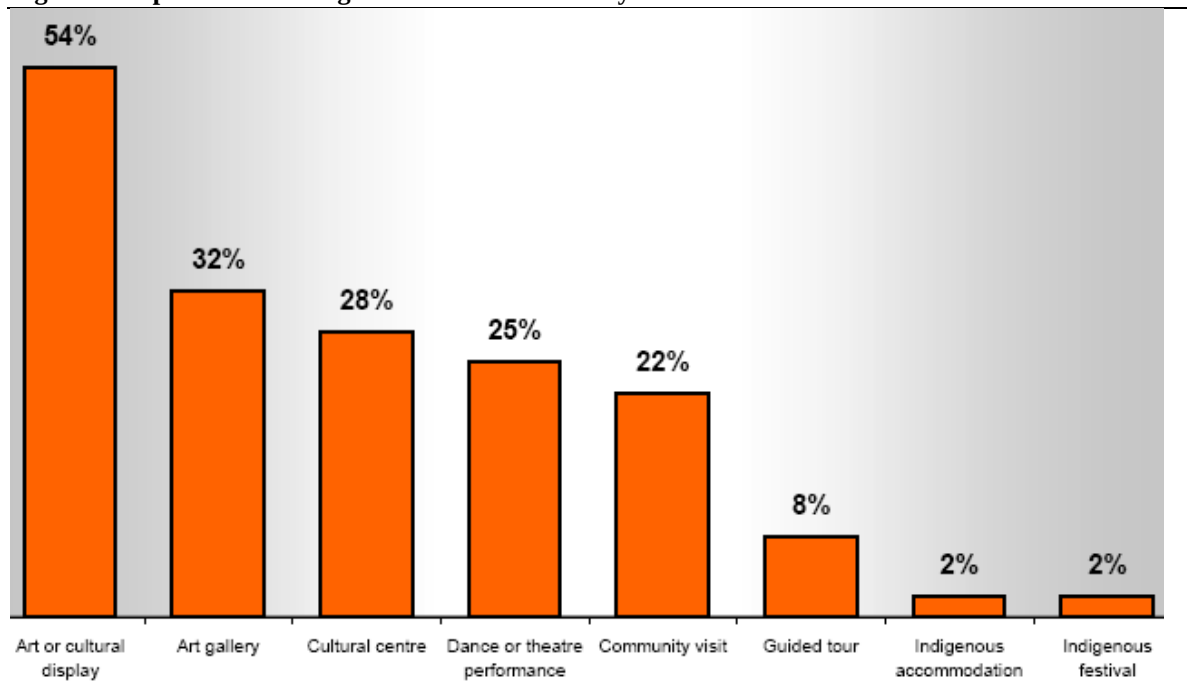
2.3.2. Current Aboriginal Tourism Trends in Australia

In 2005, about 16% of all international visitors to Australia participated in Aboriginal tourism activities, which has increased from about 12% in 2001. On the other hand, the participation of domestic tourists in Aboriginal tourism has remained rather low, with about 0.8% of total domestic overnight visitors and only 0.2% of domestic day visitors participating in such activities. The majority of international (88%) and domestic visitors (76%) who had an Aboriginal cultural experience on their trip experienced Aboriginal arts and craft and cultural displays. A smaller proportion (around 40% for both international and domestic visitors) visited an Aboriginal site or community. (Tourism Research Australia (2006), data based on the National and International Visitor Surveys)

The dominant market for Aboriginal cultural tourism appears to be international visitors, with the largest source markets coming from the United Kingdom, Germany, United States, Japan, New Zealand, and China. It must be acknowledged, though, that considerable proportions of these markets – almost 40% (Tourism Research Australia (2006), n.p.a.) – travel in organised tour groups, for which the indigenous cultural activity is very often an integrated part of the itinerary. (Tremblay et al. (2005), pp. 13-14) Visitors from Germany and the US had the strongest propensity to engage in Aboriginal activities while in Australia. However, for more than half of all visitors having an indigenous experience is not among the main motivating factors to come to Australia (Tourism Research Australia (2006), n.p.a.), which outlines the rather low significance of Aboriginal culture in the overall trip experiences of tourists coming to Australia. Ryan and Huyton (2001, p. 281) suggest that many tourists choose to experience indigenous culture primarily for the entertainment value rather than out of a strong interest in the culture. On the other hand, it has also been acknowledged that tourists may perceive indigenous culture as part of a more complex image of the destination and enhance the value of the overall experience. (Petheram (2005), p. 46)

New South Wales attracted the largest number of international visitors who participated in Aboriginal tourism activities, followed by Queensland, Victoria and the Northern Territory. Conversely, the Northern Territory received the highest number of domestic overnight visitors who participated in Aboriginal cultural activities, followed by Queensland and New South Wales. The most popular activities in combination with Aboriginal culture were visiting Aboriginal art, craft or cultural displays (54%), visiting Aboriginal galleries (32%), visiting Aboriginal cultural centres (28%), attending Aboriginal dance or theatre performances (25%) and visiting Aboriginal sites (22%). Only around 2% decided to stay in an Aboriginal community or take part in an indigenous cultural festival (Figure 9). (Tourism Research Australia (2006), n.p.a.)

Figure 9: Experienced Aboriginal tourism activities by international visitors



(Source: adapted from Tourism Research Australia (2006), n.p.a.)

2.3.3. Demand for Aboriginal Tourism

A large body of literature has addressed the issue of demand for indigenous tourism in Australia in previous years, including a number of government reports, strategy papers working papers or conference proceedings. However, many of these documents had a tendency to cover the topic quite superficially or exaggerate interest in Aboriginal culture and made overly optimistic claims about the potential of indigenous tourism to support economic growth. (Schmiechen (2006), p. 10; Petheram (2005), pp. 37-39; Boyle (2001), p. 20; Ryan/Huyton (2000a), p. 15) Although it has often been acknowledged that it is critically important to understand the true nature of the demand for indigenous tourism (Petheram (2005), p. 37; Altman/Finlayson (2003), p. 83; Carson (2002), n.p.a.; Boyle (2001), p. 11; Ryan/Huyton (2000b); p. 54) much of the previous research was confined to general issues of demand from international visitors, and to a lesser extent from domestic visitors. This lead to a number of rather broad key findings which were summarised by Tremblay (2006b, pp. 3-5) and Petheram (2005, p. 61): -

- The dominant market for indigenous tourism appears to be international visitors (particularly from Western Europe). They also expect more interaction with indigenous people.
- Indigenous experiences are not a primary motivating factor for most visitors.
- Natural surroundings and iconic attractions play a role in visitor motivation to experience indigenous tourism.
- Demand for indigenous art is highest and leads to most revenue compared to other indigenous tourism products.
- ‘Authenticity’ and meaningful interactions with indigenous people are decisive aspects for visitors.
- Factors such as time and budget play a role in whether visitors will participate in an indigenous experience.
- The level of interest in and demand for indigenous tourism can be dependent on the regional context in which it is presented.

Interest in Aboriginal tourism tends to be much greater than participation levels. This can be related either to a lack of appropriate products or pricing, insufficient information about the available products or to the perception of excessive commercialisation. (Tremblay et al. (2005), p. 10) For example, in the Northern Territory it appears that while international visitors expressed greater interest in indigenous experiences, they seemed to participate less in tours with Aboriginal themes. (ibid., p. 12) Previous research (AGB McNair (1996) quoted in Boyle (2001), p. 31) found that especially international visitors expected to interact with Aboriginals in the Northern Territory through routine activities, similar to experiences made with indigenous peoples in Asia and the South Pacific. They tend to expect informal contact with local Aboriginal people in shops or hotels but are often poorly informed about living conditions of Aboriginal people and that informal interaction with them is not possible in the way they expect it but that it involves either knowledge, connections or protocols. (Tremblay et al. (2005), p. 12; Boyle (2001), p. 29)

Furthermore, it was argued that many travellers do not do extensive pre-trip research and wait to investigate options to engage in Aboriginal activities until their arrival in Australia. While many of the more in-depth indigenous cultural experiences are available outside of

urban areas, visitors get immediately confronted with the marginalisation and social isolation of Aboriginal people upon arrival. Such confronting images were often supposed to deter tourists from pursuing their interest in Aboriginal culture any further. (Petheram (2005), p. 49; Boyle (2001), p. 30)

Many visitors are primarily interested in indigenous art and artefacts and expect to purchase Aboriginal art directly from Aboriginal people. The opportunity to speak and negotiate with an indigenous person enhances the authenticity and the value of the object. (Petheram (2005), p. 49; Boyle (2001), p. 29) It was also found that the demand for art and artefacts would be even higher if tourists were allowed to watch the items being produced and to learn about background stories and traditions. There is a high level of importance placed on authenticity, meaningful tourist-host interactions and the credibility of indigenous cultural experiences. (Petheram (2005), p. 42) Similarly, cultural tours need to be authentic, well-presented, educational and interesting. Visitors need to be entertained, enjoy themselves and go away having learnt something about indigenous content. (Boyle (2001), p. 37)

In this context the meaning of “authenticity” needs some clarification as it appears to be used almost as a matter of dogma in connection with indigenous cultural experiences. Altman and Finlayson (1992, pp. 8-9) found that success in indigenous tourism relies on trade-offs between authenticity, interpretation and understanding of indigenous culture by non-indigenous people. Aboriginal Tourism Australia defines authenticity as a declaration of identity, belonging, knowledge, respect and responsibility for Aboriginal culture. (Zeppel (1999), p. 25) Instead of stereotyped images, it involves cultural ways of “*living, thinking and knowing what it is to be an Aboriginal*” and the historical experience of being indigenous in Australia. In the context of ethnic tourism MacCannell (1979, p. 596) introduced the concept of “*staged authenticity*”, meaning that culture is often presented for tourists in a way that cultural traditions and customs get manipulated. On the other hand it has been acknowledged that indigenous tourist enterprises rely on presenting traditional stereotyped images of Aboriginal culture to attract non-indigenous audiences. (Zeppel (1999), p. 25) It has also been argued that authentic culture can not be purchased but is only found “*at the back of the stage*” through informal and non-commercial interactions.

(Dyer et al. (2003), p. 85) It is therefore possible that authentic tourist experiences and products do not exist at all. (Xie (2006), p. 547; Chhabra et al. (2003), p. 704; Dyer et al. (2003), p. 85; Wang (1999), pp. 350-51)

Another issue facing indigenous tourism providers is the problematic nature of demand for indigenous products among domestic visitors. Given that the traditionally main growth and interest area for indigenous tourism remains the international market, there has been a considerable lack of focus on the domestic market. Determining the level of domestic demand is a widely acknowledged research gap (Boyle, (2001) p. 20; Pitcher et al. (1999), p. 28; Ryan/Huyton (2002), p. 635) and has important repercussion for Aboriginal tourism because of the importance of the domestic market to Australian tourism. (Schmiechen (2006), p. 8; Fuller et al. (2005), p. 893) Domestic tourism accounts for around 75% of the Australian tourism industry and contributes markedly to regional economies through improved amenities and infrastructure, with domestic tourists nearly three times as likely as international visitors to stay outside of the major capitals or destinations. (CBSR (2004), p. 28) However, it has already been claimed that there is a strong potential domestic market for indigenous cultural experiences, but that the needs of these tourists are vastly different to those of international markets and therefore different marketing approaches are needed. (Miller (2000), quoted in Petheram (2005), p. 62)

A clear need for more research into the field of demand for indigenous tourism has been emphasised. (Tremblay (2006), p. 10; Petheram (2005), p. 37; NTTC (2004), p. 8; Ryan/Huyton (2002), p. 644; Pitcher et al. (1999), p. 27-28) In particular, there appears to be a greater need for more focused research on specific markets in specific destinations. So far, specific core markets, such as the backpacker market, have only rarely been addressed. Carson (2002, n.p.a.) claimed that more successful research in the future should be conducted at regional rather than national level and Petheram (2005, p. 61) suggests that it would be useful to further explore indigenous tourism under particular “special interest” aspects.

Also in the case of the Northern Territory it has been found that the information available to date does not explore the nature or characteristics of demand for indigenous tourism in

any meaningful way, nor does it effectively relate to specific places in the Northern Territory. It has been recognised that the Northern Territory holds a potential competitive advantage with indigenous tourism over other destinations in Australia because it is commonly perceived to offer the greatest opportunity to explore Aboriginal culture. (Young (2005), pp. 114-117) Tourism NT acknowledged the need for a greater understanding of the needs and wants of the Territory's visitors with respect to indigenous tourism experiences. (NTTC (2004), p. 1) Furthermore, qualitative studies to understand the requirements of different markets which are core to the NT would be insightful. (Young (2005), p. 117)

2.3.4. Aboriginal Tourism in Central Australia

Indigenous cultural tourism has been recognised as one of the main building blocks of tourism in the Northern Territory, which is estimated to offer the region significant potential for tourism development in the longer term. (NTTC (2004), p. 4) Since the Northern Territory has the largest proportion of indigenous population in Australia – about one third of its population identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander – this part of Australia is closely associated with a strong influence of Aboriginal culture. Tourism NT (formerly known as the Northern Territory Tourist Commission) builds its current Indigenous Tourism Strategy on previous research (Australia Domestic Marketing Research (2000) quoted in NTTC (2004), p. 4) which indicated a significantly higher perception of the “ability to explore indigenous culture” in both central Australia and the Top End than in any other destination in Australia. (ibid.)

Data from the National and International Visitor Surveys in 2005 revealed that over 80% of international visitors who spent at least one night in central Australia participated in an Aboriginal tourism activity. The majority of these activities include visits to Aboriginal art, craft or cultural displays, visits of Aboriginal sites or communities and attending an Aboriginal performance. As to domestic visitors, around 23% of Australian tourists who spent at least one night in central Australia engaged in an Aboriginal activity. (Tourism Research Australia (2006), n.p.a.)

Australia's desert regions, such as central Australia, are characterised by a high proportion of indigenous people, many of which live in small communities away from servicing towns (Desert Knowledge CRC (2006), n.p.a.). Tourism has often been promoted as a tool for economic development of such rural and remote indigenous communities and as a method for maintaining cultural heritage. (Schmiechen (2006), p. 6; Fuller et al. (2005), p. 892; Mapunda (2001), p. 220; Hunter (1999), p. 1; Hinch/Butler (1996), pp. 12-16) Zeppel (1998, quoted in Sharma/Carson p. 83) identified the following key issues in the development of a sustainable indigenous tourism industry as follows: -

- product development;
- access to marketing and product distribution channels;
- staff training;
- management of community impacts;
- increasing participation in the industry by indigenous people; and
- maximizing economic benefits.

However, there are still many barriers to indigenous participation in the tourism industry (NTTC (2004), p. 30; Mapunda (2001), pp. 226-229; Parkin (2001), pp. 259-60) and in particular, desert regions such as central Australia are faced with a number of challenges in achieving sustainable development and delivering indigenous cultural tourism products. Many Aboriginal communities are located in remote areas away from main existing tourism flows. Although this feature contributes essentially to the perceived authenticity of indigenous cultural attractions, access is still a critical issue. It is not only difficult to attract tourists away from major tourist icons and “off the beaten track”, but the remoteness of such regions also means limited access to infrastructure (Sharma/Carson (2002), pp. 78-79), relatively long distances from key suppliers and markets and high transport costs. Further, low economies of scale due to the domination of small and micro businesses, shortage of capital or a lack of access to management skills and skilled labour add to this problem. (Fuller (2005), p. 893; Altman/Finlayson (1992), pp. 2-3)

In addition, not all Aboriginal communities are automatically interested in engaging with tourism because they might fear negative effects of commercial tourism activity on their

cultural identity. (Barre/Jafari (1997), pp. 474-76; Altman/Finlayson (1992), pp. 2-3) Access to land for tourism activities is consequently often difficult (Dyer et al. (2003), p. 84) and, in some cases, cultural misunderstandings and decisions taken by non-indigenous people have created barriers to the establishment of sustainable business relationships (Dodson/Smith (2003) pp. 6-7; Mapunda (2001), p. 228) or even to social tensions (Harron/Weiler (1992), p. 88)

2.3.4.1. Types of Available Aboriginal Tourism Products

Perhaps as a consequence of the factors discussed above, the number of successful indigenous owned tourism ventures has been small (Boyle (2001), p. 20) and a lack of indigenous involvement in the tourism industry has often been acknowledged (Tremblay (2006a), p. 23; Desert Knowledge Australia (2005), p. 33). Existing attractions include well known “Anangu Tours” at Uluru or lesser known “Desert Tracks” out of Pitjantjatjara country. Wallace Rockhole Tourist Park and Hermannsburg Cultural Precinct as well as some community art centres are other examples, which are, however, not very well known. (Tourism NT (2006), p. 4) A scan of indigenous tourism products and cultural experiences in central Australia advertised through Tourism NT (NTTC, (2005), n.p.a.) revealed that the current range of products in the region offers very little diversity. Tourism NT lists a number of Aboriginal cultural experiences on its website and classifies them under the categories Aboriginal culture attractions, tours, accommodation and events. It was found that available indigenous products and experiences can be roughly split up into three main groups – Aboriginal art and craft galleries, attractions featuring Aboriginal culture such as Aboriginal rock art in nature parks and conservation reserves and standardised tour packages from mainstream tour operators.

The core of indigenous involvement in the Australian tourism industry is the production of arts and crafts for sale to tourists. (Whitford et al. (2001), p. 153; Boyle (2001), p. 19) Also in central Australia, the majority of available indigenous cultural experiences features Aboriginal art and craft in Aboriginal art galleries, most of which are located in Alice Springs and are accessible free of charge. Aboriginal cultural centres, such as the famous Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre, Alice Springs Cultural Precinct or Hermannsburg

Historic Precinct fall in this category as well. Despite growing sales numbers of Aboriginal art in the Northern Territory (Boyle (2001), p. 20) the range of available products in galleries offers very little variety. Other Aboriginal cultural elements can be encountered in protected areas, such as Ewaninga Rock Carvings Conservation Reserve, Corroboree Rock Conservation Reserve or Chambers Pillar Historical Reserve. They are often accessible free of charge but offer very limited indigenous involvement and interpretation work. In addition, there might still be a considerable proportion of visitors who do not want to purchase indigenous art but for whom seeing paintings and artefacts in galleries or rock art in protected areas is already synonymous with having an indigenous cultural experience. Transforming and enhancing such low yield visitors segments is likely to require indigenous tourism stakeholders to be proactive in developing new and innovative products and experiences.

Package tours promoted through the Tourism NT web site tend to promise similar types of experiences to one another. They are highly structured in their itineraries in terms of time schedules and activities, mainly involve transportation in coaches and are concentrated around major tourist hubs such as Uluru. The segment of “*Packaged Culture traveller*”, as defined by Tourism NT (NTTC (2002), p. 115), is more likely to participate in indigenous activities as part of the tour itinerary. Typically, available itineraries vary from single day trips (for example day trips from Alice Springs to Uluru, Watarrka or to West MacDonnell Ranges) to longer packages in the Red Centre region, ranging from three to eight days. Given that many travellers experience the Northern Territory as part of a coach tour (Boyle (2001), p. 44) and packaged holidays used to be the traditional mainstay of visitation to central Australia (Sustainable Tourism Services (2005), p. 6) many tour operators have tailored their packages to this very specific market.

However, one of the continuing trends in international tourism today is the growth in independent travel and a relative decline in package travel. (Hyde/Lawson (2003), p. 13) Independent travellers are more likely to be on flexible itineraries, they look primarily for the sense of freedom and self-determination while travelling, avoid big crowds and try to be different from the mass. (ibid., p. 14) Hence, they are likely to avoid high-level structured tours, which do not allow for any flexibility in terms of itinerary planning. As

some of the key markets to central Australia, such as the self-drive or backpacker visitor segment, also fall into this category of leisure travellers, this might have in particular effects on the performance of indigenous tourism suppliers in the region. By catering primarily to the package tour markets indigenous operators are most likely to miss out on a considerable proportion of potential customers.

2.3.4.2. Indigenous Tourism Marketing Strategies

In addition to the apparent homogeneity of the Aboriginal tourism market, central Australia lacks a clear marketing strategy for promoting and distributing indigenous tourism products. Despite a continuous commitment from Tourism NT to fully integrate indigenous tourism products into its mainstream marketing activities (NTTC (2004), pp. 17-18) the current Indigenous Tourism Strategy outlines rather broadly defined marketing directions for either the domestic or the international markets but does not provide any suggestions on how to address specific markets in any greater depth. For example, the marketing emphasis for domestic and international markets is defined as follows:

“[...] the NTTC’s [Northern Territory Tourist Commission] domestic marketing activities will incorporate an ongoing emphasis on the indigenous experiences available in the Territory. This will include: advertising campaigns to strengthen the Territory’s brand as a cultural and nature-based destination; tactical activities to convert interest in cultural tourism into actual travel; and public relations campaigns to generate media promotion for specific cultural events, such as festivals.” (NTTC (2004), p. 18)

“All of the Territory’s priority international markets (UK/Ireland, North America, Europe, Japan and New Zealand) strongly associate the Northern Territory with indigenous culture. The continued integration of indigenous cultural experiences in the NTTC’s international promotional efforts in these markets will remain a priority. Additional opportunities will also be sought, through public relations activities, to further showcase the Northern Territory’s indigenous cultural appeal.” (ibid., p. 19)

Moreover, online promotion of indigenous tourism products through the help of government websites has been emphasised:

“The Internet offers indigenous businesses a relatively low cost promotional tool which can be used to directly market their product to consumers. [...] The NTTC has committed to incorporating ongoing promotion of indigenous cultural tourism experiences on its websites and to assisting indigenous business to maximise the benefits available from this marketing tool.” (NTTC (2004), p. 19)

To develop additional, more specific marketing strategies Tourism NT has acknowledged the need for further research to gain a better understanding of different market segments in order to allow indigenous people to make informed decision about their participation in tourism. Proposed research directions include identifying which markets have an interest in indigenous culture, what they perceive to be an indigenous cultural experience, where they choose to have these experiences, how much they are willing to spend and how they seek information on such experiences to find out what distribution channels and technologies might assist in growing the indigenous tourism sector. (ibid., p. 8)

Developing more options for experiencing Aboriginal culture will require a careful consideration of the range of tourists visiting the local area and experiences to be targeted towards particular segments of the visitor market. (AGBMcNair (1996) quoted in Boyle (2001), p. 43) Expectations and needs of various markets are often intrinsically different from each other and therefore need to be responded in different ways. (Parkin (2001), p. 263) This implies that not only the nature and demand for a certain type of product but also the required information and distribution technologies will differ from market to market. (Williams/Richter (2002), p. 405) In practical terms, this means that indigenous operators first need to understand the (potential) nature and (potential) extent of demand from a specific target market and it is vital to connect the ways in which information about products is distributed to the specific information search and trip planning strategies of certain key markets. The following chapter will describe the background of distribution methods in tourism, in particular to the independent traveller market, and will further analyse the role of information in this distribution process.

2.4. Distribution of Tourism Products and the Role of Information

2.4.1. Distribution Systems in Tourism

Distribution can be seen as that part of the marketing mix that makes the product available to consumers and establishes the link between supply and demand. (Pearce/Schott (2005), p. 50; Laws (2001), p. 53) Distribution channels have also been defined as pathways by which firms execute the communication and sale of their products and services. (Williams/Richter (2002), p. 404) The importance of developing effective distribution systems has often been recognised in the past as they are considered as key elements of the marketing mix, which enable enterprises to improve their competitiveness and performance in the marketplace. (Kotler et al. (1996), p. 451; Buhalis (1998), p. 412) They ensure that the right quantities of the right product or service are available at the right place, at the right time. (Wynne et al. (2001), p. 425)

According to Buhalis (2001, p. 8) the primary functions of distribution in tourism are information, combination and travel arrangement services. Distribution channels provide information for prospective tourists and intermediaries, bundle tourism products together and establish the necessary mechanisms that enable consumers to make, confirm and pay for reservations. The fast changing environment of the tourism industry intensifies the need for more effective communication and distribution channels in order to provide sufficient information and to facilitate transactions. (Buhalis (2006), p. 178) The functions and benefits emerging through tourism distribution channels have been summarised in Table 2:

Table 2: Functions and benefits emerging through tourism distribution channels

<i>Functions and benefits emerging through tourism distribution channels</i>
• Provision of information by using various media (brochures, leaflets, maps, videos etc.); • Consumers' guidance and consultation for particular packages or products; • Undertake pre- and post-experience marketing research on consumers' needs and experiences; • Assemble tourism products from different providers according to tourists' expectations; • Facilitation of selling process of tourism products, by reserving and issuing travel documents; • Improve inventory management by managing demand and supply; • Issue of travel documentation, for example ticketing, vouchers etc.; • Utilize a clearing system where each channel member receives payments for their services; • Spreading the commercial risk between tourism distribution channel members; • Arranging details and ancillary services, such as insurance, visa, currency etc.; • Promotion of particular products or packages; • Complaint handling for both customers and industry

(Source: adapted from Buhalis (2001) p. 9)

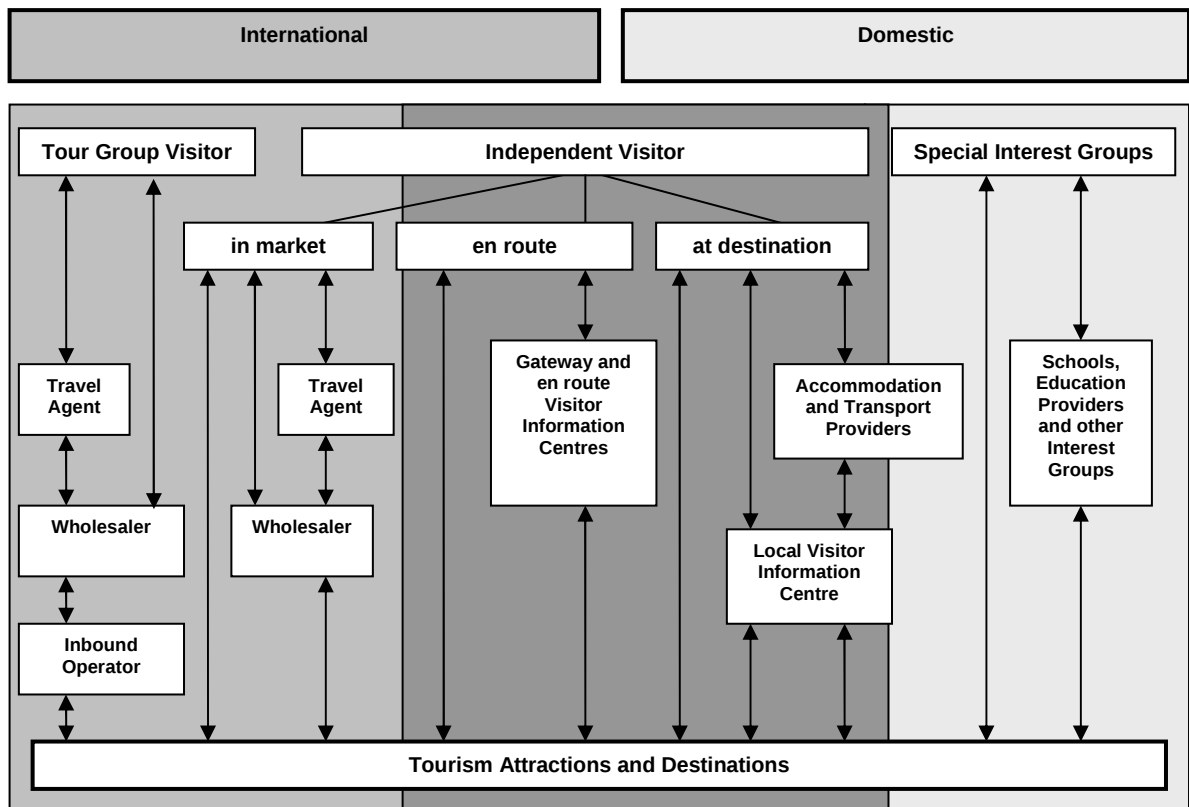
The distribution mix in tourism is characterised by the use of direct and indirect distribution channels to make customers aware of available services, facilitate purchase decisions and finally deliver services. (Morrison (1989), p. 274) Direct channels normally involve suppliers who develop and maintain direct sales contact with consumers without the help of intermediaries. In particular, SMTEs may rely primarily on direct sales to tourists. (Stuart et al. (2005), p. 237) Conversely, indirect distribution occurs when parts or all of the communicating and selling process are handled by a third party, usually a travel trade intermediary (e.g. wholesalers, inbound and outbound operators, retail travel agencies, regional or local tourism organisations). (Williams/Richter (2002), p. 404) A combination of various distribution channels is also referred to as "distribution mix". (Ujma (2001), p. 41)

Distribution strategies can be characterized as *intensive*, when the tourism product is distributed through all available intermediaries; *exclusive*, when only a limited number of channels are used; or *selective*, when a mixture of intensive and exclusive strategies

occurs. (Buhalis (2001), p. 10) In this context, it further has to be distinguished between distribution through horizontal and vertical integration. Horizontal integration takes place when homogenous enterprises at the same level of a distribution channel merge to distribute their products, whereas vertical integration occurs when enterprises from different levels cooperate, for example, when tour operators cooperate with retail travel agencies. (ibid.)

Distribution channels have also been analysed from a spatial perspective, which describes where and at which stages of the trip the provider attempts to reach the customer. There is a need for destinations and individual businesses to understand where in the trip planning process tourists seek information, make reservations or complete transactions. (Pearce (2005), p. 427) Pearce and Tan (2004, p. 230) distinguish between distribution strategies that target the customer “*at the market*” prior to departure, “*en route*” to the focal destination and finally “*at destination*” (Figure 10). Generally, it would appear that more intermediaries are involved to reach the market prior to departure, while distribution strategies at destination tend to be either direct or involve a single intermediary. Given the complexity of distribution systems in tourism, it is critically important for tourism suppliers and destination marketing organizations to understand the product preferences and market support needs of both customers and channel partners prior to entering into strategic alliances (Williams/Richter (2002), p. 405; Buhalis (2000), p. 97)

Figure 10: A spatial perspective of distribution systems in tourism



(Source: adapted from Pearce/Tan (2004), p. 230)

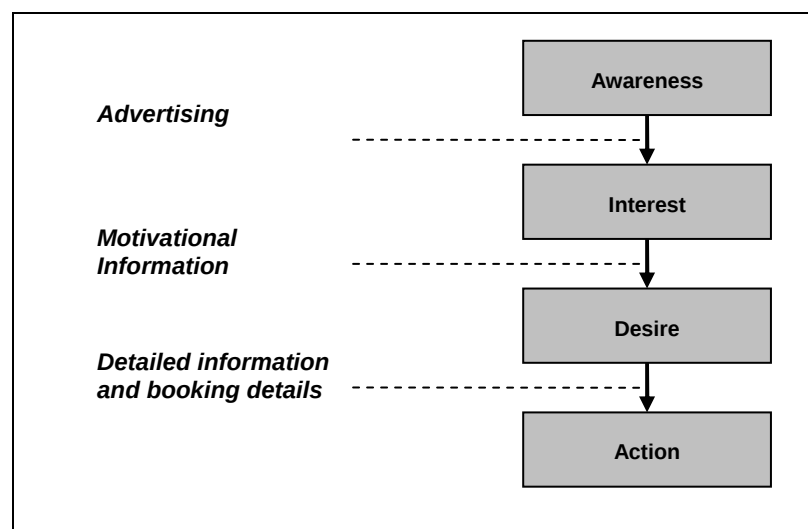
2.4.2. Distribution of Information in Tourism

The role of information in this distribution process is exceptionally important in tourism, which has often been described as a very information intensive industry due to a number of distinct characteristics. (Bieger/Laesser (2004), p. 357; French et al. (2000), pp. 216-20; Dickman (1999), pp. 10-12; Werthner/Klein (1999), pp. 8-10) A typical tourism product can be characterised as: -

- **Intangible** – Consumers can not see, feel or touch the product before purchasing it.
- **Heterogeneous** – The product is complex and often consists of many individual components (such as transport, accommodation, attractions etc.).
- **Perishable** – The product can not be physically stored.
- **Inseparable** – The consumption and production of tourism products always coincide and supplier and consumer have to take part in this process simultaneously.

Kotler and Keller (2006, p. 536) established that marketing communications are “*the means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade, and remind consumers – directly or indirectly – about the products and brands that they sell.*” The main functions of such pre-purchase information in the process of distribution marketing are manifold. Suppliers use information to raise awareness of a product in the market, kindle interest, generate desire and finally facilitate an action (Figure 11). (See Bruhn (2001), p. 208)

Figure 11: The role of information in distribution marketing

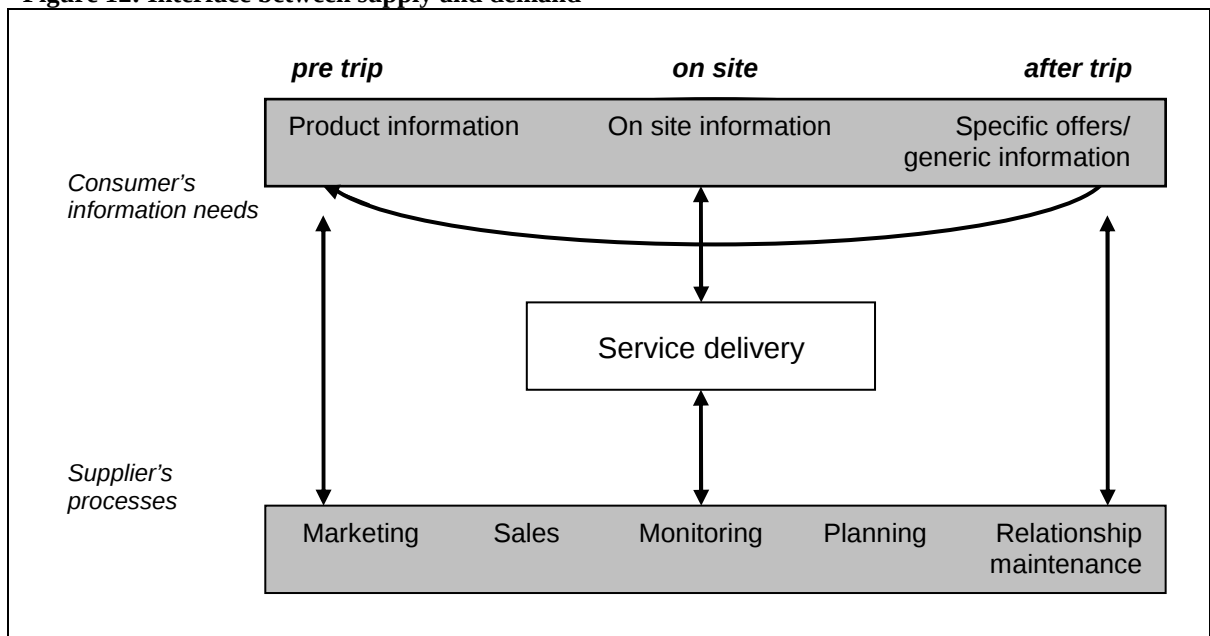


(Source: Desert Knowledge Australia (2005a), p. 38)

In addition, it has been argued that tourists require different kinds of information at different stages of the trip. (Werthner/Klein (1999), pp. 61-62) The time and the place of the initial decision are most likely to be different from the time and the place of consumption and any changes that might occur during this time span needs to be communicated from the supplier to the consumer and vice versa. For example, tourists might consider acquiring additional products during the trip or changing their travel plans, which implies further use of information at the destination. On the other hand, even at the post-trip stage of the trip information exchange is considered necessary for managing and maintaining relationship with clients.

As shown in Figure 12, information needs of consumers and the business processes of the supply side have to be coordinated. This interface consists of the service delivery – the creation of the product, and the medium to support the communication between both sides, either directly or indirectly through intermediaries. (Werthner/Klein (1999), p. 62) Given the unique nature of tourism products, it is critical to guarantee constant information flow between both supplier and consumer sides during the different travel phases and transaction processes. Getting the right information to tourists in the right form, in the right time and in the right place is therefore a particularly important means of promotion for the tourism industry. (Molina/Esteban (2006), p. 1038; Lehto et al. (2005), p. 161; Werthner/Klein (1999), p. 10)

Figure 12: Interface between supply and demand



(Source: Werthner/Klein (1999), p. 62)

2.4.3. Travel Planning and Information Search Behaviour

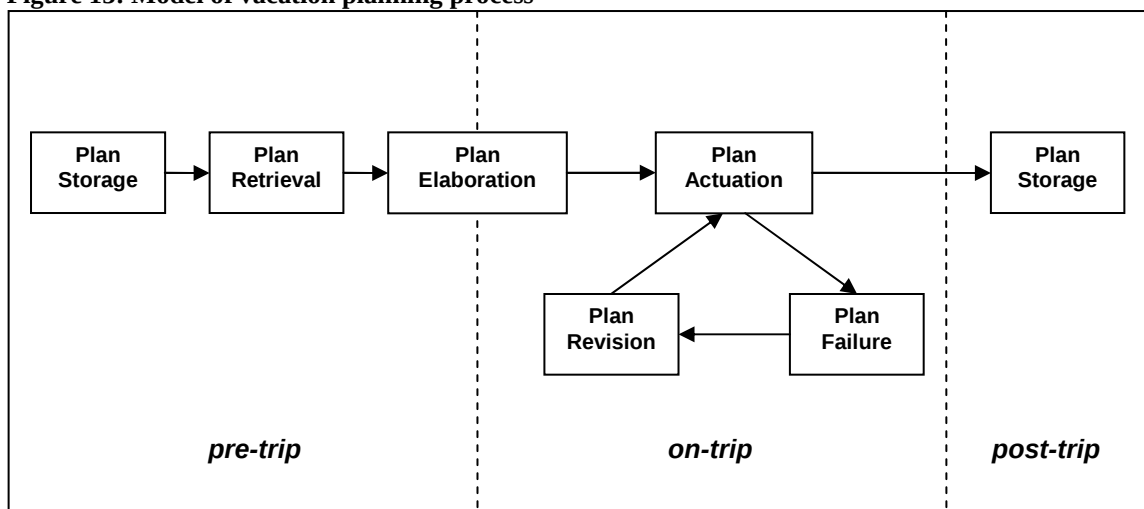
Given the importance of information in the trip planning process, the terms “information search” and “travel planning” have often been used interchangeably in a number of empirical studies. (Hyde (2005), p. 44) A vacation plan represents the culmination of a series of decisions made by the tourist before arrival at the destination. Stewart and Vogt

(1999, pp. 80-82) argue that tourist construct and change their travel plans based on the use of information, experiences and expertise, mental images, perceptions and judgments of alternatives.

Vacation planning includes a sequence of activities that the tourist undertakes, from pre-trip through to post-trip (Figure 13). Planning usually starts with the recognition of a certain problem or related goals, as well as the context or setting, followed by retrieving a case from memory that was used successfully in a similar situation. This retrieved plan mostly contains many elements or sub-plans (including destination, transport, activity choices). The actual plan elaboration then involves specific decisions. As the vacation starts, plan elaboration continues and plan actuation sets in. Depending on the extent of plan failures further revisions need to be made. The cycle of actuation – failure – revision – actuation continues throughout the whole trip, gets revised after the trip and finally stored for future planning decisions. (Stewart/Vogt (1999), pp. 83-84)

The central role of plan revision suggests that changes will be made during the trip as the planner actuates the plan. Reasons include the acquisition of new information that expands the awareness of more attractive alternatives or changes the judgment of an alternative's attributes; variety seeking as the visitor gets bored with an activity or place; heterogeneity of preferences within the visitor's travel party; or unanticipated constraints to participation, such as illness or bad weather. (ibid.)

Figure 13: Model of vacation planning process



(Source: Stewart/Vogt (1999), p. 84)

It has been found that consumers are most likely to be influenced in their buying decisions during the process of information acquisition (Gursoy/McCleary (2004), p. 353) and a growing body of literature recognises that understanding how tourists acquire knowledge, develop vacation plans and make decisions is a focal point in developing effective tourism marketing and communication strategies. (Pearce/Schott (2005), p. 50; Hyde (2005), p. 43; Bieger/Laesser (2004), p. 357; Gursoy/McCleary (2004), p. 353; Money/Crotts (2003), p. 191; Laws (2001), p. 61; Baloglu (1999), p. 82) Information acquisition is necessary for selecting a destination as well as for on-site decisions of various trip elements, such as accommodation, transportation or activities (Gursoy/Chen (2000), p. 583; Fodness/Murray (1998) p. 109; Snepenger et al. (1990), pp. 13-14)

2.4.3.1. Internal versus External Information Search

The human information behaviour is defined as the phenomena of access, searching, retrieval and use of information to avoid or reduce the level of uncertainty in a given buying situation. (D'Ambra/Wilson (2004); p. 732; Money/Crotts (2003); p. 191; Werthner/Klein (1999), p. 58) In the context of tourism, many attest that the information search process typically involves the recognition of a problem (i.e. the need for vacation travel), information search for a destination and related choices, and the evaluation of alternative destination-related choices. (Kerstetter/Cho (2004), p. 962) According to Prestipino (2006), p. 4) information behaviour encompasses not only information seeking but also unintentional information acquisition.

Engel et al. (1990, p. 494) define information search as “*the motivated activation of knowledge stored in memory or acquisition of information from the environment*”. This search can be either conducted internally or externally. Internal information search involves retrieval of decision-relevant knowledge from memory and determines whether external search will take place at all. Internal search may be insufficient if the consumer lacks prior knowledge of the product or previous purchase expertise, if a significant amount of time has passed since the last purchase, if the consumer perceives that personal circumstances or product features have changed or if previous purchases turned out to be

unsatisfactory. In such cases, consumers will direct attention and effort to external information search, which involve acquiring information from the marketplace and the environment. (Kerstetter/Cho (2004), pp. 962-64; Chen/Gursoy (2000), p. 584; Fodness/Murray (1998), p. 109; Engel et al. (1990), p. 494) External information sources have been organized into four basic categories: (Money/Crotts (2003), p. 193) –

- **Personal** (e.g. word-of-mouth advice from friends or relatives)
- **Marketer-dominated** (e.g. advertisements in print and electronic media)
- **Neutral** (e.g. third-party sources such as travel agents and travel guides)
- **Experiential** (e.g. direct contacts with retailers)

The internet has often been considered as a fifth uniquely interactive source of external information, while others still classify homepages as an electronic sub-group of either marketer-dominated or neutral sources. (ibid.) Many researchers agree that internal as well as external personal sources of information, such as word-of-mouth are most influential in the trip planning process. (Laws (2001), p. 64) More recently, the internet has increasingly been used as an electronic form of personal information source, providing word-of-mouth information from travellers in form of travel blog entries in virtual travel communities. (Lin/Huang (2006), p. 1201; Carson (2007a), p. 9)

A number of other researchers have divided external information sources into two categories - formal or informal sources of information. (Schwabe/Prestipino (2005), p. 8; Case (2002), p. 289; Pigato (2001), p. 35; Raitz/Dakhil (1989), p. 45; McDonough/Ackert (1986), n.p.a.) Formal sources include information that product or service providers deliberately plan to use and disseminate to establish contact between consumers and their products. Generally, information that is presented through formal sources can be controlled in terms of content, quality and timeliness. Examples for formal sources include print and electronic information channels from product suppliers, intermediaries or other third party organisations, such as destination marketing organisations. In contrast to that, the informal sources provide information that product suppliers often do not have control of. The content and ways how informal information is presented is difficult to influence. Examples

of informal sources include personal information from friends, family members, relatives, repeat visitors or other forms of word-of-mouth. (McDonough/Ackert (1986), n.p.a.)

2.4.3.2. Information Search Strategies

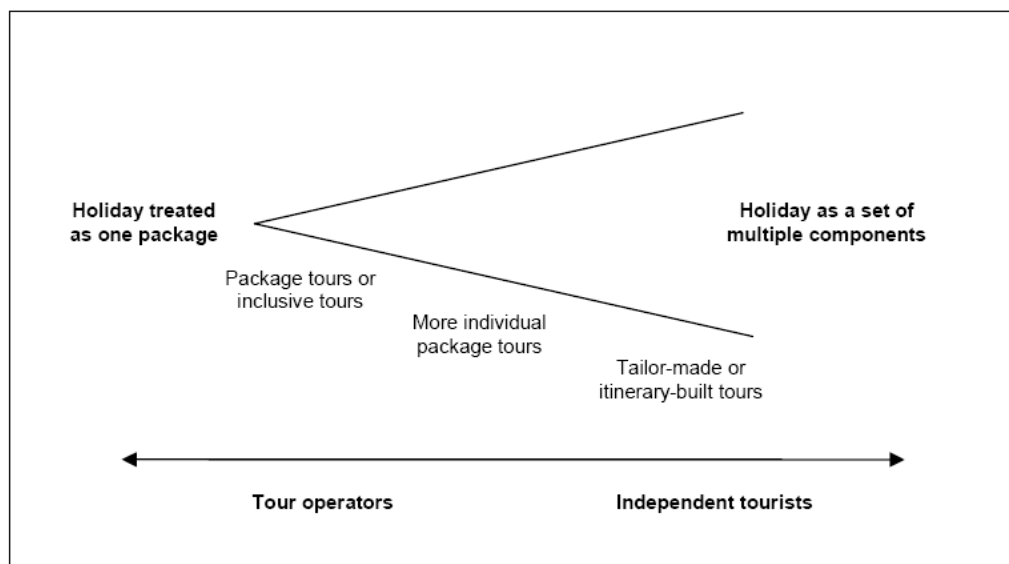
Previous research into information search behaviour in tourism has found that information search is a lengthy process and can be conceptualised as a series of interrelated activities and factors. (Laws (2001), p. 64; Bieger/Laesser (2004), p. 359-60; Kerstetter/Cho (2004), p. 962; Gursoy/McCleary (2004), p. 365) Fodness and Murray (1998, pp. 109-10) suggest that in any given purchase situation there are at least three distinct strategies for information search that tourists make use of: *spatial*, *temporal* and *operational*. The spatial dimension describes where the search activity takes place – internally or externally. The temporal dimension represents the timing of the search activity. This search can be either *ongoing*, building up a stock of knowledge for future purchase decisions, or *pre-purchase*, responding to a current purchase problem. The operational dimension focuses on the relative effectiveness of particular sources of information for decision making and problem solving. It distinguishes between *contributory* and *decisive* information sources. Contributory tend to be used in combination with other sources whereas decisive are used as the sole source for trip planning, leading to a final decision. Furthermore, Fodness and Murray (1999, pp. 220-22) identified other forces that have a direct influence on tourists' information search behaviour. These include for example:

- Product characteristics, including purpose of the trip or mode of travel;
- Situational influences, such as composition of the travel party or nature of decision making (whether decisions are routine or require more time and effort);
- Tourist characteristics, such as the socio-economic status and the family life cycle; and
- Trip characteristics, such as length of stay, number of destinations and attractions visited, or travel-related expenditures.

2.4.3.3. Information Search Behaviour of Independent travellers

Independent travellers have been defined as all vacation travellers who do not purchase travel packages and who arrange their travel components themselves. (Hyde/Lawson (2003), p. 13) The holiday is not treated as an individual package but rather as a set of multiple components. (Figure 14) An integral part of independent travelling is that the vacation is very often not planned in detail. Independent travellers appreciate the unknown and unexpected on their trips and consider a certain degree of freedom and flexibility as one of the key values they are seeking when they choose independent travel. (Hyde (1998), p. 1022) Rather than following a fixed itinerary, the itinerary tends to evolve as the vacation proceeds and decisions about destinations, transport, attractions and activities are made relatively spontaneously. (Hyde (1998), p. 1019; Stuart et al. (2005), pp. 244-45) As found by Hyde and Lawson (2003, p. 18), the temporal sequence of the vacation planning and decision-making process followed the pattern: sub-destination – travel route – attractions – activities. Only as independent travellers approach a sub-destination do they seek detailed information on that sub-destination and its attractions and activities.

Figure 14: Independent trips versus package tours



(Source: adapted from Werthner und Klein (1999), p. 53)

This phenomenon has already been described in connection with the backpacker travel market, which has a tendency to prefer independently organized and flexible travel schedules, according to the motto “*the plan is there is no plan*”. (Suckling (2006), n.p.a.) Further research into the planning behaviour of independent travellers has found that core decisions such as the choice of the primary destination and key “anchor points”, travel party members, budget, and travel mode tend to be made well in advance prior to travelling. Within the destination, however, secondary decisions about specific activities, accommodation or side trips are somewhat flexible and likely to be made en route. (Carson et al. (2007), p. 9; Hyde (2005), p. 44)

In general, the volume of information search and travel decisions appears to increase as independent visitors get closer to the destination. Given their tendency towards incomplete itineraries, the general approach to target independent travellers focuses on *en route* and/or *at destination* distribution strategies. (Stuart et al. (2005), pp. 244-45) The purpose of pre-trip information gathering is mainly to identify a variety of options for activities, destinations, transport and accommodation and to build up a stock of knowledge which they can choose from at a later stage of the trip. (Hyde (1998), p. 1019) This plan of multiple “*researched before*” items is mostly complimented by unplanned purchases, including “*researched after*” items and spontaneous purchases which are encountered serendipitously on the way or at the destination. (ibid., p. 1020)

2.4.3.4. Information Search of the Self-Drive Market

Given the characteristics discussed above, self-drive tourists can be classified as independent travellers. Previous research into self-drive tourism has revealed that this market has a set of unique characteristics in terms of the level of planning and the preference for certain information sources. (Olsen (2002), p. 14) Similar to other independent travellers, the drive market uses two distinct phases of information collection and planning: *pre-trip* and *en route*. Drive tourists tend to plan their main route extensively but leave other aspects of the trip including accommodation or activity choices rather unplanned and decide upon such trip components “*on the road*”. This planning behaviour is largely consistent with the findings that drive tourists are seeking freedom and flexibility

during a drive holiday and that pre-trip planning is among the most enjoyable parts of the whole trip. They generally book as little as possible in advance and rely on completing their itinerary on the way. It has been argued that the amount of pre-trip planning is directly related to the length of the trip, meaning the longer the trip the more planning is done. (Yann et al. (1999), quoted in Olsen (2002), p. 14)

As to the sources of information used prior to departure, the drive market relies mostly on one or more of the following sources: Automobile clubs, State Tourism Organisations, word-of-mouth and the internet. The majority of self-drive travellers use maps as their first points of reference. In addition, information is usually collected in form of brochures and travel guides from State Tourism Organisations. Word-of-mouth has an exceptional importance in the decision making process of self-drive tourists and is often used as a filter to other printed information material. (Olsen (2002), pp. 14-15; Derrett (2002), p. 26) Furthermore, drive tourists tend to use different sources of information for different purposes. For information about attractions and places to visit on the way they rely primarily on sources such as State Organisations, word-of-mouth, motoring organisations and travel guides. For route information – including distances, major stopovers or other regulations such as safety issues – the main sources are motoring organisations followed by maps and the State Tourism Organisations. (Olsen (2002), p. 15)

Information sources used en route differ a lot from those used prior to departure in the way that drive tourists primarily try and get local information on the way. This kind of information is primarily considered as “insider information” that is more reliable and reveals some of the regions’ secrets. (ibid.) Especially visitor information centres (VICs) play a key role in this information collection process. It has been argued that information obtained from VICs may have an influence on the places visited and furthermore increase the amount of time and money spent in a region to a small degree. (Olsen (2002), pp. 15-16, Ware/Budge (2002), p. 67, Fesenmaier (1994), p. 44)

To date, research into trip planning and preference for information sources of the 4WD market has been very limited. Taylor et al. (2007, p. 11) examined the choice of information sources of domestic 4WD enthusiasts and found that the vast majority use

maps or word-of-mouth to help plan their trip. There is a relatively high tendency towards the use of special interest 4WD magazines among 4WD enthusiasts, whereas the internet is used less frequently compared to other sources. However, it is not clear how and for which purposes 4WD travellers use various sources of information to develop travel plans and make travel decisions.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The objective of the research was to analyse current interest in and consumption of Aboriginal tourism products and to identify product gaps in the supply of those products. In addition, the study sought to identify 4WD travellers' trip planning and information search behaviour. The research objectives (as defined in Section 1.3) emphasise the need to investigate and explore subjective topics including elements of personal attitudes, motivations and behavioural patterns of 4WD desert travellers. The research design and methodology used in order to address the problem in this study followed a qualitative approach using semi-structured in-depth interviews as the main means of primary data collection. In-depth interviews were considered appropriate for this study as they yield rich insights into individual persons' experiences, values, attitudes and feeling. (Hesse-Biber/Leavy (2006), p. 119)

3.2. Justification of the Qualitative Paradigm

In recent decades, qualitative methods have become widely accepted in leisure and tourism studies as they produce in-depth information on a small number of individuals and look beyond people's obvious behaviours. (Veal (1997), p. 195; Hyde/Lawson (2003), p. 16) In general, researchers distinguish between two main approaches to theory development from social scientific research – the inductive theory building and deductive theory testing. (Carson et al. (2005), p. 5; Veal (1997), pp. 31-32) The deductive theory approach, also referred to as quantitative or positivist viewpoint, is characterised by a focus on description and explanation of numerically quantifiable phenomena. In contrast to quantitative research methods, qualitative research design takes the form of an inductive or interpretative perspective, meaning that theory is usually generated through understanding and interpretation of a specified issue or problem. Qualitative and quantitative research

approaches can be described as follows: (Ritchie/Lewis (2003), p. 3; Carson et al. (2005), pp. 62-65; Veal (1997), pp. 34-35), -

- *Quantitative research* is concerned with testing explicitly stated hypotheses and theories and deriving objective conclusions based on statistical analysis and numerical evidence. Relatively large samples are needed to ensure sufficient reliability.
- *Qualitative research* is concerned with providing an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the human behaviour and the social world of research participants. Theories are generated by rather subjective conclusions based on interpretations of the social circumstances, underlying motivations, experiences, values, attitudes and feelings. Information is gathered from a relatively small sample and by non-quantitative means.

Qualitative research methods are typically open-ended and related to a specific temporal and spatial situation and are suitable for addressing questions of how and why things occur, whereas quantitative methods are more appropriate for answering what and how many things occur. (Carson (2005), pp. 64-66) The main justification provided for using qualitative methods was the ability to provide more insights and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. (Ritchie/Lewis (2003), p. 3) Qualitative data collection methods usually involve close contact between the researcher and the research participants, are interactive and remain open to the unexpected, which allows emergent issues to be explored. (Neuman (1997), p. 146)

Qualitative methods generally require a more flexible approach to overall research design and conduct than other approaches. For example, most quantitative research tends to be sequential in nature, following a detailed pre-planned sequence. Qualitative data involves a more fluid relationship between the various elements of the research. In this recursive approach, hypothesis formation evolves as the research progresses, data analysis and collection take place concurrently, and writing is often an evolutionary, on-going process. (Veal (1997), pp. 131-32)

Peterson (1994, quoted in Veal (1997), pp. 130) summarises the potential uses of qualitative research as follows: -

- to develop hypotheses concerning relevant behaviour and attitudes;
- to understand how decisions are made;
- to identify the full range of issues, views and attitudes which could be pursued in larger-scale research;
- to develop new product, service or marketing strategy ideas;
- to provide an initial screening of new product, service or strategy ideas; and
- to learn how communications are received, particularly in relation to advertising.

3.3. Criticism of the Qualitative Paradigm

Analysis of qualitative data often requires personal subjective judgements to be made by the researcher. Common limitations discussed in qualitative research include the issues of validity and reliability of the obtained data. Validity refers to the extent to which the collected data truly reflects the phenomenon under investigation. The validity of leisure and tourism data can rarely be as certain as that of data in the natural sciences since it is largely concerned with people's behaviour and attitudes. Reliability of data has been defined as the extent to which research findings would be the same if the research were to be repeated at a later date or with a different sample of subjects. This is rarely the case in the social sciences, because they deal with human beings in ever-changing social situations. Qualitative research presents a snap-shot of a group of people, which is subject to change over time. (Veal (1997), pp. 35-36; Dillon et al. (1993), p. 130) Generally, disadvantages of a qualitative research approach include: -

- Sample sizes are commonly too small to allow for generalizations beyond the selected sample.
- Reliability of data can be difficult and it can not be guaranteed that the study is replicable.

- The meaning can be de-contextualized, if interpretation is taken out of context.
- Interpretation might be subjective and explanations might be oversimplified.
- In-depth, comprehensive approach to data gathering limits scope.

3.4. In-depth Interviews

Qualitative techniques which are commonly used in leisure and tourism research include: in-depth interviews, group interviews or focus groups, participant observation, textual or image analysis, biographical methods or ethnography. (Veal (1997), pp. 131-32) In-depth interviews are a special type of qualitative research instruments that are used to elicit subjective responses and allow for a deeper understanding of the participant's point of view or situation. In-depth interviewers aim to collect detailed and content-rich personal information from one or more individuals. (Kaufman (1994), pp. 123-25) In-depth interviewing involves open-ended questions and further allows the researcher to follow up with probing questions when additional data and explanations are deemed necessary. (Carson et al. (2005), p. 74; Mayring (2002), pp. 66-68; Veal (1997), pp. 132-33; Berry (1999), n.p.a.) This method is considered useful for getting a detailed understanding of complicated behaviour or confidential, sensitive or embarrassing topics. Given the open-ended nature of this approach, every interview in a study, even though dealing with the same issues, will be different and hence enables the researcher to get a broad spectrum of different opinions and ideas. (Veal (1997), p. 133)

In-depth interviews tend to be used in three situations: (ibid.) –

1. The research subjects may be relatively few in number, so that a quantitative approach would be inappropriate.
2. The expected information is most likely to vary considerably from participant to participant.
3. A topic needs to be explored as a preliminary stage in planning a larger study, for example a quantitative study.

Patton (2001, pp. 342-46) suggests three basic approaches to conducting qualitative interviewing: the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach and the standardised open-ended interview. These types of interviews have also been defined as unstructured, semi-structured and structured interviews (Atteslander (2003); pp. 146-48; Jennings (2001), pp. 164-66) and can be differentiated by the extent to which interview questions are determined and standardised before the interview is conducted. (Patton (2001), p. 342) Standardised interviews consist of a set of open-ended questions which are carefully worded and arranged to ensure that each participant will be asked the same questions in the same way. Conversely, unstructured interviews rely primarily on informal conversations, during which questions arise in the natural flow of the conversation.

Semi-structured interviews are a mix of these two approaches and are widely used as a popular qualitative method of data collection. (Mayring (2002), pp. 66-68; Flick (1998), p. 76) As with unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews are fluid in nature and follow the thinking processes of the interviewee. (Jennings (2001), p. 165) They involve the use of an interview guideline or schedule that contains a set of predetermined general issues to be explored to make sure that basically the same information is obtained from each participant. However, in which order and to which extent these are discussed can vary based on the conversation flow of each interview.

Interview guidelines can be developed in more or less detail, depending on the extent to which the interviewer is able to specify important issues in advance. (Patton (2001), p. 344) The guideline provides a framework within which the interviewer would develop questions, sequence those questions and make decisions about which information to pursue in greater depth. (ibid.) The interviewer is free to explore, probe and ask additional questions that might arise during the conversation. Such probing may allow the interview to develop into new directions that, while not originally considered as part of the interview, might help to meet the research objectives. (Churchhill/Iacobucci (2005), p. 86; Atteslander (2002), p. 148)

3.5. Advantages and Disadvantages of Semi-structured Interviews

Table 3 highlights the most common advantages and disadvantages encountered with semi-structured in-depth interviews:

Table 3: Advantages and disadvantages of semi-structured in-depth interviews

<i>Advantages</i>
• Multiple realities can be determined since the semi-structured interview does not constrain the participant to following the interviewer's a priori reasoning. • Rapport can be established between interviewer and interviewee which can facilitate deeper and more meaningful insights. • It is possible to gather data on complex and sensitive issues, as the interviewer can take time to establish rapport and explore specific issues in any great depth. • Detailed information regarding attitudes, opinions and values may be elicited. • The questions are not objectively predetermined, so the interviewer is able to ask for further clarification and details and can pursue these issues without negatively affecting the quality of the data collected. • Queries can be clarified and researchers can give further explanations on a question without causing bias to the data collection process. • Follow-up questions can be framed to further extend specific responses and can be altered to follow the path the interviewee is focused on pursuing. • The semi-structured schedule provides a more relaxed interview setting.
<i>Disadvantages</i>
• Using different interviewers results in differences of interactions, which might reduce the comparability between data collected. • The interviewees are able to interpret reality rather than the interviewer and lead the interaction. • This style of interviewing is closer to unstructured than to structured interviewing. Critics might arise in terms of reliability and validity of the data collected. • Replication is almost impossible since the social interaction between the interviewer and the participant is influenced by the day, type of setting and the social circumstances. • Semi-structured interviews take much longer than structured interviews. • Data may prove useless if the researcher does not follow up by probing. • Rapport is necessary to gather the complexity and sensitivity of data in a trusting environment. Much time may be needed to establish rapport prior to the interview and to get to know each other. • Researchers may bias the data by only pursuing one particular line of prompting.

(Source: adapted from Jennings (2001), pp. 166-67; Churchill/Iacobucci (2005), p. 88)

3.6. Research Design and Data Collection Strategies

3.6.1. Interview Instrument

Based on the identified research questions an interview guideline was developed prior to commencing fieldwork, including a checklist of general open-ended questions and related probing questions to structure and deepen the conversation. The interviews started with several general introductory warm-up questions to make interview participants feel comfortable and to sequence to the main questions relating to the research problems. This approach has been recognised by many researchers as a useful means of setting the right context for the interview. (Mayring (2002), p. 70; Jennings (2001), p. 165) Although not specifically related to the study's research problems, these introductory questions also generated a great amount of additional data which contribute to a better understanding of 4WD desert travellers' motivations and trip patterns and could therefore be included in the data analysis. An outline of the interview guideline can be found in Appendix A. Table 4 contains the main topics and sub-questions included in the interview guideline and describes how they contribute to understand the identified research objectives: -

Table 4: Topics in the interview guideline and their relation to research objectives

<i>General topics addressed</i>	<i>Relation to research objectives</i>
Trip motivations and characteristics, general trip patterns and preferences	This section contained a set of introductory questions. It examined general motivations of 4WD travellers to choose the desert and central Australia as a destination, their reasons for using 4WD vehicles and their preferences for exploring remote destinations.
Itinerary	This section investigated which places and regions were included in the itinerary and whether specific activities were sought on their trip. It also included questions about best and worst experiences encountered during the trip. The focus at this stage of the interview was to lead into why and based on which knowledge they chose to visit certain sub-destinations or undertake specific activities.
Trip planning	This part of the interview uncovered which elements of the trip were planned at which stage of the trip and under which circumstances 4WD travellers decided on specific trip elements.

Information search behaviour	This topic examined the sources and types of information that 4WD travellers were looking for and for which purpose they were used.
Demand for Aboriginal tourism products	This section looked at general interest in Aboriginal tourism products. It investigates which activities were already being undertaken and which activities they would still be interested in. It also explored the relative importance of Aboriginal culture in the product mix of the region and tried to identify potential barriers for 4WD barriers to engage in Aboriginal tourism activities.
Current distribution methods of Aboriginal tourism products	The last part of the interview was conducted after explaining the exact purpose of the study to the participants and asked for their personal opinions. It investigated how they perceive and evaluate current information and distribution methods of Aboriginal tourism products in central Australia and what they would suggest for improvements.

3.6.2. Sampling

This study used a purposive sampling method, which has often been recognised as appropriate for conducting qualitative small-scale, in-depth studies. (Ritchie/Lewis, 2003, p. 78) Purposive sampling, also referred to as judgement sampling, seeks information-rich cases which can be studied in depth and there is no statistical model as to how many participants need to be recruited to guarantee representative samples. (Patton (2001), p. 230) The focus is on selecting respondents with characteristics that enable the researcher to generate new theories through investigating ideas, insights and opinions of those who can offer some perspective on the research question (Churchill/Iacobucci (2005), p. 327) Patton (2001, pp. 230-243) identifies and describes 16 types of purposeful sampling, including extreme or deviant case sampling; intensity sampling; maximum variation sampling; homogenous sampling; typical case sampling; stratified purposeful sampling; snowball sampling; criterion sampling; opportunistic sampling; or convenience sampling. The sampling strategy for this study involved a crude stratification method to divide the sample into meaningful sub-groups, to capture major characteristics and variations between each sub-group and to facilitate comparisons.

A set of thirty semi-structured qualitative interviews was conducted in September 2006 with 4WD travellers at three different locations in central Australia (Figure 15): Alice Springs, Kings Creek Station near Kings Canyon and Glen Helen Resort in the West MacDonnell Ranges. The latter two feature remote accommodation establishments which are located on the 4WD route known as the “Mereenie Loop”. As recruiting 4WD travellers prior to or after their trip was considered difficult, it was decided to approach potential interview participants while being on vacation trips in the desert. All three interview sites represent popular points of convergence for 4WD travellers in central Australia and therefore have been chosen as strategic interview locations to facilitate access to a meaningful sample.

Figure 15: Interview locations in central Australia



(Source: adapted from Tourism NT (2007), n.p.a.)

Potential interview participants were identified based on the criteria of being on a leisure trip and using a 4WD vehicle and were thereafter asked to participate in a qualitative interview, either individually or together with their travel party. A total sample of thirty 4WD travel parties was obtained which was comprised of 16 domestic and 14 international travel parties (Table 5).

Table 5: Origin of interview participants in relation to interview location

<i>Interview Location</i>	<i>Domestics</i>	<i>Internationals</i>
Alice Springs	10	3
Kings Creek Station	6	5
Glen Helen Resort	0	6
<i>Total</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>14</i>

Most international respondents originated from continental Europe, with Germany being most represented (7) followed by Switzerland (3) and France, Holland and Denmark (1 each). One participant was from Canada. Although there is a strong representation of German participants this outcome is not unexpected and may not constitute significant bias since this is an important source market for 4WD travellers to remote areas. The Northern Territory Travel Monitor (NTTC (2004), n.p.a.), conducted on behalf of Tourism NT from 1997 to 2004, suggests that visitors from Germany and other parts of Europe were relatively over-represented amongst international 4WD travellers, even though they are ranked behind the cluster of the UK, Ireland and Scandinavia in terms of absolute visitor numbers.

The majority of Australian interview participants were from Victoria (13), mainly because the interview timeframe coincided with school holidays in this State. The three remaining domestic travel parties were from Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia. While the strong representation of Victorian 4WD travellers may have induced bias, Taylor and Prideaux (2006) have established that the motivations of 4WD travellers for trips to remote areas vary little across States and Territories.

Further stratification was sought based on the composition of the travel party in order to capture a relatively broad spectrum of different types of 4WD desert travellers and get a greater variety of opinions and ideas. (Table 6)

Table 6: Travel party type in relation to origin of participants

<i>Travel Party Type</i>	<i>Domestics</i>	<i>Internationals</i>
Families with children	9	4
Couples/families travelling with friends in a group	4	1
Couples without children (>40 years)	3	4
Couples without children (<40 years)	-	5
<i>Total</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>14</i>

3.6.3. Data Collection Process

The interviewer is fluent in both English and German, which allowed interviews with international travel parties from Germany and Switzerland to be conducted in German, while the remaining interviews were conducted in English. Interviews typically lasted between 20 and 45 minutes and were audio-taped with the approval of participants. Since all participants agreed to their interviews being audio-taped, notes were not taken during the interviews. After completing the interviews they were transcribed in form of summary statements and verbatim quotes. For the purpose of uniformity and in order to facilitate the use of the transcribed data for future research projects at the hosting institution Charles Darwin University, interviews conducted in German were translated into English by the author. Original transcripts and audio files are available from the researcher and the Tourism Research Group of Charles Darwin University.

3.7. Ethical Issues

Ethical issues in qualitative research have often been subject to discussions. Common ethical issues pertaining to qualitative research include confidentiality, informed consent or emotional safety. The basic principles of ethic research state that no harm should befall the research subjects and that they should take part voluntarily and on the basis of informed consent. Prior to each interview, the participants were explained the purpose of the study and received a written project description, including a guarantee of their right to privacy

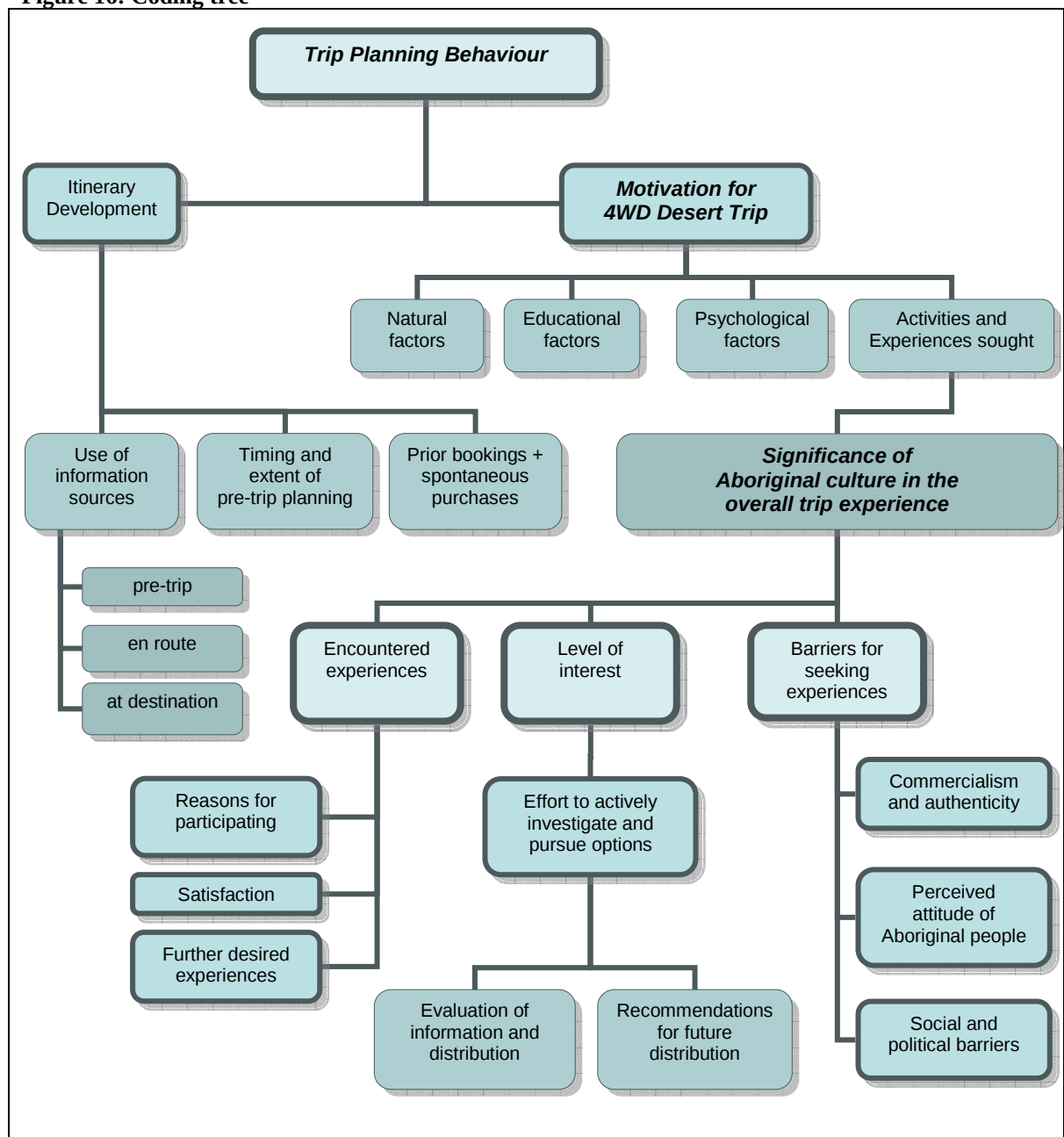
and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, each participant was required to sign a letter of consent. (Appendix B) The research protocols were given approval by the Charles Darwin University Human Research Ethics Committee.

3.8. Data Analysis

Qualitative research typically involves inductive analysis of data, meaning that critical themes emerge out of the data. Data analysis already commenced during the data collection and transcribing process, which provided an opportunity to identify emergent categories during interviews and to explore these further with other respondents. After completion of all interviews they were completely transcribed and thoroughly reviewed and screened to get further familiar with the enormous amount of data. Analysis was started with an “open coding” approach, meaning that main themes and common patterns were identified from the raw data and grouped into meaningful conceptual categories to get more manageable data units. (Hoepfl (1997), pp. 54-55)

These categories were gradually modified, extended or replaced as the analysing process proceeded. Through continuous re-examination of categories it was further identified how the various categories were interlinked and how potential connections could be established. This process is also referred to as “axial coding” and helps the researcher to build a big picture and holistic understanding of the problem under investigation. (Hoepfl (1997), pp. 55-56) Veal (1997, p. 135) argues that the essence of any analysis procedure must be to return to the research problems and questions and begin to sort and evaluate the information gathered in relation to the questions posed and the concepts identified. Based on this concept a “coding tree” was developed, which outlines all identified categories and subcategories in relation to the research questions and forms the framework against which the collected data was analysed. (Figure 16)

Figure 16: Coding tree



3.9. Limitations

Given that interview participants were selected at locations in central Australia, some of the travel parties were still in the early stages of their desert trips and could not talk about past experiences but rather about their expectations and planned activities. It might be the case that conducting interviews at the end of the trip would have revealed a more realistic picture of their overall trip experiences and a better understanding of the problems under investigation. However, in order to facilitate participant recruitment and to achieve a more meaningful sample of both international and domestic 4WD travellers it has been decided to include travellers who had not finished their trip at the time of the interview. As it turned out, travel parties who were interviewed towards the end of their trip focused more on evaluating their experiences in the desert while travel parties interviewed at earlier stages of the trip tended to reflect more on their initial motivations and expectations.

One of the limitations that were identified during the interview process was the tendency of participants to provide information relating to overall trip preparations and not specifically to the part of the trip in desert locations. The majority of international 4WD travellers were on trips which incorporated different regions as part of a larger round trip in Australia. Also domestic 4WD travellers often included other destinations outside central Australia on their trip. Consequently, responses to questions on information search processes and the application of these to trip planning may have been made in the context of the overall trip. It was not possible on all occasions to separate the desert trip component from the overall trip. On the other hand, the *in situ* nature of interviews in desert locations is likely to have elicited responses from some respondents which related exclusively to the desert component of their trip.

Another limitation relates to the use of English as a foreign language for interviewing international 4WD travellers. While interviews with international travellers from German speaking countries were conducted in German, participants from Denmark, France and Holland were interviewed in English although it was not their first language. This might have caused some deficiencies in the consistency of the collected data. In order to reduce

these limitations the researcher used continual probing and response clarifications during the interviews in order to avoid any misinterpretations.

Comparing domestic and international travellers' interests in and attitudes towards Aboriginal culture in this study has proven particularly problematic since both groups are most likely to have an intrinsically different background knowledge about Aboriginal people and their culture. In some cases, international travellers did not seem to understand what is commonly referred to as Aboriginal culture or what constitutes an Aboriginal tourism product. On the other hand, this limitation is already an interesting finding *per se*, as it shows that different background knowledge might have a particular influence on issues such as interest in or demand for a product and therefore might require further investigation.

Since the specific nature of qualitative research results virtually excludes generalizability (Carson et al. (2005), p. 69) it can not be claimed that the findings of this study represent any particular proportion or sub-group of travellers. Generalization beyond the data obtained from this sample will need to wait for further research studies or surveys done later on.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

The main objective of this research was to find out how 4WD travellers in central Australia make decisions about consumption of Aboriginal cultural tourism experiences, and whether there are any deficiencies in the nature of the experiences provided and/or product distribution strategies. The focus of the interviews was on examining to what extent 4WD travellers are interested in getting Aboriginal cultural experiences, what kind of products they might consume, the trip planning and information seeking patterns of 4WD travellers, and the implications for product consumption.

Before addressing these issues in the interviews, participants were asked to provide some background information on their trip motivations and characteristics in order to set the context for the interviews. During the analysis it was found that the additional information obtained through such introductory “warm-up questions” provided some very useful insights into trip planning behaviour and contributed to a better background understanding of the types of experiences sought during 4WD desert trips. This chapter will first present the findings on trip characteristics and motivations and will then examine the role of Aboriginal culture in the overall trip experience of 4WD travellers including the product development and distribution opportunities that might exist for Aboriginal tourism products. The last section of this chapter will describe the information search and trip planning behaviour of 4WD desert travellers and how this relates to product consumption in the desert.

4.2. Trip Characteristics and Motivations

Relevant information obtained during the introductory stages of the interviews was centred around the following topics: -

- Trip characteristics and components of their itineraries (length of trip, places visited or tracks used);
- Main motivations for visiting central Australia and characteristics that are most appreciated about the desert environment;
- Reasons for using a 4WD vehicle on the trip;
- Specific activities and experiences sought on the trip;

4.2.1. Characteristics of Itineraries in Central Australia

Since different trip itineraries of domestic and international 4WD travellers in central Australia may signify differences in trip planning behaviour, the study first addressed characteristics of various itineraries in central Australia. The majority of domestic 4WD travellers were visiting central Australia as the main destination and spent between one and three weeks in the region. Some travel parties spent several weeks driving to or back home from central Australia while visiting many other places on the way. Typical itineraries included for example a drive trip from Victoria up the Oodnadatta Track and Stuart Highway to Alice Springs, while the main destination still remained central Australia. About a third of interviewed domestic travel parties were on a longer 4WD trip around Australia, which lasted between two and twelve months. They included a visit to central Australia as a relatively small part of their overall trip, despite staying there for several weeks.

In contrast to domestic 4WD travellers, the majority of internationals were on trips which incorporated many different regions in Australia in a relatively limited period of time. Most international 4WD travellers could be classified as fly and drive tourists, meaning

that they flew into either Alice Springs or Uluru, hired a 4WD vehicle there and spent several days driving from Alice Springs to Uluru or vice versa before flying to their next destination. Hence, their 4WD desert trip typically constituted a small part of their overall time in Australia and international travel parties hardly ever spent more than one week in central Australia.

However, actual itineraries within central Australia were similar among respondents in both groups. Almost all interviewed travel parties visited the major tourist spots in central Australia, including Alice Springs, Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park, Watarrka National Park and the main tourist sites in the West MacDonnell Ranges such as Glen Helen, Ormiston Gorge or Standley Chasm. This finding is of course little surprising since all three interview locations are situated in the vicinity of the main attractions of central Australia. Nevertheless, it indicates that the major tourist sites still dominate the development of itineraries, even from independent travellers such as 4WD tourists. Domestic visitors spent more time at each location and included more sub-destinations on their itinerary than international visitors. For example, domestic visitors were more likely to include side trips to places such as Palm Valley, Finke National Park, Rainbow Valley, Chambers Pillar or the East MacDonnell Ranges, which are generally not as popular as the West MacDonnell Ranges.

4.2.2. Main Motivations for Visiting Central Australia

This research could identify three main motivation factors that influenced 4WD travellers to visit central Australia on their leisure trip. These factors include environment-based factors (including attractions and the unique landscape), educational factors and psychological factors. It was furthermore investigated to what extent specific experiences and activities had an influence on choosing central Australia as trip destination. The main driving factors to visit central Australia varied a lot between domestic and international 4WD travellers. While domestic visitors rated natural and landscape aspects of the desert environment as their most important motivations to visit the region, international visitors mainly came to central Australia in order to see the most famous sights in the Red Centre.

4.2.2.1. Environment-based Factors

Domestic 4WD travellers indicated that they chose to visit central Australia mainly because they wanted to experience the natural assets of the region and to explore remote and untouched places. Attributes that were considered as most attractive in the desert environment included for example: the remoteness, the vastness and the open space, the impression that *“there is just nothing out there”*, the quietness and loneliness, the wilderness, the dramatic landscape and the colours, the various types of terrain, vegetation and animals, and the stars in the desert sky.

“I just love the desert. Why? I don’t know, I just love it! I love the dust, the corrugations and the rocks! And the colours and the sunsets are just beautiful!” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

“It’s amazing what you see out here – it’s such a different countryside! We have taken some tracks that we were not going to take and it’s just amazing how different everything is. The nature changes like every 500 yards – from rocks to sand and stone, red sand and white sand!” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

In contrast to domestic travel parties, international 4WD travellers generally visited central Australia to see the major iconic attractions – Uluru, Kata Tjuta and Kings Canyon. In particular, Uluru is still considered to be a *“must-see sight”* in the region and almost all international interview participants visited Uluru on their trip. While also the majority of domestic travel parties visited Uluru and Kings Canyon, only one of them indicated that seeing the major icons of the region was the main reason to visit central Australia. Other aspects mentioned in connection with nature and landscape as a motivational factors for international visitors were for example: the great variety of landscapes, the red colours and rock formations, the sunsets in the desert, the remoteness and the quietness of the Outback, and the open space.

“It’s not so much the landscape itself because it’s very dry and not so colourful [...] but there are always highlights in between that are absolutely fascinating. And Uluru is so famous and you have to see the ‘tremendous stone’ once you go to Australia.” (International travel party, Alice Springs)

4.2.2.2. Educational Factors

Both domestic and international 4WD travellers mentioned educational aspects to be among the main reasons to visit the region. “*Getting to know the Outback*” and “*seeing something different*” which they had never experienced before were among such motivations. Especially Australian families often indicated that an important reason to go to central Australia was to make their children familiar with a different part of their country and to enable them to get some educational experiences while being on holiday.

“We wanted to see something different on this trip. We’ve never been here before and we’ve never experienced the desert in any way before. You normally have quite a good grasp of what Uluru or Kata Tjuta is like but you don’t hear and see so much about the other places.” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

“The most important reason to come was to show my family, especially my children, the grandeur of our country. I wanted them to get aware of the expanse of our country, of the colours and the culture and especially to educate them in a way that they do not get in any urban society!” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

4.2.2.3. Psychological Factors

Domestic 4WD travellers mentioned that they came to central Australia in order to enjoy the isolation and the silence of the desert environment. A general desire to “*get away from it all*” could be observed among many domestic visitors. On the other hand, some travel parties indicated that they just wanted to “*tick it off the list*” as a part of a longer Australia roundtrip, without having any particular motivation to visit the region.

“I live in a city and the last thing I want to do is spend a holiday in big cities! I could not spend my holiday at a resort like Surfers’ Paradise – that just drives me crazy! The places are just too busy. [...] I’ve got a very strenuous and demanding job and every now and then I just need to get away from mobile phones and just chill out!” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

4.2.3. Reasons for Choosing 4WD Vehicles

It was important for domestic 4WD travellers to be able to access remote places that only 4WD vehicles can get to, to see relatively untouched places off the normal highways and to get away from the crowd and main tourist sites. The desire for doing trips “*off the beaten track*” was often mentioned in this context. Being different and getting to places which are basically inaccessible for “normal” tourists seemed to be a main motivational factor for domestic 4WD travellers.

“What I like about off-road driving in the desert is that you can avoid the crowd. You can see so much more scenery if you get off the highway and away from the people. You can really see pristine country and untouched places!”
(Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

Similarly, international 4WD travellers wanted to be able to access remoter places and see something else than the main tourist attractions. Some international travel parties sought a higher degree of flexibility and independence by renting a 4WD vehicle and wanted to be able to decide spontaneously to get off the main highways. Even though they sometimes decided to stick to bitumen roads they just wanted to avoid to have limited trip options because of not having the right vehicle.

“We wanted to go to places where not so many other tourists go to. We would have never joined any of those bus tours. [...] Because they just visit the places which do not really represent the character of the region here and secondly, you have to hang out with so many people who you actually don’t want to hang out with!” (International travel party, Kings Creek Station)

Another decisive reason for international travellers relates to safety considerations. Some travel parties indicated that they were concerned about road conditions in central Australia and that they wanted to avoid getting stuck on the way. In addition, it was often recommended in travel agencies and travel guides that it would be safer to rent a 4WD vehicle and that it would be a prerequisite for using specific tracks, such as the Mereenie Loop.

“You also get the feeling that it is a lot safer because you can’t get stuck that easily somewhere in the middle of nowhere!” (International travel party, Glen Helen)

4.2.4. Desired Experiences and Activities in the Desert

Domestic and international 4WD travellers alike did not visit central Australia for doing any specific leisure activities. Seeing the main sights, bushwalking and going for short hikes, camping in the wilderness, as well as driving through a dramatic landscape were the main experiences that 4WD travellers were looking for in the region. Some domestic and more experienced 4WD travellers mentioned in particular off-road driving as one of the main activities sought during their desert trip. Challenging 4WD tracks, including river crossings and sand driving were found to be among such motivating activities.

“I want to do sand driving in the Simpson Desert. [...] It’s more like a challenge, you can go longer distances. It’s a challenge in the way if the car or you can make it and if you have enough water and fuel!” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

Additional activities were mostly undertaken spontaneously after finding out about available options at the destination. Such activities included for example guided walks, visits to museums and galleries, helicopter flying, camel riding, hot air ballooning or quad biking. On the other hand, it was often criticised that available commercial leisure activities were too expensive and just geared towards mainstream tourists, which kept 4WD travellers from pursuing such opportunities any further. In particular, some international travel parties demonstrated that they wanted to be different from other mainstream tourists and tour groups.

“We did not plan where to eat or what other activities we would do on the way, like the camel ride we did today with the kids. We are likely to do these sorts of things when they are around!” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

“I don’t like such outstanding adventure activities like parachuting or bungee jumping or even helicopter flying. If I wanted to do that I could also go elsewhere, you don’t need the Outback for that!” (International travel party, Kings Creek Station)

4.3. Trip Planning Behaviour

This part of the research sought to gain a better understanding of how domestic and international 4WD travellers in central Australia plan their trips and what kind of information they are looking for both prior to and during the trip. Questions in relation to trip planning and information search behaviour referred to the following issues:

- The sources of information used prior to departure, en route and at the destination;
- The content and type of information sought prior to departure and en route;
- The amount of time spent on planning and information search prior to departure;
- The amount of specific trip elements planned (places to visit, accommodation, activities etc.) prior to departure; and
- The extent of booking finalisations prior to departure.

4.3.1. Timing and Extent of Pre-trip Planning

4.3.1.1. Domestic 4WD Travellers

As to the timing and extent of pre-trip planning, it was found that the planning timeframes of domestic 4WD travellers differed tremendously from “*just a couple of nights before*” to “*about four years since the last 4WD trip*”. As a generalization one can say that the longer the trip, the longer the planning timeframe. Especially those who indicated that they had or were going to use relatively challenging 4WD desert tracks, such as the Tanami Track, Gibb River Road, Canning Stock Route or Birdsville Track, invested a lot more time into pre-trip planning. By and large, they mostly related pre-trip planning to vehicle and safety preparations, which included getting information about distances between settlements or major service stations, required fuel supplies or food and water supplies for the trip.

“It’s very different to planning other trips and mainly about preparing the car. And in the desert you always have to be sure where you can stop overnight or stock up fuel and supplies, how many people are around in the area in case

you have a breakdown, which roads to take and which not, things like that.”
(Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

While such safety aspects were often highly planned, aspects concerning detailed itineraries, sightseeing and activities were deliberately left more flexible. Domestic 4WD travellers generally had a very firm idea about their main travel route and about major sights and stopovers which they were going to include on their itinerary. However, gathering of destination or region specific information, especially with regard to available attractions and activities, prior to departure seemed to be limited. Many travel parties indicated that they felt they already had a fairly good knowledge about the region – either from previous visits or from friends and relatives – and therefore did not feel the need to get a lot of information about the region prior to departure.

Some domestic 4WD travellers stated that they deliberately avoided obtaining too much information in advance because they appreciated a certain degree of unforeseen surprises on their trips. The strategy appears to be to plan itineraries very roughly and to head out in a general direction, having only a couple of main stops or attractions in mind before. They wanted to remain flexible in their choice of where to stay or how much time to spend at each location. Generally, they were very likely to include short side trips or stops spontaneously in between if they happened to come across something interesting on the way. Only some travel parties indicated that they preferred having “*at least a fair idea*” of what they were going to do each day, although they still admitted that they were flexible enough to include spontaneous side trips or activities on the way. Interestingly, people travelling in a group as a multiple vehicle travel party tended to have more detailed and structured itineraries than single vehicle travel parties.

“We don’t know yet which places we will go to on our way home because we are very flexible. We don’t book and we don’t have a set itinerary!” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

“No, we didn’t! [develop a detailed itinerary] We normally have a pretty flexible itinerary. So, we ‘Just go!’ I’d say we are flexible enough to stop in between if we find something interesting or do a short side trip.” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

“We just knew that the first night we would spend in Morgan and on the next day we would be at the ‘Flinders Range-ish’, and somewhere around that ‘-ish’, so it was pretty vague. We would stop wherever! If I decided, yes, it looks nice here, we would stop and could go camping anywhere!” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

4.3.1.2. International 4WD Travellers

In contrast to domestic 4WD travellers, international travel parties generally indicated that they invested substantial time in planning their trips and that they started their trip preparations several months prior to departure, sometimes up to a year in advance. It has to be considered, however, that international 4WD travellers also visited other regions in Australia and were often on a relatively tight time schedule. In addition, international travellers were not as familiar with the region before the trip as many domestic travellers because they did not have any prior knowledge from previous trips or from friends and relatives who had been to the region before. Given the fixed timeframe of their trips and the high degree of uncertainty, a relatively high level of pre-trip planning was considered necessary to decide on what they wanted to see in each destination and how much time they had available for each region. Itineraries were generally not as flexible as those of domestic visitors and international 4WD travellers did not include as many additional spontaneous stops in between as domestic visitors.

“I think we started already nine months ago [planning the trip]. And then we went to a travel agency to get some ideas of what we could do in four weeks. [...] And then we decided on what we were going to do ourselves, just from what we found in some travel guides and on the Internet.” (International travel party, Kings Creek Station)

While domestic travellers often mentioned vehicle and safety preparations in connection with trip planning, international 4WD travellers were mainly concerned with finding out about interesting places and attractions in the region which could be included on their trips in addition to the main planned anchor points. This is not necessarily surprising since international travellers were generally not as familiar with the region as domestic travellers and they were not going to drive equally long distances or use challenging 4WD tracks like many domestic travel parties did.

“We knew that we wanted to see Ayers Rock, the Olgas and Kings Canyon, and we also knew that we had just five days altogether here in the Centre. These places had absolute priority for us. We hired this vehicle just in case that we should still have some spare time afterwards, and luckily we’ve found that we still have some time. So we are going to do the Mereenie Loop drive and stop at some places between here [Kings Creek Station] and Alice Springs.” (International travel party, Kings Creek Station)

For some international visitors it was important to stress that they developed and decided on their itineraries themselves without having consulted other travel intermediaries. This is consistent with the assumption that independent travellers try to maintain a certain degree of independence and freedom of choice on their trips. Nevertheless, many international interview participants indicated that they arranged various trip components, such as accommodation or transport, from home to reduce potential risk and uncertainty factors in advance.

4.3.2. Bookings in Advance versus Spontaneous Decisions

4.3.2.1. Domestic 4WD Travellers

The extent of pre-trip bookings was very limited for domestic travel parties. For the majority, the preferred strategy was to be flexible and just “*turn up*” at certain places to check for availability of accommodation facilities or they decided spontaneously to go camping “*in the wilderness*” somewhere along the way. Only seldom did it happen that domestic 4WD travellers organised their accommodation in the desert in advance. This was for example the case when they felt that certain places might be busy due to special events, such as the Camel Cup in Alice Springs or the Birdsville Races in Birdsville, or school holidays. Others indicated that they only booked their accommodation at major stopovers along the route, such as Alice Springs, Uluru or Port Augusta.

“We don’t book accommodation anymore in advance. We’ve already made quite a lot of bad experiences with pre-bookings, for example when we never got to the right places in the right time. So we prefer staying at certain places for a couple of days just when we feel like staying there.” (Domestic 4WD traveller, Alice Springs)

4.3.2.2. International 4WD Travellers

In contrast to this, about half of all international respondents indicated that they had organised most of their accommodation and transport (including domestic flights and rental cars) prior to arriving in Australia, either through a travel agency or, less frequently, on the Internet. The main reason for pre-booking was to be on the safe side since many were advised by travel agents that the region would be quite busy during that time of the year and most of the cheap accommodation would be booked out. On the other hand, some travel parties indicated that they just booked their accommodation in major cities (like Sydney, Melbourne and Darwin) or at starting points of their self-drive trips (Alice Springs or Uluru), while leaving their accommodation options in remote areas more open. During their journey these respondents preferred to go camping or access other forms of cheap accommodation, such as cabins or motels.

“Actually we don’t like booking in advance because we like being a bit more independent. But here in this region there is not much choice. [...] And we don’t want to take the risk and then stand in front of closed doors because everything is booked out, so that we finally have to stay at the resort for 300\$ or more per night!” (International travel party, Kings Creek Station)

“We don’t really need to book any accommodation. Sometimes we just show up at caravan parks like this one [MacDonnell Range Caravan Park], or we stay at other camping sites. And we also have the high-top, so we can sleep in the car.” (International travel party, Alice Springs)

Neither international nor domestic interviewees actively planned or pre-booked any additional activities or tours for their desert trips. Apart from driving, walking and seeing the major sights in the region, none of them indicated that they actively planned to include any other specific activities on their trips. Indeed, many domestic travel parties admitted that they would generally be tempted to include interesting activities spontaneously if they found out about new alternatives or opportunities on the way. Such activities included for example camel riding, helicopter flying or hot air ballooning. Nevertheless, they were mainly regarded as ancillary and peripheral to the overall trip purpose and were therefore not actively sought before.

“And we haven’t booked a tour at the Rock [Ayers Rock] either, we are just hoping that we can get on one when we get there. If there were other things around we would be tempted to do them. I don’t know what is around, though. We haven’t planned anything!” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

“If it there is something, I think it will be indicated somewhere and we won’t miss it! But we did not look for it before. If we get somewhere and it happens to be there, then we will definitely do it, but if not we are not too sad about it either. We would not drive a hundred kilometres just to get on a camel somewhere!” (International travel party, Glen Helen)

4.3.3. The Use of Information Sources for Trip Planning

This part of the research sought to understand what sources of information 4WD travellers used for planning their trip, at which stages of the trip planning process they were used and what specific role these sources had in the decision making process. Table 7 and 8 provide an outline of the ranking of information sources based on how many travel parties used these sources before or during their trip.

The Internet appears in the top three information sources used by both domestic and international 4WD travellers. Apart from websites, domestic travel parties also made prominent use of word-of-mouth and road maps for planning their 4WD self-drive trips and did not consult any travel agencies or commercial tour operators. Only domestic travellers mentioned specifically the use of road maps and 4WD magazines. On the other hand, international travel parties strongly preferred travel guides, books, and direct information from travel agencies and tour operators. Information through word-of-mouth was not as common among international visitors as among domestic travellers, but both groups demonstrated that they got information from visitor information centres during the trip. Other sources include brochures and pamphlets collected at accommodation sites and other public access places, or direct information from product and service providers.

Table 7: Ranking of information sources used by domestic 4WD travellers

<i>Information Sources Used by Domestics</i>	<i>(n = 16)</i>
Internet	11
Word-of-mouth	10
Maps	9
Visitor Information Centre	7
Travel Guides, Magazines and Books	5
4WD Magazines	3
Travel Agency and Tour Operator	0
Other	7

Table 8: Ranking of information sources used by international 4WD travellers

<i>Information Sources Used by Internationals</i>	<i>(n = 14)</i>
Travel Guides, Magazines and Books	13
Internet	8
Travel Agency and Tour Operator	7
Word-of-mouth	6
Visitor Information Centre	5
Maps	0
4WD Magazines	0
Other	3

4.3.3.1. Pre-Trip Information Search

4.3.3.1.1. Domestic 4WD Travellers

Most sources used by domestic 4WD travellers in the pre-trip planning stages were of contributory nature, meaning that they were primarily used to enhance knowledge about the destination and to investigate a range of available options to choose from at the destination. For domestic travellers, the most popular source for getting pre-trip information was the Internet. Other sources used as a planning tool prior to departure were road maps, travel guides, books and magazines and to some extent word-of-mouth from friends or relatives who had been to the region before. As against international travellers,

none of the domestic interview participants consulted tour operators or travel agencies prior to departure for information or bookings, which emphasises once again the desire for flexible and unstructured itineraries.

“No travel agency! We prefer organising it ourselves, and you don’t actually need a travel agency for a self-drive trip. Why give them the money?” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

The primary function of the Internet for interview respondents was to obtain regional information including a broad overview of the destination and its available attractions and places of interest. Some tried to get general information about specific places by using search engines and performing “destination audits” to see what is available at the destination. Others tried to get more specific information about available accommodation facilities, to print out maps or to get information on various 4WD tracks, road conditions or recommendations about distances and expected fuel consumption. More experienced 4WD travellers used special member-based 4WD community websites, such as *ExplorOz*³.

“We have gone on the net several times but only to see what the driving conditions would be, for example on the Oodnadatta track.” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

Some travel parties indicated that they made use of the official government destination website⁴, although its content and the structure were often criticised. In general, websites containing destination specific information were often regarded as a relatively ineffective planning tool, since they were sometimes not up-to-date or did not contain sufficient details, for example about driving conditions or availability of accommodation facilities. In such cases, they preferred doing follow-up research by contacting tourist information centres or service suppliers directly.

Domestic 4WD travellers also ranked road maps among their top information sources and planning tools used prior to departure. Several interview participants, in particular more experienced 4WD travellers, indicated that detailed road maps in combination with prior

³<http://exploroz.com.au>

⁴ <http://travelnt.com.au>

knowledge about the region from previous visits were often enough to set up their main itinerary and select various places of interest along the way. Some travel parties indicated that they used road maps to verify some of the information obtained through other sources, such as word-of-mouth, and to determine distances and time needed between sub-destinations and overnight stops.

“Some friends told me before that I should go there and do this and this...and then I just started to work through the maps to figure out how big the distances really were and how many of those places I could go to and see in six weeks!”
(Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

Domestic 4WD travellers appeared to rely heavily on personal and informal information from friends and relatives who had been to the region before. Again, information sought prior to departure included recommendations about places and attractions along the main route as well as information about accommodation options or driving conditions. This kind of information was generally regarded as more informative and reliable and was highly influential in the development of itineraries. It appeared that many domestic 4WD travellers accumulated a very comprehensive knowledge about various trip options and then finally made decisions about their itinerary based on word-of-mouth recommendations from friends or relatives. In this context, the Internet was also employed by some respondents as a de-facto word-of-mouth information source. Several interview participants said that they were looking for “*expert information*” about specific tracks or vehicle preparations provided by other 4WD travellers in form of travel blogs or forums.

“A friend of mine recommended the Mereenie Loop. He was there a few weeks ago and he just loved it. [...] Then I got a call from another mate and he said that the road was in a great condition. So I knew I had to come!” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

“I only went on the net to check a few things, but I couldn’t find a lot. But actually, I didn’t need a lot more information. I knew everything I needed to know from my friends in Alice Springs.” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

In relation to printed information sources, domestic 4WD travellers generally did not use travel guides very often for pre-trip planning. It was found that they preferred using other publications including camping guides or specialised 4WD literature, such as 4WD

magazines, to the broader travel guide content. In particular, trip reports and recounts of trip experiences in 4WD magazines by other Australian 4WD travellers were considered to be very useful. As with travel blog entries on the Internet, this reflects again the emphasis on word-of-mouth as a decisive source of information for domestic 4WD travellers.

“They [other 4WD travellers] know the region because they are the ones who have been out here and done it and write about their experience. They know all the tracks and the distances, or where to stop and get fuel...” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

4.3.3.1.2. *International 4WD Travellers*

Due to a lesser degree of flexibility and limited prior knowledge of the destination, international 4WD travellers invested more time into pre-trip information search than domestic visitors. As with domestic travellers, their preferred strategy was to become more familiar with the destination and build up a general stock of knowledge about the region and available products, which emphasises once again the widespread use of contributory information sources. Nevertheless, international 4WD travellers showed a stronger tendency towards organising various trip elements in advance in order to reduce perceived risks at the destination. It could be observed that pre-trip information led more often to a final purchase decision among international than among domestic travel parties. The most common sources of pre-trip information for international travel parties included travel guides, magazines and books, the Internet and travel agencies. To a lesser extent, they also obtained word-of-mouth information from friends who had visited Australia before.

Travel guides were by far the most popular source of information before leaving their home countries. Travel guides that were most commonly mentioned include the *Lonely Planet*, *Iwanoswsky*, *Polyglott*, *Frommer’s*, *Stefan Loose* and *Reise Know-How*. Almost all international interview participants indicated that they used travel guides to plan and develop specific itineraries and to find out about accommodation options and places of interest. Despite this, hardly any bookings were generated based on pre-trip information obtained from travel guides. On the other hand, some participants criticised travel guides in

terms of their content. Information provided in travel guides was sometimes considered as very superficial and descriptions of various places of interest were rather poor. Instead, it was found that the information was mainly centred around references to commercial businesses and was therefore not very objective.

“We got a lot of information from travel guides and magazines, but I think it’s sometimes very superficial what you get out of them. There are so many references to commercial tour operators, which is really annoying. And I get the feeling that it’s not always true what they write there and that they just want to rip off tourists!” (International travel party, Kings Creek Station)

Similar to domestic 4WD travellers, international visitors used the Internet solely in the pre-trip stages. The Internet can be primarily regarded as a contributory tool for pre-trip information search strategies but not as a decisive source per se. Search engines, such as Google or Yahoo, were commonly used to find out about the available product mix in the region and the Internet was also used to cross-check information obtained by word-of-mouth or from travel brochures. International travellers generally tried to avoid commercial websites in favour of non-commercial sites provided by tourism promotion agencies. Relatively few interview participants used the Internet to obtain information on specific products or suppliers in the region and almost no commercial transactions or bookings were undertaken during pre-trip Internet use, except for rental car bookings. Instead, many international travel parties specifically looked for travel reports and blog entries from other travellers on the Internet to get an idea of possible itineraries and various recommendations of “do’s and don’ts” in the region.

“Travel reports from other people are the most important source of information for us. We just googled them on the Internet!” (International travel party, Kings Creek Station)

Half of all international respondents visited a travel agency, mainly to obtain brochures and seek personal recommendations on what to do in the region. Most international interviewees utilised travel agents to pre-book single trip elements such as flights or rental cars and, to a lesser extent, accommodation at major stopovers. However, other complementary products including accommodation in remote regions and tours were often arranged spontaneously during the trip or only a few days in advance rather than through

these intermediaries. More importantly, travel agencies were a prominent recommender for hiring a 4WD vehicle to travel in central Australia.

“We didn’t need a travel agency to get more information to organise our itinerary! We just booked our flights, the car and the three hotels there!”
(International travel party, Kings Creek Station)

Obtaining information through word-of-mouth prior to departure was not as common among international 4WD travellers as among domestic. Only some travel parties received recommendations from friends or relatives who had been to Australia before. Such recommendations mostly referred to places and specific attractions that should be included on the itinerary. Given that those information providers often had visited Australia a relatively long time ago, the effects of this type of word-of-mouth information were not as decisive as for domestic travellers and the information received was sometimes not regarded as up-to-date. For example, personal recommendations from friends or relatives were never related to specific accommodation or other purchase decisions. However, word-of-mouth seemed to make some contributions for selecting additional places of interest along the main travel route.

“Our niece spent several months in Australia five years ago on a ‘Working Holiday Visa’. And she also went to central Australia during that time. She told us a lot about the region here and also showed us a lot of pictures. And that was so impressive that we decided we wanted to see it ourselves.”
(International travel party, Glen Helen)

4.3.3.2. En Route and At Destination Information Search

It has been observed that specific purchase decisions, such as bookings of accommodation, tours or activities, but also definite decisions about specific places to visit were most of the time made during the trip. The most prominent sources of information in these stages of the trip were informal and included word-of-mouth information from locals or other travellers, information obtained at visitor information centres or direct information obtained from various service providers, such as accommodation facilities, restaurants or national park employees.

4.3.3.2.1. Domestic 4WD Travellers

One of the most decisive sources of information for domestic 4WD travellers during the trip was word-of-mouth information from other travellers or locals they met on the way. This kind of information had a particularly important influence on the choice of accommodation or additional activities. Decisions about spontaneous side-trips which had not been considered in the pre-trip planning stage were often triggered by informal conversations with other travellers who recommended various sites or tracks.

“For example, we also went to Boggy Hole and first, we didn’t know anything about it. We first heard about it from other people up the Birdsville Track and thought it would be interesting. So we spoke to a couple of other people on the way and they said it’s absolutely worth going there.” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

“We met another couple at the other caravan park and they told us that this one [MacDonnell Range Caravan Park] would have great facilities, especially for the kids!” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

Visitor information centres (VICs) were mainly used to obtain more detailed and localised information on arrival at the destination. The primary role of VICs was to obtain brochures and pamphlets and get recommendations about additional places of interest in the area. Domestic travellers also sought up-to-date local information on road conditions. The information centre that most of the 4WD travellers referred to was located in Alice Springs and it was found that hardly any bookings were generated there. It could be observed that many domestic 4WD travellers were not satisfied with the information provided in VICs. It was criticised that available brochures mainly feature information about commercial tours and cater relatively poorly to the independent self-drive or 4WD traveller market.

“They really need to cater more in tourist bureaus for self-drive tourists! We wanted information on Palm Valley [...] and on any other points of interest along the way. They could not even give us a brochure or anything else. We also asked them where Albert Namatjira’s house was and they could not even tell us.” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

Some travel parties contacted product suppliers such as accommodation facilities directly once they were in the region or vicinity. Another common way of getting information

while already on the way was by picking up brochures and pamphlets at accommodation sites or other public places like restaurants. Domestic travellers mentioned several times that they “*stumbled across*” information at such locations, which was often highly decisive for selecting overnight stopover accommodation. In addition, leisure activities, such as camel riding or helicopter flying, and evening entertainment activities, such as didgeridoo shows or slide shows, were spontaneously undertaken after arriving at the destination and investigating available options at the selected accommodation site.

“These [camp sites] are the best places to meet people who are interested in the same kind of things! [...] We didn’t go to the visitor centre. We basically relied on the information in the caravan park shop” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

“We found out about Ross River Resort just by chance. That was more a spur of the moment thing. [...] We went to this 24-hour place in Alice Springs and there we found a small booklet about this resort. My wife and my daughter saw the pictures and thought that it would be nice and worth a try.” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

4.3.3.2.2. *International 4WD Travellers*

International interview participants indicated that they used travel guides during the trip in order to decide on various places of interest or find out about accommodation options in the region. The main reason for their use was the concentration of all destination relevant information in one single medium. Some travel parties indicated that they often selected specific attractions or activities for the subsequent day based on what they had found out from reading travel guides the day before getting to the destination.

“We found out about this camp ground [Kings Creek Station] from our Lonely Planet when we were already on the way and looking for a place to stay!” (International travel party, Kings Creek Station)

While international travellers often consulted travel agencies and tour operators before leaving their home countries, they did not consider travel agencies as very useful once they got to the destination. Available tours at the destination were not of interest to them and it

was found that international 4WD travellers deliberately shunned tour operators and agencies in the region.

“The last thing that we wanted was to get on a tour bus with many other tourists and then you stop somewhere for half an hour and you are told that you’d now have time to look at this and this and this...!” (International travel party, Kings Creek Station)

Instead, many international travel parties went to the visitor information centre when they arrived in Alice Springs before starting their self-drive trip. The primary role of the information centre was to obtain brochures about additional places of interest in the region, information about accommodation facilities and maps. As with domestic 4WD travellers, international travel parties did not make any bookings through the VIC. Only permits for crossing Aboriginal land were likely to be purchased there. Although it was mentioned several times that the employees of the visitor centre were exceptionally friendly and helpful, it was again criticised that the VIC in Alice Springs was mainly catering to tourists interested in tours and activities offered by commercial tour operators. Information for self-drive tourists, such as proper maps with a good description of all interesting places on the way, was regarded as very poor.

“We bought our permit for the Mereenie Loop there and we also got a flyer there from Glen Helen. We actually tried to find something offside the main tourist sites, but there was not a lot there. They had heaps of those nice tour brochures but nothing that really would have helped us. So we finally took a couple of brochures about some day-tour offers. Not that we would have done it, but we got some ideas of where else we could go!” (International travel party, Glen Helen)

Word-of-mouth information from other travellers in the destination was hardly ever mentioned as an important source of information. With the added complication of language barriers, international visitors appeared to prefer more formal and impersonal sources of information. However, some travel parties mentioned that they received very important information during the trip through direct contact with service suppliers, such as accommodation providers or car rental companies. Service providers were contacted either shortly before arriving at the destination or on the day of arrival. Based on personal conversation with service suppliers, international travel parties made sometimes

spontaneous decisions at the destination, especially with relation to the choice of accommodation. Other decisive on-trip information included flyers and brochures that international travellers sometimes came across at public places or various accommodation sites.

“We called the people directly, otherwise you don’t get the information that you really need!” (International travel party, Kings Creek Station)

“We had this flyer about Glen Helen and so just gave them a ring. Originally, we wanted to stay in Hermannsburg but when we called there they told us that it was all booked out. So, Glen Helen sounded nice and then they also asked us whether we wanted to book a table for dinner, and we thought ‘actually, why not?’” (International travel party, Glen Helen)

4.4. The Role of Aboriginal Culture in the Overall Trip Experience

What further emerges from these findings is that Aboriginal culture has only a secondary role in contributing to the attractiveness of the destination mix in central Australia. Most 4WD travellers did not appear to consider Aboriginal culture as a unique asset of the region and Aboriginal culture was hardly ever among the primary reasons to visit central Australia. The majority of 4WD travellers did not have Aboriginal culture in mind when planning a trip to central Australia. Only one international travel party indicated that one of the reasons to visit central Australia was to see original Aboriginal art.

“When you are an Australian you know pretty well what the Aboriginals do. [...] Our intention to come here was certainly not to liaise with Aboriginals. This is not our interest!” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

“No, we were more interested in the scenery here and the landscape and we wanted to see all the famous sights. This was more important than the culture. Aboriginal culture is nothing that we would really come for!” (International travel party, Glen Helen)

Generally, it was found that domestic travel parties, in particular families with children, showed a greater interest in getting experiences with Aboriginal culture on their trip, while

many international travel parties appeared to be somewhat indifferent about Aboriginal culture. Domestic families seemed to appreciate a certain educational aspect during their trips and mentioned that they intended to make their children aware of the country's heritage and history, including Aboriginal people and culture.

“And this is also why we are coming here because my kids have never ever seen any Aboriginal people!” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

4.4.1. Encountered Experiences with Aboriginal Culture

Even though Aboriginal cultural experiences do not appear to be associated with initial trip motivations and are not among the activities and experiences sought beforehand, the majority of both domestic and international 4WD travellers still have included some aspects of Aboriginal culture on their trips which are briefly outlined in Table 9 and 10.

Aboriginal cultural activities were mostly limited to non-commercial activities such as visiting art galleries in Alice Springs or the Cultural Centre at Uluru. Only rarely did visits to art galleries encourage 4WD travellers to purchase Aboriginal art and it appeared that many travel parties considered looking at Aboriginal paintings and artefacts as constituting an experience with Aboriginal culture. Some international travel parties participated in free ranger guided tours with a non-Aboriginal guide at Uluru (also known as the Mala Walk) which they rated as an Aboriginal cultural experience as well because they received a lot of information about Aboriginal people and the tour took place on Aboriginal land.

Table 9: Aboriginal cultural experiences made by domestic 4WD travellers

<i>Aboriginal cultural experiences made by domestic 4WD travellers</i>	<i>n = 11</i>
Art galleries in Alice Springs	5
Cultural Centre at Uluru	3
Aboriginal guided tour at Uluru	2
Aboriginal guide at Alice Springs Desert Park	2
Rock art sites in the East MacDonnell Ranges	2
Historic precinct and art galleries in Hermannsburg	1

Table 10: Aboriginal cultural experiences made by domestic 4WD travellers

<i>Aboriginal cultural experiences made by international 4WD travellers</i>	<i>n = 9</i>
Cultural Centre at Uluru	6
Art galleries in Alice Springs	4
Historic Precinct and art gallery in Hermannsburg	2

Some travel parties had previous experiences with Aboriginal culture on their trip before arriving to central Australia. Such experiences included for example: Aboriginal talks in Tennant Creek, Aboriginal guided tours at Lake Mungo (NSW), Kakadu National Park or in Arnhem Land and visiting art galleries, rock art sites or Aboriginal interpretation centres in South and Western Australia. One domestic travel party deliberately wanted to visit an Aboriginal community along the Gibb River Road.

4.4.1.1. Reasons for Participating in Aboriginal Cultural Activities

The main reason for participating in Aboriginal cultural experiences appeared to be that they just turned out to be among available side-experiences at the destination. Most travel parties who experienced Aboriginal culture had found out by chance about available options once they arrived at the destination, either through word-of-mouth from other travellers, in the VIC or directly from employees at accommodation facilities. The reasons for deciding to undertake these activities were either that they had no other plans at that time or that they got curious to find out what those experiences were all about. Some travel parties visited Aboriginal art galleries in Alice Springs in order to buy didgeridoos and other souvenirs, whereas just two domestic travel parties indicated that they were specifically looking for paintings from certain Aboriginal artists.

Only few interview participants decided to undertake an Aboriginal activity due to information received prior to arriving at the destination, for example by travel guides or word-of-mouth. Some travel parties, in particular internationals, who were still in their initial stages of the trip, indicated that they would be prepared to participate in Aboriginal

cultural activities if they happened to be available once they arrived at the destination. However, such activities were largely considered as potential “gap fillers” to be used in order to complete itineraries and fill in additional spare time.

“We went to one of the gorges near Ross River Resort and we also had a look at the Aboriginal rock art there. But we wouldn’t have made the trip out there just because of the Aboriginal art, but in fact we were in the area, had an hour or so to spare, so we went and had a look at that”. (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

“If there was, for example, an Aboriginal art gallery or something like that on the way, we probably would have a look at it. But just for a short stop. We don’t want to spend too much time on things that do not really have priority for us!” (International travel party, Kings Creek Station)

4.4.1.2. Evaluation of Available Experiences and Activities

Opinions about available Aboriginal experiences and activities in central Australia were consistent among domestic and international 4WD travellers. One of the main complaints from both groups related to the range and diversity of Aboriginal tourism products. It was repeatedly criticised that the only available experiences in the region were focused on Aboriginal art galleries or on organised tours from tour operators at the main tourist centres. Such tours were often regarded as not very authentic or interesting and as mainly being targeted towards big tour groups from overseas. Impressions of experiences obtained in museums, art galleries or cultural centres were that having seen one is somewhat synonymous with “*having seen them all*”.

“We have been to some art galleries but every town ends up looking the same. It gets a bit boring if you try to get to every Aboriginal cultural thing in town because it’s all the same.” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

Domestic 4WD travellers complained about a lack of opportunities to meet Aboriginal people “*off the beaten track*”, in their communities and on their traditional land. Even though they acknowledged a huge interest in visiting remote regions including Aboriginal land they often shunned such places because they thought that they were basically not accessible for them or that tourists were not welcome. Some domestic travel parties

criticised in this context that there was not enough or no clear information about which areas require access permits and which communities want to receive tourists. In contrast to domestic 4WD travellers, international travel parties were not so much concerned with access to remote Aboriginal land but they generally found that Aboriginal culture is not present along the way. They criticised in particular that the possibility to interact and talk to Aboriginal people in the Red Centre was not there and that they could not even see any Aboriginal people on their own land or near tourist attractions.

“[...] There are pretty strict rules from what you’ve read on pamphlets if you need permits. And then you think, well, I’ll stay away from there just in case you do need a permit. Sometimes you are sort of scared to drive through somewhere because you might need a permit or they might be offended. But if there was something saying that you are allowed then I would go through!”
(Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

“The cultural centre was not that great. [...] The artwork was nice though but we actually had expected a bit more because Ayers Rock is said to be such a big Aboriginal spiritual place. But you can not even see Aboriginals working there. We would have expected that you can talk to them and ask them questions, but there was no such thing!” (International travel party, Alice Springs)

Another reason for dissatisfaction with Aboriginal tourism products in the region was that many of the cultural activities on offer are performed by non-Aboriginal people. Especially domestic travel parties did not appreciate experiences which were originally associated with Aboriginal culture but then turned out to be delivered by white people. On the other hand, travel parties who had participated in an Aboriginal guided tour or had the opportunity to listen to Aboriginal talks (also in regions outside central Australia) were generally highly satisfied with the experiences received. Such activities were regarded as very educational and beneficial, especially when they included explanations and demonstrations of preparing bush food, traditional hunting or Dreamtime⁵ stories and gave them the possibility to talk to Aboriginal people in a more or less informal way.

“The first night that we came here we heard that there was a didgeridoo show, so we went there because we thought we could play didgeridoo and that we

⁵ The “Dreamtime” or “Dreaming” has a sacred meaning for Aboriginal people and explains the origins of the universe, the nature of humanity and the cycle of life and death. (Aboriginal Tourism Australia (2007), n.p.a.)

were gonna be taught by an Aboriginal guy. But then we just got a white fella playing didgeridoo.” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

“There is no point in sending out a white Australian person to explain ‘This is Aboriginal culture!’. The Aboriginal people have to be much more involved themselves because it’s their own culture.” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

“But then in Tennant Creek there was this Aboriginal or half Aboriginal bloke in the caravan park and for example he cooked up some Aboriginal food, like witchetty grubs and that sort of thing. And that’s interesting, you know, because you learn a few things.” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

4.4.1.3. Further Desired Experiences with Aboriginal Culture

The results suggest that in-depth experiences including educational aspects and genuine insights into Aboriginal culture are largely missing in central Australia. Especially domestic travel parties mentioned that opportunities to learn something about Aboriginal culture and to get first-hand experiences with Aboriginal people are very limited in central Australia. Consequently, all interview participants were asked if there were any additional experiences with Aboriginal culture that they would be interested in but which had not been encountered in central Australia. The following section will provide an overview of Aboriginal cultural experiences that 4WD travellers would be interested in.

“I think the demand is there. I was fascinated and that’s why we also went with the children to this exhibit so that they could experience the different culture and understand the way how people survive, their beliefs and why they belief. And I think it’s inherent to this country. But I don’t think it has really been tapped into enough and that the opportunities for that have been really provided!” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

“Yes, yes I am [interested in Aboriginal culture]! In fact, every time I’ve gone out with an Aboriginal guide I’ve learned a lot more than I have when I’ve gone out in a white group, so to speak. And that’s happened at Kakadu, that’s happened at Lake Mungo and that’s happened at Ayers Rock and each time I’ve learned a lot, whereas, you know, in those white sort of tours you don’t learn as much. (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

Many domestic travel parties acknowledged interest in personally guided tours by Aboriginal people to see some remote places and learn at the same time something about Aboriginal traditions. Especially families demonstrated a high level of interest in such experiences and mentioned that they would appreciate particular educational and participative activities for their children. Some domestic travel parties would also like to participate in personally guided 4WD tag-along tours with Aboriginal guides to less touristy places of interest such as Palm Valley, Rainbow Valley or Chambers Pillar. Such tours could include interpretational aspects about Aboriginal culture and history while the main emphasis should be on the self-driving component of the trip and on small groups and personal guidance. It was mentioned several times that conventional tours to such places either do not offer the desired degree of flexibility and independence or were considered to be too artificial and expensive.

“Some of my friends told me that further north, I think it was Tennant Creek, there was an old fella who used to come around to the caravan park and for 20\$ he teaches you about bush tucker and things like that, take the kids for a walk out in the bush. And I thought, you know, if they did the same thing here, I would have certainly done that!” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

“If you had like a very knowledgeable and well educated Aboriginal guide setting up a budget kind of trip for people, even just out into Palm Valley and stay there for a night etc. [...] And if there are four people and all pay around 50\$, I mean that’s already 200\$, and therefore he teaches you all about the area that you go into. That would be an attractive sort of trip because you learn a lot and you understand what the history of Palm Valley is and what it is all about!” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

Some domestic interview participants would have appreciated special evening entertainment activities involving Aboriginal culture, such as evening talks and presentations about Dreamtime stories and Aboriginal traditions at various accommodation sites in the desert. This has been considered as a particularly interesting opportunity for Aboriginal people to engage in tourism since tourists in general have a lot more spare time in the evening than during the day and are therefore more likely to participate in such activities. Especially accommodation facilities such as caravan parks or camping sites in the region were mentioned to be the ideal and most attractive settings because they offer a rather casual atmosphere and a high concentration of *“like-minded people”* who could be

easily encouraged to participate. Other desired evening activities included art workshops, such as dot-painting. Similar activities are already being offered at Uluru but interview participants, who acknowledged interest in such activities, either did not have enough time there for participating or found the offers to be heavily overpriced.

“They could be doing much more with these dreamtime stories. Even here [at the camp site], if they had like a campfire and a corroboree or something I reckon you could get half the people here to attend. And if they were telling dreamtime stories under the moon, I mean, of course I would take my kids there!” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

On the other hand, international 4WD travellers seemed to be rather sceptical about any commercial Aboriginal tourism products, such as organised tours or evening activities. Only few international travel parties would have been interested in joining an Aboriginal guided tour to remote Aboriginal land in order to see a real traditional community. Most international participants generally considered Aboriginal tourism products as not authentic and declared that they did not want to participate in activities that come across as something that is specifically staged for tourists. Similarly, some domestic travel parties indicated that they were not interested in experiencing Aboriginal culture but that they would join self-drive tours guided by Aboriginal people, for example as tag-along tours, to remote parts of their traditional land just in order to be able to access remote regions.

“It should not turn out to be something like a theatre where everything is just staged and made up from a commercial tour operator! Sometimes you just get the feeling of being ripped off!” (International travel party, Glen Helen)

Several interview participants were not interested in any commercial activities at all. For them, visiting traditional Aboriginal communities and seeing how and where Aboriginal people nowadays live in the desert would constitute a real and authentic Aboriginal cultural experience, rather than getting explanations from guides about the way they used to live in the past. In this context, both domestic and international 4WD travellers would desire personal interactions with Aboriginal people in daily routine situations. Some travel parties would appreciate to see more Aboriginal people being employed at various tourist attractions along the way, who do not try to avoid contact and show interest in sharing their culture with tourists. Again, talking to Aboriginal people and being able to ask them

questions about the history and the meaning of certain places of interest were rated as the most important aspects.

“The easiest way to experience real Aboriginal culture is to actually speaking to the people. Around Uluru there is probably less chance to do it. [...] I don’t want a ‘Disneyland-experience’ for Aboriginal culture, like pushing forward the ‘howdydoodo’ Aboriginal side of things! If they live in squalor, fine, but I want to see what that is! But if they live in traditional ways then that’s what I want to see. I don’t want a sanitised and politically correct version!” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

“If there was the possibility to go and visit a real Aboriginal community and stay there for a while, we would go. We’ve done something similar on our last trip to Fiji, which was great!” (International travel party, Kings Creek Station)

4.4.2. General Level of Interest in Aboriginal Culture

As already discussed in the previous section, Aboriginal culture is not among the motivating factors to visit central Australia and most 4WD travellers did not associate the region with the ability to experience Aboriginal culture before commencing their trip. Nevertheless, when being asked about their general level of interest in Aboriginal culture, the majority of both domestic and international travel parties indicated that they consider Aboriginal culture as very or at least partly interesting. A minor part of both sub-groups admitted that they were basically not interested in Aboriginal culture although they still participated in various Aboriginal cultural activities as they turned out to be available at the respective places of interest. Similarly, some international travel parties had not been interested in getting in contact with Aboriginal culture before leaving their home countries but the longer they stayed in Australia and the more they found out about Aboriginal people in the course of the trip the more they got interested in it. Only two domestic travel parties deliberately wanted to avoid getting any contact with Aboriginal culture on their trip because they had the feeling that they had already made enough experiences with Aboriginal people and culture in daily life.

“We have already seen it all. We don’t need to get Aboriginal culture on this trip!” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

“I think it became more important as we travelled, especially after we’ve been to Kakadu. We saw and found out a lot about Aboriginal culture there and so I’d say, we also got more alert to those kind of things!” (International travel party, Alice Springs)

4.4.3. Effort to Investigate and Pursue Available Options

This part of the research sought to understand the effort that 4WD travellers invested into exploring options to experience Aboriginal culture and to what extent information about Aboriginal products received before and during the trip influenced 4WD travellers to undertake in Aboriginal cultural activities. As it could be observed throughout the whole interview process, a great majority of both domestic and international travel parties did not actively try and get information about any Aboriginal tourism products before or during their trip. Even travellers who had acknowledged reasonable general interest in Aboriginal culture or who were looking forward to getting experiences with Aboriginal culture during the trip did not actively investigate about available options in the region. Travel parties who expected to experience Aboriginal culture in central Australia largely relied on finding out about available products and experience during the trip, while others who did not plan to get such experiences often decided spontaneously to participate in Aboriginal activities when they stumbled across certain opportunities by chance.

“Look, I’m not gonna research for a month or two months before we go on holiday because we don’t have time! We are working, we are busy. Maybe some people might do that but we are more a bit like last-minute. So if we stumble across things, that’s fine and that’s how we gonna learn and do it. I thought that there would be more of that stuff around.” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

“I think, in general, people do not come to the region to see Aboriginal people. If they happen to get a nice side-experience, fine, but they won’t really look for it!” (International travel party, Glen Helen)

It was further found that some travel parties had come across some information about Aboriginal tourism products in the course of their trip preparations prior to arriving in central Australia. However, at that stage of the trip planning process they were mostly not considering Aboriginal culture as a potential component of their itinerary and therefore did

not really pay attention to that information. Many travel parties were of the opinion that such pre-trip information would only have an influence on the planning behaviour if tourists already had a relatively strong interest in getting experiences with Aboriginal culture in the first place. Otherwise tourist just would not notice the information at hand and the effects of such pre-trip information would be very limited. On the other hand, some travel parties mentioned that more general information about Aboriginal culture and available experiences prior to departure would contribute to a higher awareness of such products, which could facilitate spontaneous decisions at the destinations. This is, however, based on assumptions from a limited number of travel parties only and could therefore not be investigated any further.

“But you have to be really interested in it and somewhat receptive to this kind of information. People who are not that much interested will probably not even notice it!” (International travel party, Kings Creek Station)

“We haven’t come across anything [information about Aboriginal tourism products] before at home. But I also have to say that we did not really look for it, so maybe we just missed it. But nobody really recommended it to us and nothing really drew our attention to Aboriginal culture, maybe if we had got some more information before we would have been more aware of it!” (International travel party, Glen Helen)

4.4.3.1. Evaluation of Current Distribution Methods

This section was originally supposed to investigate how interview participants perceived and evaluated information about Aboriginal tourism products received before or during their trips through various media in terms of content, quality and accuracy and to what extent it encouraged them to undertake activities. However, as it turned out during the interview process, most of the travel parties did neither actively nor passively obtain any promotional information about Aboriginal tourism products and therefore this research could not provide any insights on content and quality criteria of various information materials. Instead, it was tried to elicit further information about how they evaluated current information and distribution methods of Aboriginal tourism in central Australia once they had found out about available offers in the region.

It was mentioned several times that most of the region and destination specific information is mainly focused on nature and landscape assets and that Aboriginal culture is not being portrayed as an essential tourism experience like other “*must-see sights*” in central Australia. It is relatively easy to find out about major tourist attractions in the region, but getting information on not so popular places or experiences “*off the beaten track*” requires much more independent research and being more proactive.

“I’ve gone on to the internet and I’ve tried to find out, particularly if we have gone camping in certain areas, what you can do there. And you can get limited information [...] but it tends to be more on flora and fauna than on the Aboriginal cultural area which is not emphasized at all.” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

“If you hear something about Australia and tourism then it is mostly something about nature and landscape, red sand, Ayers Rock, the Great Barrier Reef and also Sydney. [...] In order to find out something about places like Palm Valley or the Mereenie Loop you have to invest a lot more effort and time into research and getting information!” (International travel party, Kings Creek Station)

Another point mentioned in this context was that much of the available information is concentrated on commercial tours only and is often displayed in a very superficial and little appealing way. Available products are not really differentiated from each other and promote more or less the same kind of experiences and values, while being exclusively targeted towards the mainstream mass market. At the same time, this point of criticism refers more to a general lack of products and experiences than to a gap in information and distribution methods.

“Most of the information always tries to appeal to as many tourists as possible and it’s always about the same things – many short two or three-hour tours which are basically all about the same things and in the big mass of available tours, not only Aboriginal but also general tours, they just disappear somewhere. Nothing really stands out.” (International travel party, Kings Creek Station)

Both domestic and international 4WD travellers pointed out that there is hardly any information available about more genuine and in-depth experiences with Aboriginal culture, which they related to the fact that there are simply no such products on offer. In their opinion there would be much more information available and a lot easier to find if

there were relevant products offered in the region. This outlines once again that 4WD travellers generally expect information to be available where they normally tend to get information from and that they do not actively pursue any activities that had not been planned in before as a fixed component of their itinerary.

“At the moment I could not enumerate any places where you can find or do something with Aboriginal culture. The only thing that I can remember is this art gallery in Alice Springs!” (International travel party, Glen Helen)

“If we ran here around into a local who said ‘Come and have a look!’ we would go and do that, no worries! [...] Or for example if we were out here in the caravan park and talked to different people who said ‘Yeah, we’ve been out there and spoke to ‘so and so’ and we went out on a corroboree...’ or whatever there might be. But that sort of things just don’t seem to happen around here.” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

“If there was happening a lot [Aboriginal cultural activities] I think you’d find out about it but you don’t seem to hear much about it!” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

4.4.3.2. Recommendations for Future Distribution Strategies

When being asked about suggestions for a better distribution of Aboriginal tourism products in the future, interview participants mostly referred to better coordinated on-trip distribution strategies, including more active sales and promotion and a more efficient use of on-trip information channels. The need for establishing partnerships with existing businesses and well established attractions could further facilitate a better distribution process.

“I think it’s the active sales process that has to be improved. You know, like you’ve got to sell your product, we’re not going to search the product, though!” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

One suggested way to improve the current distribution of Aboriginal tourism products was to provide better services at VICs. Firstly, 4WD travellers would appreciate more information specifically for self-drive tourists since the majority of available information about Aboriginal products seems to be focused on commercial bus tours only. Secondly, it

was often criticised that staff members of VICs do not actively recommend any Aboriginal tourism products or experiences but just provide information that tourists specifically ask for. VICs should be more “*proactive*” and try to promote such products. It was mentioned that there should be Aboriginal people employed at VICs or at government tourism organizations to advise tourists on available options. This would not only be regarded as more reliable and trustworthy information but it would also give Aboriginal people the opportunity to have more influence on the distribution process of their own products.

“They are not proactive [staff members at the VIC]. No one tells you ‘Listen, while you are here make sure you do this and this and this!’ or ‘These are the top three things that we suggest’. You just receive what you ask for but no one recommends you anything!” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

“I don’t think it’s useful to get a piece of paper and put all the Aboriginal culture on that because I think people don’t read things anyway, you know? I think what would help is a nice tourist information bureau and a government organization which has employed some very reliable and knowledgeable Aboriginals and they should go to 4WD clubs or to caravan parks.” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

It was further suggested to make more information about Aboriginal tourism products available at various points of convergence in the region. Such potential distribution points include public places and highly frequented tourist attractions, accommodation sites, restaurants or rental car companies. In addition, it was emphasised that direct involvement of Aboriginal people in the promotion and distribution process would be highly appreciated. Tourists wanted to see and listen to Aboriginal people and wanted to get the impression that Aboriginal people are really interested in sharing their culture with tourists, which they generally did not get from flyers and brochures or from pictures on TV or on the Internet.

“If tourists don’t get the information you have to get the information to the tourists! For example at public places like here [Kings Creek Station], where so many tourists pass by or even stop, there could be more information!” (International travel party, Kings Creek Station)

“For example, we don’t watch TV, so you wouldn’t get through to us by that way. And we don’t read brochures either unless they’ve got a really pretty picture on the front that makes you focus on that. Whereas if you have like one

introductory night here [at the caravan park] and they come here and say ‘Ok, next Friday, this is where we go and what we do and so and so many cars can join us!’ This would be a lot more effective.” (Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

4.4.4. Barriers for Seeking Aboriginal Cultural Experiences

This research further tried to identify potential barriers for 4WD travellers to engage in Aboriginal tourism. It sought to understand various reasons for not seeking experiences with Aboriginal culture or for not participating in available activities and tried to explore additional concerns and opinions having a negative influence on tourists wanting to experience Aboriginal culture. The main barriers impacting on consumption of Aboriginal tourism products were found to be the extensive promotion of commercial tours and activities which are not perceived as authentic, the negative attitude of many Aboriginal people and communities towards tourists and finally social and political issues, including poor living conditions of many Aboriginal people in the desert.

4.4.4.1. Commercialism and Authenticity

The major barrier for 4WD travellers to seek Aboriginal cultural experiences on their trip appears to be that most of the available products tend to be extensively commercialised and are therefore regarded as largely staged activities and as not authentic. Guided tours were often claimed to be heavily overpriced and it appeared that many 4WD travellers were simply not willing to pay high prices for activities that did not really have priority for them. Other activities, including Dreamtime dinners or traditional dances were mainly perceived as shows that are specifically set up for tourists and do not comply with the real life and traditions of Aboriginal people at all.

“I’ve seen on a television show that there are Aboriginal places where you can go and live in a tent which is 5-star luxury and people leave there 1500\$ a day, but families could not afford that! I think the best things are free – sort of out in the open under the stars!” (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

“Yes, we would like to do something but as we found out there is not a lot around to do. We just saw some flyers about a special dinner for tourists where

Aboriginal people dress up and dance around a bit - like 'hulahula' [unreal and staged spectacle] for tourists!" (International travel party, Kings Creek Station)

"The only thing that concerns me is that because so much of the Aboriginal culture is really private, how much of it is actually factual and how much is performance for the tourists. [...] I think a lot of the Aboriginal stuff that is advertised comes over as pretty fake and I don't think it's genuine." (Domestic travel party, Kings Creek Station)

4.4.4.2. Perceived Attitude of Aboriginal People

Many interview participants, in particular international travel parties, had the impression that Aboriginal people were not interested in tourism or even tried to avoid contact with tourists, which apparently contributes to a further alienation between tourists and the Aboriginal population. Both domestic and international 4WD travellers indicated that they sometimes felt insecure about how to behave in the presence of Aboriginal people or which places they could go to without offending Aboriginal people. In addition, some international travel parties compared such tourist – host interactions with experiences from previous trips to other countries, for example in Africa, Asia or South Pacific. Encounters with indigenous culture in such countries were generally more positively evaluated due to a more welcoming attitude of indigenous people and more possibilities to interact with the locals.

"It's also hard to say whether they want us actually to be involved. I've been to some places where I actually felt uncomfortable and unwelcome. We went for example through Hermannsburg fairly late at night and I didn't feel it was a safe place to be with my family!" (Domestic travel party, Glen Helen)

"We have been to Kenya on a previous trip and we met quite a lot of Masai people there, but compared to the Aboriginals, they were so much more friendly and welcoming. And they still lived their traditional life, they wore their traditional clothes etc. but the people here in Alice Springs did not make a good impression at all!" (International travel party, Glen Helen)

4.4.4.3. Social and Political Barriers

Another decisive reason for not wanting to get in touch with Aboriginal people were the poor living conditions of many Aboriginal people in Alice Springs or Hermannsburg. Communities were generally regarded as not safe and as dirty places. The big alcohol problem in the cities and communities, especially when tourists got confronted with drunken Aboriginal people “*lying around or yelling and swearing in the streets*”, was often mentioned to deter 4WD travellers from going to communities or seeking any Aboriginal cultural experiences. In addition, the bad picture that is often delivered by the media, especially in the Southern states of Australia, seemed to keep many domestic travellers from trying to get in contact with Aboriginal people.

“We went for a walk down the mall [Todd Mall in Alice Springs] and we heard Aboriginals yelling and screaming around and that was not appealing to us at all. And where they were in the mall there, I mean from a distance we principally would have liked to go there and look at that particular area. But because of this yelling and screaming carrying on and the swearing and the drunkenness, that turned us right off. Not interested! Just walk away from it!”
(Domestic travel party, Alice Springs)

“And I think it’s because of bad publication and bad media throughout the country. It’s presented like Aboriginals are all drunk, lazy and dirty...that’s why white people all think that way, especially people from down south!”
(Domestic travel parties, Alice Springs)

“They don’t seem to be open and welcoming towards tourists. Alice Springs is the best example – you can see them there lying around, completely drunk and yelling around and you can see that the people make a detour to avoid them!”
(International travel party, Kings Creek Station)

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1. Trip Characteristics and Motivations

This research has addressed a considerable gap in knowledge about trip preferences of 4WD travellers visiting desert regions. As argued by Carson and Taylor (2006b, p. 4), it was not clear under which conditions 4WD travellers might prefer desert regions over other environments. This research has found that the main motivation to undertake a 4WD trip in the desert varied a lot between domestic and international 4WD travellers. The main motivation factors could be divided into three different categories: environment-based, educational and psychological factors.

In particular for domestic visitors, natural and landscape aspects of the desert environment, including the possibility to explore remote and untouched places, were among the most important reasons to visit the region. This relates strongly to the existing literature which established that environment-based attractions, such as landscape, terrain or fauna and flora, are very important to the overall trip experience of 4WD travellers. (Taylor et al. (2007), pp. 3-4; Prideaux et al. (2006), pp. 2-3) Furthermore, a general desire to “*get away from it all*” and to experience isolation, remoteness and the silence of the desert could be observed among many domestic visitors. This is also consistent with results from previous research into the motivations of 4WD travellers, which found that domestic 4WD travellers seek to get away from the crowd and the city. (Taylor/Prideaux (2006), pp. 10-11)

In general, the reasons for which desert regions were considered as most attractive for domestic 4WD travellers compare well to the findings from other researchers, who have investigated the attractiveness of remote and peripheral destinations. (Carson/Harwood (2007), pp. 10-11; Sørensen (1999), p. 12; Wanhill (1997), p. 50) Similar to what was found in this study they argued that visitors to peripheral regions mainly choose such destinations because of their remoteness, the isolation and the strong and unique natural environment. Domestic 4WD travellers showed a relatively strong tendency to look for new destinations and to get away from well-established high volume tourism routes, which

encourages the assumption that 4WD tourists might have some advantages over other desert tourism markets in dispersing tourism to remoter regions. (Carson/Taylor (2006b), p. 3) In addition, many of the interviewed domestic travel parties have been visiting central Australia repeatedly, which emphasises a relatively strong preference for desert environments. This indicates that domestic 4WD travellers are potentially more loyal to desert destinations and can also contribute to a higher repeat visitation rate than other desert tourism markets, which might help to sustain the desert tourism industry over time. (ibid.)

In contrast to domestic travel parties, international visitors mainly considered the most famous sights in the Red Centre as their primary motivation to visit central Australia. It was found that the international 4WD market is more likely to stick to the main established tourism routes and to visit the main clusters of attractions in the region. As suggested by Tremblay (2006a, p. 13) this type of desert travellers primarily comes to the desert “incidentally” due to iconic attractions and not so much because of the unique desert environment as such. Venturing to new regions is not very likely to happen and hence their potential contribution to disperse tourism activity to remote destinations is rather limited.

The main reason for choosing 4WD self-drive trips were to be able to access remote and untouched places off the normal highways that no other vehicles can get to and to get away from the crowd and main tourist sites. Being different from “normal” tourists was one of the common motivational factors for using 4WD vehicles. This purposeful separation from other mainstream tourists is also significant for general drive tourists and indicates that the self-drive market prefers “real and local experiences” away from routes and products that are generally perceived as very touristy. (Olsen (2002), p. 13)

In general, psychological factors played a very important role for 4WD travellers in the choice of their travel mode. In particular, for domestic 4WD travellers the impression of being among the first to access remote locations sometimes conveyed the feeling of having achieved something special and outstanding and was highly valued with regard to their overall trip experience in the desert. This outlines once again the exploratory nature of domestic 4WD travellers and the desire for facing challenges and gaining personal

recognition during their trip. (Taylor and Prideaux (2006), p. 7) While domestic 4WD travellers mainly considered the vehicle as an essential part of their trip experience, international travel parties tended to use it as a mere form of transport, where the final destinations played the most important role, and safety considerations were among the primary reasons to rent 4WD vehicles.

Educational aspects, such as “*getting to know the Outback*” and “*seeing something different*” which they had never experienced before, were considered important in the choice of destination by both domestic and international 4WD travellers. In particular, Australian families with children were most likely to visit the desert for the purpose of education and getting new experiences. In contrast to this, specific activities had only a minor role in motivating 4WD travellers to visit central Australia and were mostly not considered as essential for the pre-trip planning of their itineraries. The range of experiences sought in the desert was mostly confined to experiencing the desert environment through simple routine activities, such as driving, walking or camping in the wilderness. As a consequence, the demand for commercial products in the desert, including Aboriginal tourism products, appeared to be somewhat limited. This confirms one of the arguments made by Carson and Taylor (2006b, p. 2), who warned against too optimistic expectations in terms of economic benefits arising through desert 4WD tourism.

Further behavioural differences between domestic and international 4WD travellers were identified in the composition of their travel itineraries. While domestic travel parties generally spent between one and three weeks in central Australia, the majority of international visitors only stayed for a couple of days in the region. According to Olsen’s classification of the self-drive market based on the length of trip (2002, p. 19), international 4WD travellers were largely on short tours, ranging from 4 to 7 nights, while domestic travellers were more likely to undertake big tours and grand tours, extending to 21 nights and more. However, actual itineraries within central Australia were similar among respondents in both groups. Almost all interviewed travel parties visited the major tourist spots in central Australia, which indicates that the major tourist sites still dominate the development of itineraries, even from independent travellers such as 4WD tourists. Nevertheless, domestic visitors spent more time at each location and visited more sub-

destinations than international visitors, which underlines once again that domestic 4WD travellers are more inclined to visit remoter regions and include locations off the main tourism routes on their itineraries.

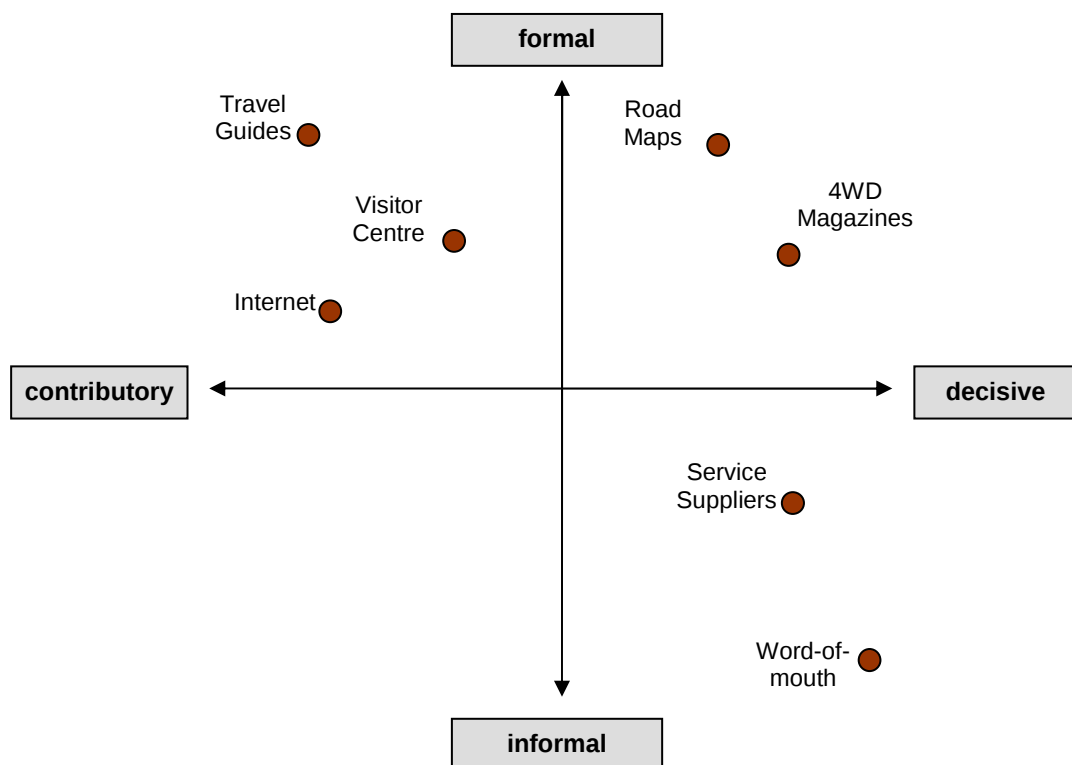
5.2. The Use of Information Sources

4WD travellers used different channels for different types of information and at different stages of their trip. The most important sources of information for both domestic and international 4WD travellers were classified on a bi-variable continuum diagram according to whether they were used in a contributory or decisive way and whether they were formal or informal by nature. This analysis is based on previous attempts from researchers to classify various sources of information and their role in the information search strategy. As suggested by Fodness and Murray (1998, pp. 109-10), information strategies can be classified according to operational dimensions which distinguish contributory from decisive information sources. Decisive sources tend to be used in isolation to make decisions about trip elements, while contributory sources are used in combination with others for enhancing visitor knowledge about the range of available alternatives, which can contribute to decisions either before or during the trip.

At the same time it is possible to distinguish between formal and informal sources of information. As discussed by numerous researchers (for example Case (2002); Raitz/Dakhil (1989) and McDonough/Ackert (1986)), formal sources are relatively consistent in terms of the structure and content of the information they provide. Their content is usually closely managed and regularly up-dated and their influence on travel behaviour is easier to control and to predict. Examples for formal sources include print and electronic information channels from product suppliers, intermediaries or other third party organisations, such as destination marketing organisations. On the other hand, informal sources, including personal information from friends, family members or other forms of word-of-mouth, are often difficult to control and their influence on trip planning and travel behaviour is hard to foresee and respond to in advance. (McDonough/Ackert (1986), n.p.a.)

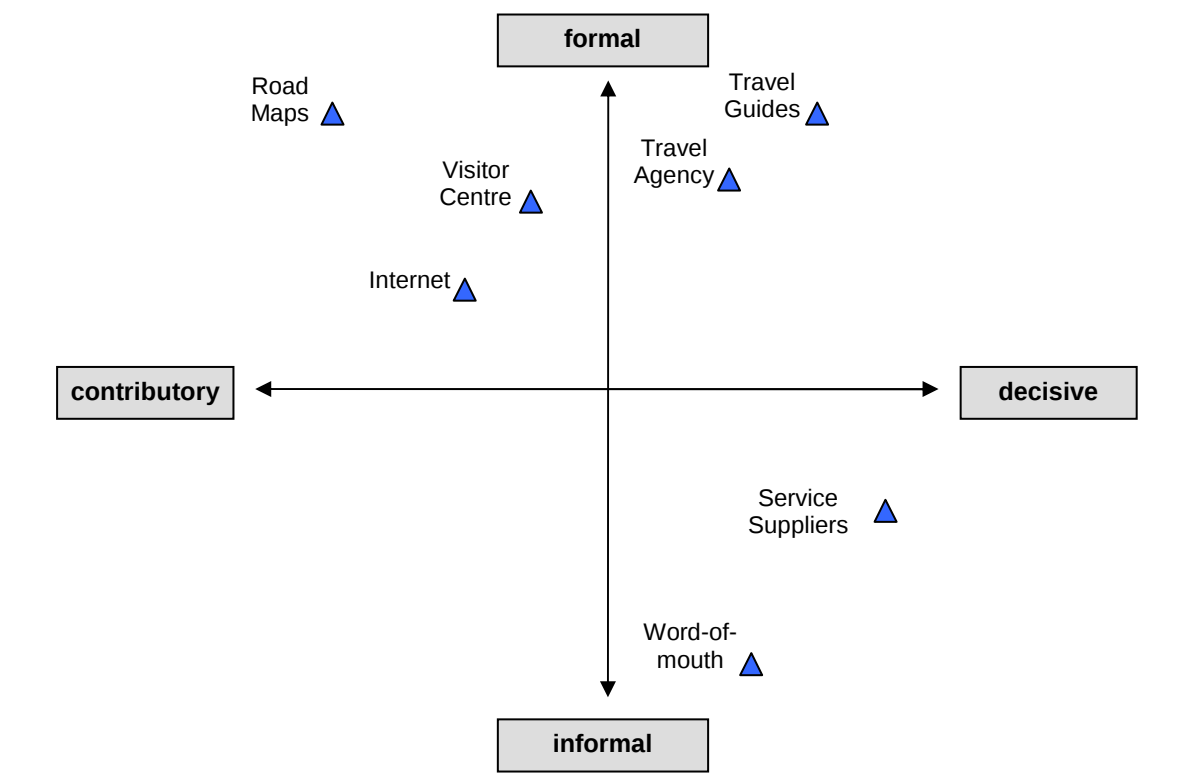
As demonstrated in Figure 17, informal information obtained through personal conversations with service suppliers and through word-of-mouth from friends, relatives or other travellers can be classified as most influential in the decision making process of domestic 4WD travellers. This finding is in line with existing literature which suggests that the most common channels of information for independent travellers are informal, including friends, family, repeat visitors or lodging employees, and that formal channels are mostly used to a limited extent and primarily in the early stages of a trip. (McDonough/Ackert (1986), n.p.a.) Similarly, Olsen (2002, pp. 14-15) and Derrett (2002, p. 26) have found that informal information through word-of-mouth has an exceptional importance in the decision making process of self-drive travellers. Other decisive sources for 4WD travellers that contained more formal structures included special interest magazines such as 4WD magazines and road maps. Travel guides, visitor information centres and even the internet were used mainly as contributory sources by domestic travellers with travel guides being the most formal and least decisive source.

Figure 17: Classification of information sources used by domestic 4WD travellers



The classification of information sources used by international 4WD travellers (Figure 18) delivers a partly different picture. As with domestic 4WD travellers, personal information from service suppliers and through other word-of-mouth was again considered as very decisive. Additionally, information obtained from the Internet, from visitor centres and from maps was placed on the contributory side of the continuum. The most formal and at the same time the most decisive sources of information for international travellers were travel guides but also information obtained from travel agencies. It has to be pointed out, however, that these sources were mainly used in order to create their own itineraries instead of using them for their intended purpose to make final bookings. Hence, the traditional intermediation functions of these sources as distributors of products and services for destinations were largely bypassed in order to acquire more detailed knowledge on the destination itself.

Figure 18: Classification of information sources used by international 4WD travellers



Similar to what previous research into information search and trip planning behaviour of independent travellers suggested (Stuart et al. (2005), pp. 244-45; Hyde (1998), p. 1019; Fodness/Murray (1998), pp. 109-10), both domestic and international travellers used a variety of information sources in the pre-trip stages of their trip to build a relatively broad stock of regional information about possible itineraries, activities and attractions. During the trip, information needs changed as the journey unfolded and access to particular information sources including local knowledge became relatively easier than from home (Prestipino (2006), p. 8).

Actual decisions based on the information acquired prior to departure were very rare for domestic visitors and it is not clear to which extent this information contributed to decisions made at a later stage of the trip. It can be assumed that pre-trip information for domestic visitors is primarily contributory until it is retrieved and revised again during the trip when being confronted with a given purchase situation. For international 4WD travellers, the relatively high use of formal sources like travel guides and travel agents stands in contrast to the information search strategies of domestic travellers. International travellers seem to conduct more pre-trip information search and invest more time into trip planning prior to departure. The primary motivation for the extensive pre-trip research appears to be to avoid risks which are associated with travelling to a remote and relatively unknown destination. A similar approach has been suggested by Fodness and Murray (1999, p. 222). International 4WD travellers need to establish a base level of destination knowledge first in order to reduce the level of uncertainty and develop stable itineraries within which they can find some scope for spontaneous and flexible decisions. Itineraries within a region are relatively fixed temporally given a tighter time schedule, which also may encourage the use of more decisive pre-trip information sources.

5.3. Trip Planning Behaviour

This research further suggests that many 4WD travellers do not make their choice of specific side trips, attractions and activities until they arrive at the destination. This attitude is common among independent travellers in general. As Hyde and Lawson found in their

study about trip planning behaviour of independent travellers to New Zealand (2003, p. 21), an integral element in independent travel is the enjoyment experienced from not planning too many details of the trip beforehand. The temporal sequence of the vacation planning and decision-making process followed the pattern: sub-destination – travel route – attractions – activities. (Hyde/Lawson (2003), p. 18) Only as travellers approached a sub-destination did they seek detailed information on that sub-destination and its attractions and activities and detailed plans for choice of attractions and activities are often made for the immediate 24-hour period only.

Similar to what Hyde and Lawson (2003, p. 15) found in their research about independent travellers, 4WD travellers tend to make use of travel information centres and seek personal word-of-mouth information on the way to and at the final destination. Such information does not only influence an independent traveller's choice of attractions and activities in the destination area but can also impact on the length of stay in the region. In addition, the itineraries of 4WD travellers were complemented by spontaneous purchases and decisions when tourists "stumbled across" new opportunities at the destination without actively seeking information. This has already been demonstrated to be a common phenomenon among independent travellers who tend to make purchases during their trip that are encountered serendipitously during the trip upon unintentional acquisition of information. (Prestipino (2006), p. 4; Hyde (1998), p. 1020)

This research has further revealed that 4WD travellers often develop general plans and rough preliminary itineraries before their trip, although these plans were often subject to change, in particular with regard to on-site attractions and activities. In their work about vacation planning of independent travellers Stewart and Vogt (1999, p. 92) had found similar results. They argue that one of the main reason for travel plan revision is the acquisition of new information at the destination that either expands the awareness of more attractive alternatives in the region or changes the judgement of an alternative's attributes that had not been considered as interesting enough prior to arrival at the destination. (Stewart/Vogt (1999), p. 85) Their study further suggests that the high probability of independent travellers to substitute elements of their original vacation plans during the actual trip requires detailed and high-quality information about available attractions,

activities or other readily substitutable elements at the destination. Going one step further, they argue that travel information should furthermore be designed for repeated reference and ongoing use, at least throughout the duration of the trip. (ibid., p. 92)

Information use with regard to activities and side-destinations is mainly employed at a regional and rather localised level and decisions are often made subsequent to information acquisition on the way to or at the destination. In this way, 4WD travellers did not have the impression that the flexibility of their itinerary could get compromised and decisions were therefore still considered to be spontaneous. Especially domestic travellers seemingly tried to maintain options to substitute planned or semi-planned trip elements with other elements that are discovered during the trip based on newly sourced information. In practical terms, this might mean that information sourced at the destination may not lead to a final decision if it is considered to compromise the flexibility of the itinerary or to detract from the desired exploratory nature of the trip.

5.4. Implications for Product Distribution to the 4WD Market

Considering all this, opportunities to influence tourist behaviour may often arise when visitors are on the way to or at the destination. This limited window of opportunity for product suppliers and other tourism stakeholders, in combination with the independent and flexible trip preferences from 4WD travellers, makes it difficult to effectively predict and manage consumer behaviour of this specific market in the region. Tourism service providers expect the visitor to plan ahead and largely rely on the planning period as a time when potential visitors are likely to be susceptible to external influences and stimuli through product related information. As tourism suppliers mostly provide services that can not be stored and resold later and are often subject to capacity constraints (e.g. accommodation), their ability to deliver quality services depends partly on obtaining commitments for sales on a given day in advance. (Vogt/Fesenmaier (1999), pp. 79-80) Especially for destinations that attract substantial numbers of independent travellers this presents a very critical issue. (Hyde/Lawson (2003), p. 21)

Consequently, remote destinations that access or would like to access the 4WD market are confronted with a number of critical challenges. Since pre-trip information provided by traditional intermediaries apparently does not facilitate pre-trip decisions (in particular bookings or purchases), destination marketers must place more emphasis on at or near destination information. An effective local distribution of tourism products seems in particular important for smaller local start-up businesses which tend to rely more on the independent traveller market, including the 4WD market. 4WD travellers expect to receive relevant information about regional products and attractions once they get to the destination without having to invest any effort into information acquisition. In practical terms, this means that even if travellers notice a lack of information about certain products they might be interested in, they may not actively pursue such interests and extend their knowledge about potential ways to satisfy this demand. Instead, they may choose to substitute certain trip elements of interest by another activity that turns out to be available at the location and for which information was easier to access at the time.

5.5. The Role of Aboriginal Culture in the Overall Trip Experience

As a consequence of the factors discussed in the previous sections, there may be particular challenges for the distribution of Aboriginal tourism products. Enhancing Aboriginal tourism activity in remote desert regions by targeting the 4WD tourism market might be a way to explore further, although too optimistic expectations from this market should be avoided. This research has suggested that both domestic and international 4WD travel markets can be classified as rather homogenous in terms of activities and experiences sought during their trip in the desert. Non-commercial activities focusing on nature and environment-based attributes of the desert and the Outback seem to be the primary experiences that 4WD travellers are looking for when coming to central Australia.

As to the interest in and demand for Aboriginal culture, this study has found that opportunities for Aboriginal businesses to capture 4WD travellers might be limited. Even though Aboriginal culture is often positioned as one of the main pillars in the destination mix of central Australia and as a competitive advantage of the region (NTTC (2004), p. 4),

4WD travel parties in this research generally did not appear to consider Aboriginal culture as one of the main attractions in central Australia. This finding is not really surprising given that various previous studies have already established that Aboriginal culture is not among the driving motivation factors for visitation and that visitors to the Northern Territory are primarily motivated by the natural environment and well known tourist icons. (Petheram (2005), pp. 48-49; Young (2005), p. 177; Boyle (2001), pp. 29-31; Ryan/Huyton (2000b), p. 53) Nevertheless, it outlines once again that Aboriginal experiences figure very low in planned and actual travel activity of 4WD travellers and are not considered as important enough in the overall trip experience to be included as a fixed component of their itineraries.

The willingness of 4WD travellers to actively look for ways to experience Aboriginal culture is very limited. Only in single cases did they try to find out about possibilities to get in contact with Aboriginal culture. Despite this, a vast majority of domestic and international 4WD travellers still made some Aboriginal cultural experiences on their trip to central Australia. This finding implies that, although 4WD travellers can not really be attracted to the region by Aboriginal culture in the first place, they can still be motivated to participate in indigenous cultural activities once they arrive at the destination. This is partly in line with the work of Ryan and Huyton (2000a, p. 25), who argued that Aboriginal experiences are often considered as part of the complex mosaic of destination features and products which creates the uniqueness of a destination and which tourists can choose from.

The majority of Aboriginal cultural activities undertaken in central Australia included non-commercial activities which were mainly chosen because they turned out to be available at major tourist centres and did not require any additional cost or effort to engage in. This confirms findings from previous studies which argued that factors such as time and budget play a major role whether visitors will participate in indigenous experiences. (Tremblay (2006b), pp. 3-5; Petheram (2005), p. 61) Although participation in non-commercial activities appears to be relatively high among 4WD travellers, their benefit for Aboriginal operators and communities remains highly questionable. Against the common statement that demand for indigenous art is highest and leads to most revenue compared to other indigenous tourism products (Tremblay (2006b), pp. 3-5; Petheram (2005), p. 61; Boyle

(2001), p. 20) this research has found that visitation of galleries and cultural centres only rarely resulted in additional purchases. Some travel parties also considered buying souvenirs including Aboriginal art and design in non-indigenous retail stores as having an Aboriginal cultural experiences. As discussed by Hinch and Butler (1996, p. 10), such experiences can be classified as culture dispossessed indigenous tourism and tend to bring very limited economic benefits for Aboriginal desert people.

5.6. Barriers for Seeking Aboriginal Cultural Experiences

It appeared that many 4WD travellers made extensive use of available free activities and also appreciated a wide range of different experiences at the destination. However, only in single cases were they prepared to pay for additional experiences and activities if they perceived them as heightened in value by educational and entertainment aspects. Commercial activities involving Aboriginal culture, including guided tours, were largely avoided as most of the available organised tours and activities were regarded as not authentic enough and as products tailored to the mass market. Other factors in this context which deterred 4WD travellers from participating in organised tours were rigidly fixed itineraries and time schedules or organised transport in tour busses. 4WD travellers deliberately tried to set themselves apart from the mainstream tourism market and were not interested in products offered by commercial tour operators.

This research further sought to identify potential barriers for 4WD travellers to engage in Aboriginal tourism. Apart from the perception that available products generally lack authentic experiences and are extensively promoted by commercial tour operators, additional barriers impacting on consumption of Aboriginal tourism products were found to be the negative attitude of many Aboriginal people and communities towards tourists and finally social and political issues, including poor living conditions of many Aboriginal people in the desert.

Many 4WD travellers had the impression that they were not welcome and that Aboriginal people deliberately tried to avoid contact with tourists. Especially international visitors

compared such interactions with experiences from previous trips to other countries, for example in Africa, Asia or the South Pacific region. Encounters with indigenous culture in these countries were generally more positively evaluated due to a more welcoming attitude of indigenous people and more possibilities to interact with the locals. Previous research has come to similar conclusions (AGB McNair (1996) quoted in Boyle (2001), p. 31) and confirms that in particular international visitors expect to have informal contact with local Aboriginal people through routine activities. However, they are often poorly informed about their living conditions or about the fact that informal interactions with Aboriginal people are mostly not possible in the way they would expect it due to cultural protocols, land management issues or living conditions of Aboriginal Australians. (Tremblay et al. (2005), p. 12; Boyle (2001), p. 29) What evolves from this discussion is that not all Aboriginal people automatically consider tourism as an interesting economic opportunity and are willing to engage in tourism. This phenomenon has already been addressed in the past by various researchers who argued that Aboriginal communities are often sceptical towards commercial tourism activity because of potential negative effects on their cultural identity. (Barre/Jafari (1997), pp. 474-76; Altman/Finlayson (2003), pp. 2-3)

The disastrous living conditions of many Aboriginal people in cities and in communities along the main tourism routes also had a negative impact on both domestic and international 4WD travellers to look for Aboriginal cultural experiences during their trip. This has traditionally been a common issue in the discussion about demand for Aboriginal tourism. It has often been argued that many visitors get immediately confronted with the social marginalisation and isolation of Aboriginal people upon arrival to the destination, which deters tourists from pursuing their interest in Aboriginal culture any further. (Petheram (2005), p. 49; Boyle (2001), p. 30) In the course of this research, domestic travel parties often mentioned the need for a better general education of Aboriginal people and for making Aboriginal communities “more presentable” to visitors. Such comments, however, were largely based on political attitudes and opinions, which were not intended to be explored any further in this study.

5.7. Opportunities for Product Development

Although it has been a common assumption that international tourists would be more receptive to Aboriginal culture than domestic tourists (Tremblay (2006b), pp. 3-5; Petheram (2005), p. 61; Boyle (2001), p. 20), the results of this study suggest that domestic 4WD travel parties, in particular families with children, have a greater interest in getting experiences with Aboriginal culture on their trip than international 4WD travellers. Given that the main source market for the region continues to be domestic visitors, this can present remote Aboriginal communities with a range of interesting opportunities and therefore might be an avenue to explore further.

Desired activities and experiences in combination with Aboriginal culture would have to be educational, interactive and intimate in nature and involve a high degree of personal involvement of Aboriginal people. However, products that would meet the interests and demands of 4WD travellers are currently not being offered in central Australia or are only carried out on a sporadic basis. Identified product gaps could be classified into three main categories: interpretive guided tours to Aboriginal sites and land, evening or afternoon activities at accommodation sites involving Aboriginal culture and visits to genuine remote Aboriginal communities. Notions such as “*authentic experiences*” and “*genuine interactions*” with Aboriginal people were commonly among the most desired aspects of Aboriginal tourism products. This result compares well to existing literature which found that tourists generally place a high level of importance on authentic and credible indigenous cultural experiences and meaningful tourist-host interactions. (Petheram (2005), p. 42) Similarly, Boyle (2001, p. 37) has found that cultural tours need to be authentic, well-presented, educational and interesting since visitors do not only desire entertainment but also appreciate the feeling of having learnt something about indigenous culture and history.

Guided tours would need to be small in group size, preserve the flexible nature of self-drive itineraries in the way that tourists can use their own vehicles, and include individually tailored activities, such as educational activities for children, explanations and demonstrations of survival techniques in the desert or about the cultural significance of the

natural or built environment. Similarly, evening activities at accommodation sites should involve educational aspects of Aboriginal culture and participative activities, including Aboriginal talks, presentations or workshops, and should give 4WD travellers the possibility to talk to and interact with Aboriginal people. Visits to remote Aboriginal communities, however, might be more problematic. 4WD travellers would expect to visit communities spontaneously on the way through central Australia without having to ask for permission or making prior appointments or bookings. This would require a clear commitment from communities to welcome tourists on a constant basis and additional products and services to be ready for sale at any given point in time. Tourists would further expect to interact with Aboriginal people in daily life situations, which might not be accepted by Aboriginal communities.

Considering the high importance of the domestic market to tourism in remote Australia, Miller (2000, quoted in Petheram (2005), p. 62) claimed that opportunities for indigenous operators to capitalise on the potential of the domestic market might exist, but that domestic visitor segments are most likely to require different marketing approaches than international markets. Similar suggestions have been provided by Ryan and Huyton (2002, p. 642) and Parkin (2001, p. 263), who argued that one way forward for Aboriginal communities who wish to be involved in tourism is to seek means of providing “added value” to experiences that are more likely to be sought in the region, for example by positioning Aboriginal culture within the context of the landscape and the natural environment. One way to cater specifically to the domestic 4WD market could be to offer experiences that do not focus so much on cultural aspects but more on the natural desert environment and provide the opportunity to access remote parts of traditional Aboriginal land that would otherwise be inaccessible.

5.8. Opportunities for Enhancing Distribution Strategies

This research has found that 4WD travellers do not actively seek Aboriginal cultural experiences before or during their trip and that most of them do not make their choice of attractions and activities until they arrive in a region. Given that 4WD travellers apparently

do not try and get information about available Aboriginal cultural experiences, product marketers have to make sure that the information gets to the tourists. Aboriginal product suppliers therefore need to move away from conventional distribution methods through commercial tour operators. Such experiences are generally not regarded as authentic activities and do not correspond with the trip preferences of 4WD travellers and their desire for flexible, unstructured and exploratory itineraries.

This research has demonstrated the willingness of 4WD travellers to substitute segments of their itineraries, activities and commercial transactions based on information discovered once they have arrived at a destination. This pervasive application of on-trip and at-destination information means that opportunities to influence behaviour are at least partly confined to periods around access to information, which places a greater importance on the quality, appropriateness, timeliness and reliability of information provided. Developing effective mechanisms for distributing information about Aboriginal tourism products to 4WD travellers to encourage bookings or purchases may require a local approach, meaning that information about products needs to be made readily available at various places of interest and popular points of convergences in the region. Operators of attractions and activities would therefore be advised to concentrate a good proportion of their marketing and distribution on localised activities within their own region.

Especially if businesses are located some distance from the traditional tourist travel routes or from popular points of interest for 4WD travellers, operators must question how tourists could access the product more easily. Tourism is all about partnerships and this is especially true for newly emerging and small scale businesses, such as Aboriginal tourism product suppliers targeting niche markets. (Notzke (2004), p. 38) Apart from having the product constantly ready for sale from the premises, desert businesses should also consider entering partnerships with other parties that would be willing to act as booking agents for them. These might include visitor information centres, local moteliers and hoteliers in their region, camping sites and caravan parks, service stations, car rental companies and operators of businesses similar to their own. Additionally, 4WD travellers tend to be largely responsive to personally delivered information, which is generally regarded as less commercial and more reliable and trustworthy. It is not enough to rely solely on providing

passive information in form of brochures or pamphlets. In fact, products need to be actively promoted by business partners and in many cases Aboriginal product providers have to be personally involved in the promotion and distribution process.

At the same time, the importance of detailed, accurate and high quality pre-trip information should not be ignored either. The results of this study suggest that information about available products also needs to reach the market prior to departure. This is consistent with findings from the survey of Aboriginal Tourism in 1999, which revealed that Aboriginal tourism operators need to constantly promote their products through the main channels of distribution and information in order to make visitors aware of possible opportunities to experience indigenous culture before arriving in the destination. (Tourism Western Australia (2006), p. 20) Given 4WD travellers' extensive pre-trip information use for idea finding and preliminary itinerary planning, there may exist opportunities for product suppliers to deliver product information through sources that are most commonly used prior to departure, including destination based websites, 4WD websites and magazines and general travel literature.

This strategy could contribute to raise product awareness prior to departure and might help 4WD travellers to identify opportunities and alternatives more easily once they get to the destination. As their information search tends to be largely driven by the location and destination itself rather than by activities or experiences they might want to undertake, one way to facilitate pre-trip product information could be to enter partnerships either with existing product and information suppliers in the relevant region or with businesses and organisations catering to the 4WD market. These might include co-operations with destination management organisations, major attractions or accommodation facilities in the region as well as partnerships with 4WD market oriented organisations such as 4WD clubs and magazines or rental car companies.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This research sought to identify gaps in the current range of Aboriginal cultural experiences in central Australia and in the distribution processes of Aboriginal tourism products from the perspective of the 4WD travel market. As described in section 1.3 the main objectives of this study were to investigate:

1. The extent and nature of demand for Aboriginal tourism products from 4WD travellers, including an analysis of the types of products that are currently being consumed, the types and nature of additional products and experiences they would be interested in and potential barriers to seek Aboriginal cultural experiences.
2. The information seeking patterns and trip planning characteristics of 4WD travellers, including the use of various sources of information at various stages of the trip, the content and type of information sought, the amount of time invested into information search and the extent of pre-trip planning as against to spontaneous travel decisions during the trip.
3. The gaps between current distribution methods of Aboriginal tourism products and information needs of 4WD travellers, including an evaluation of the amount and quality of current information about Aboriginal products and suggestions for improving the distribution methods for Aboriginal tourism among the 4WD market.

Summing up from the discussion in the previous chapter, Aboriginal cultural experiences only play a minor role in the overall trip experience of 4WD desert trips and activities sought prior to departure hardly ever include Aboriginal tourism products. Nevertheless, the majority of this market ends up including Aboriginal cultural aspects on their trips. These are, however, largely confined to non-commercial activities, involve virtually no interaction between tourists and Aboriginal people and are only concentrated around the major tourist centres. This indicates that the 4WD self-drive market is very likely to

consume products in the destination if they are made easily available at places where 4WD travellers tend to converge. Even though they appeared to favour non-commercial activities at the destination, there may be opportunities to improve the attraction of Aboriginal cultural tourism for the 4WD market by focusing on activities that are educational, interactive and intimate in nature and involve a high degree of personal involvement of Aboriginal people.

One of the main deficiencies in the structure and organisation of Aboriginal tourism in central Australia appears to be the widely perceived lack of diversity in product offerings. This research has shown that 4WD travellers are mainly discouraged by the perception that most Aboriginal tourism products are more suitable for the organised tour market. 4WD travellers value their independence and see their experiences as substantially different to those available to the mass market via package tours. Products for this market will therefore need to be clearly positioned in contrast to products for the organised tour market. In particular, they will have to focus on personal contact, unique experiences and the ability to engage in such activities spontaneously without the need to follow rigid itineraries or to make reservations in advance. Current product development opportunities identified in this research could be classified into three main categories –

- Interpretive guided tours to Aboriginal sites and land, offering individually tailored itineraries for small groups in 4WD vehicles;
- Evening or afternoon entertainment activities at accommodation sites involving Aboriginal culture, including participative and educational activities tailored to children; and
- Visits to genuine remote Aboriginal communities.

The role of specific sources of information varied greatly between domestic and international 4WD travellers and different information sources clearly made different contributions to the decision making processes in both pre-trip and on-trip stages. Domestic travellers generally preferred relatively informal information sources, including word-of-mouth from friends and other travellers, while international visitors used more formal sources, such as travel guides or recommendations from travel agents. Pre-trip

information sources were often used extensively in order to enhance the general knowledge about the destination and to develop broad itineraries including the main “anchor points” of the trip. Actual pre-trip decisions based on information sourced prior to departure were generally very limited and bookings hardly ever occurred. In particular domestic visitors did not make their choice of side trips, attractions and activities until they arrived at the destination and bookings in advance were generally avoided in favour of spontaneous decisions in the destination. This presents product suppliers and destination marketing organisations with a number of critical challenges as they prefer travellers to make commitments prior to the trip commencing. It is, however, clearly in the nature and psychology of 4WD travellers to have relatively unplanned itineraries that can be adjusted on a day to day basis. They prefer to “stumble across” activities and discover new experiences, which constitutes an important element of the overall trip experience.

This behaviour may have particular consequences for the distribution of Aboriginal cultural tourism. The findings suggest that 4WD travellers did not actively try and get information about Aboriginal cultural experiences and that preferred information sources did not give prominence to the type of Aboriginal cultural experiences in which they might be interested. One of the major challenges in this context is the heavy reliance on word-of-mouth information. If previous visitors have not engaged in Aboriginal cultural activities, there will be no positive information to pass on to prospective visitors. In addition, current Internet based marketing of Aboriginal cultural tourism as well as printed information material available at visitor information centres can be regarded as largely ineffective for independent 4WD travellers. They do not respond to web sites or brochures that feature only commercial Aboriginal tourism products but are more interested in the experience of the destination as a whole, not just in specific activities in isolation.

Since their information search is largely driven by the destination rather than individual activities and experiences, Aboriginal product suppliers will need to make sure that information about their products reaches independent travellers at locations where they normally tend to get information from. This process could be facilitated by entering partnerships with other tourism players in the region that are already successfully catering to the 4WD market. Since participants highly valued expert knowledge including

recommendations from locals or visitor information centre staff, opportunities for successful partnerships for information distribution might include VICs, local accommodation facilities, restaurants, service stations or even car rental companies. Additionally, 4WD travellers tend to be largely responsive to personally delivered information, which is generally regarded as less commercial and more reliable and trustworthy. It is therefore deemed necessary that products have to be actively promoted by business partners and in many cases Aboriginal product providers have to be personally involved in the promotion and distribution process.

At the same time, information about available products also needs to reach the market prior to departure. The importance of pre-trip information is emphasised by the extensive information search of 4WD travellers for idea finding and preliminary itinerary planning prior to departure. There may exist opportunities for product suppliers to deliver product information through sources that are most commonly used prior to departure. This might raise product awareness among the 4WD market before coming to the region so that they will be able to identify opportunities and alternatives more easily once they get to the destination. Again, this distribution strategy would require partnerships with established businesses and organisations in the region which prominently feature destination-based information for 4WD travellers. These might include co-operations with destination management organisations, major attractions or accommodation facilities as well as partnerships with 4WD market oriented organisations such as 4WD clubs and magazines or rental car companies.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

Enhancing the potential for wide ranging economic benefits for Aboriginal people from Aboriginal cultural tourism is linked to an understanding of the total experience desired by a specific market. Various markets are often intrinsically different from each other, not only in terms of product preferences but also in terms of trip planning and information needs. Aboriginal communities and operators who wish to engage in tourism and establish Aboriginal tourism products in the desert will therefore need to cater to specific markets and adjust their products to their specific needs and interests. While the organised tour market seems to be responsive to relatively short and structured activities, such as organised Aboriginal talks or performances of cultural ceremonies, as an integrated component of a pre-arranged package, independent traveller markets, including the 4WD market, will most likely require a completely different approach.

Getting Aboriginal tourism products to the 4WD market remains a challenging task for Aboriginal communities, operators and also destination management and marketing organisations. If Aboriginal product suppliers are interested in attracting 4WD travellers and seek to capture trade from the 4WD market they should avoid designing products and experiences similar to other conventional mass tourism products. Instead, they should focus on trip characteristics and attributes that are appreciated by this type of travellers, in particular with regard to educational, interactive and flexible experiences which can be considered as *“off the beaten track”*. Furthermore, distribution strategies have to be adapted to the specific information seeking and trip planning patterns of this market, which outlines a strong emphasis on regional and localised information in combination with a high degree of direct distribution, including personal involvement of Aboriginal product suppliers and business partners.

Opportunities for Aboriginal product development for the 4WD market in central Australia do exist, however the extent to which these might translate into increased economic benefits for Aboriginal desert communities still remains unclear. Given the high importance of the domestic tourism market in Australia, a significant challenge for

Aboriginal people in the desert lies in understanding the nature of domestic travel experiences and how economic opportunities can be developed in response. Visitors generally tend to regard Aboriginal culture as a minor component of the diverse product and attraction mix of a destination and Aboriginal culture generally does not appear to be significant in the nature of experiences sought by 4WD tourists. Aboriginal product suppliers will have to understand that focusing on the Aboriginal cultural element alone will most likely be insufficient to develop viable tourism businesses. In particular domestic visitors will require different approaches to get attracted. It may therefore be more profitable for Aboriginal businesses to link their products to experiences that are more likely to be sought in the desert, especially with regard to the landscape and the natural environment.

This study has provided insights into the nature of the problem of Aboriginal cultural tourism product distribution for 4WD travellers. However, further research will be required to propose and test new models of information delivery and product design. Future research into the field of information dissemination and distribution strategies for Aboriginal tourism products might explore the potential of using information and communication technologies (ICTs). Considering the ongoing global trend and fast proliferation of ICTs in tourism, further enhancements in these information distribution processes could also have positive influences on augmenting the experience for 4WD travellers in remote desert areas. There is reason to believe that information technologies will continue to play a greater role in providing more comprehensive destination information in the future and therefore offer a wide range of possibilities to tailor information delivery according to consumer motivations and trip preferences.

Enhancing the range of economic opportunities for Aboriginal desert communities is undoubtedly a prerequisite to encourage the creation of sustainable livelihoods for Aboriginal people living in the remotest parts of the country. Tourism has often been considered as a potential way to contribute to economic and social benefits. In particular, the trend of independent travel, such as 4WD travel, in remote regions is likely to continue to grow in the future. Similarly, there seems to be a tendency towards more personalised and differentiated experiences from an increasingly experienced traveller segment. This

might provide Aboriginal product suppliers with a range of new opportunities to capitalise on tourism activity and hence stimulate economic outcomes in their region. Targeting specific niche markets by offering individually tailored products and experiences might be a possible way to reduce perceived negative impacts on their cultural identity through an extensive commercialisation of Aboriginal culture. However, the extent to which Aboriginal desert communities are prepared to engage in tourism activity is only poorly understood today and needs to be further addressed in the future.

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9. APPENDICES

9.1. Appendix A: Interview Guideline

Interview Guideline

(Alice Springs – Kings Creek Station – Glen Helen)

- **What were the most important reasons for you to come to the desert?**
How did you expect it to be and what did you expect to do or to find here?
 - **Which places in Central Australia have you visited?**
*Which tracks have you used?
Why did you choose these particular places / tracks?
How long have you been travelling around?*
 - **What are the best experiences that you've made so far?**
How / Where did you find out about it?
 - **What was the most disappointing aspect of this trip so far?**
If you could do / plan this trip again what would you do differently?
 - **What specific activities did you include on this trip?**
*Why did you decide to do it?
How / Where did you find out about it?
Did you come across anything that you decided to do spontaneously?*
 - **How often do you go on a 4WD self drive trip?**
*How familiar are you with the desert in Central Australia (been here before)?
How important is it for you to go to new and remote places? (unsealed, off the beaten track...)
Have you come across any Aboriginal land?*
 - **Have you done any activity on your trip involving Aboriginal culture?**
*Why did you decide to do it?
How / Where did you find out about it?
How important is Aboriginal culture for you?
What would you be interested in?
Would you include such an activity on your trip if you happen to come across it?
Did you actively look for any information about it before or during the trip?*
 - **Who are you travelling with?**
*What type of 4WD? (F.I.T., tag-along, club tour...)
Who planned / decided?*
 - **How long in advance did you start to plan your desert trip?**
*What components of your trip did you plan before (deliberately not plan)?
Was there a particular source of information that you used for planning (why this one)?
Which are the most important sources of information for you?
What type of information did you look for – what did you need to know before departure?
Was the planning of this desert trip different from planning other trips?*
-
- Explain purpose of the study:**
- **In your opinion, how would you describe the way that information about Aboriginal tourism products is presented and distributed?**
*Is there enough information available?
How well is it presented? (attractive, informative → making people want to experience it)
Do you think that the distribution and presentation of the information can be improved?
Do you think people are more likely to do a specific activity if they get information about it before?*

9.2. Appendix B: Letter of Consent



4WD Self Drive Tourism

Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre

4WD Trip Patterns in the Desert – Project Information Sheet

Introduction

You have been invited to participate in a study being conducted on behalf of the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre by the Tourism Research Group at Charles Darwin University (CDU). The study is part of a large national research program called *On Track* which is examining the potential for 4WD tourism to contribute to the economic and social livelihoods of desert communities.

The purpose of this study is to identify the motivations of 4WD tourists for coming to the desert and the activities they undertake during their desert trips. The focus will be on finding out how 4WD travellers, especially those on self drive trips, plan their desert trips and where they get the required information from. Data will be collected in form of an informal interview about various aspects of your latest 4WD desert trip.

What information will you be asked about?

You will be asked about your reasons for coming to the desert and what your initial expectations were. We will also ask you about the places you have visited or still want to visit and what activities in particular you have done or plan to do on your trip. We are also interested in finding out what aspects of your trip you have planned before departure and what kind of information you needed for planning this trip.

How have you been selected?

This study is being conducted with travellers who are currently undertaking self drive 4WD trips in various locations in desert Australia. Travellers are selected by convenience based on where our interviewers are at the time.

Procedure

Interviews will take around 30 minutes and your permission will be sought to extend an interview beyond this time. The questions are generally non-intrusive. However, if you feel uncomfortable about any question you are free to withhold your response. If you agree, the interview will be recorded on audiotape, however, you are free to request interviews not be taped. In this case permission to take notes during the interview will be requested. Any time you can give to this project, no matter how short, is gratefully acknowledged.

Your right to privacy and the security of records

You will not be asked to provide any personal information and you will remain anonymous when any data from the interview is published. Original records of interviews, including notes, transcripts and audio-tapes, will be kept in a locked and secure place at CDU. A copy will be kept under locked and secure conditions at the researcher's place of residence. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the interview without the need for a reason to be given, and at any time. If you withdraw, all copies of notes, tapes and transcripts will be destroyed and the data will not be used in the project.

Enquiries

If you have any questions please ask your interviewer. In case you should have any concerns after the completion of the interview, you are invited to contact the Executive Officer of the Charles Darwin University Human Research Ethics committee on 08 8946 7064 or by e-mail: fiona.steele@cdu.edu.au. The Executive Officer can pass on any concerns to appropriate officers within the University.

This is for you to keep!



PO Box 2111, Alice Springs, NT 0871, Australia
Phone: 08 8950 7162 Fax: 08 8950 7167 www.desertknowledge.com.au/crc



Part A: For the participant to complete

☐	I have read and understood the introductory letter.
☐	I am over the age of 18 years and would be pleased to be involved in the project.
☐	I agree to my interview being recorded on audio-tape.
OR	
☐	I do not agree to my interview being audio-taped and prefer the researcher to take hand written notes.
☐	I understand that all references in my interview to third parties will not be incorporated in published work unless the third party consents.

Your name:

Your signature: Date:

Name of witness:
(independent from project)

Signature of witness: Date:

Date:

Part B: For the researcher to complete

I certify that the terms of this research have been carefully explained to the participant by letter and follow-up discussion (if any), and that the participant appears to have understood.

The participant has indicated the following restrictions are placed on any data generated during the research (note if none apply):

Name of researcher:

Signature of researcher:

Date:

The researcher will keep this consent.

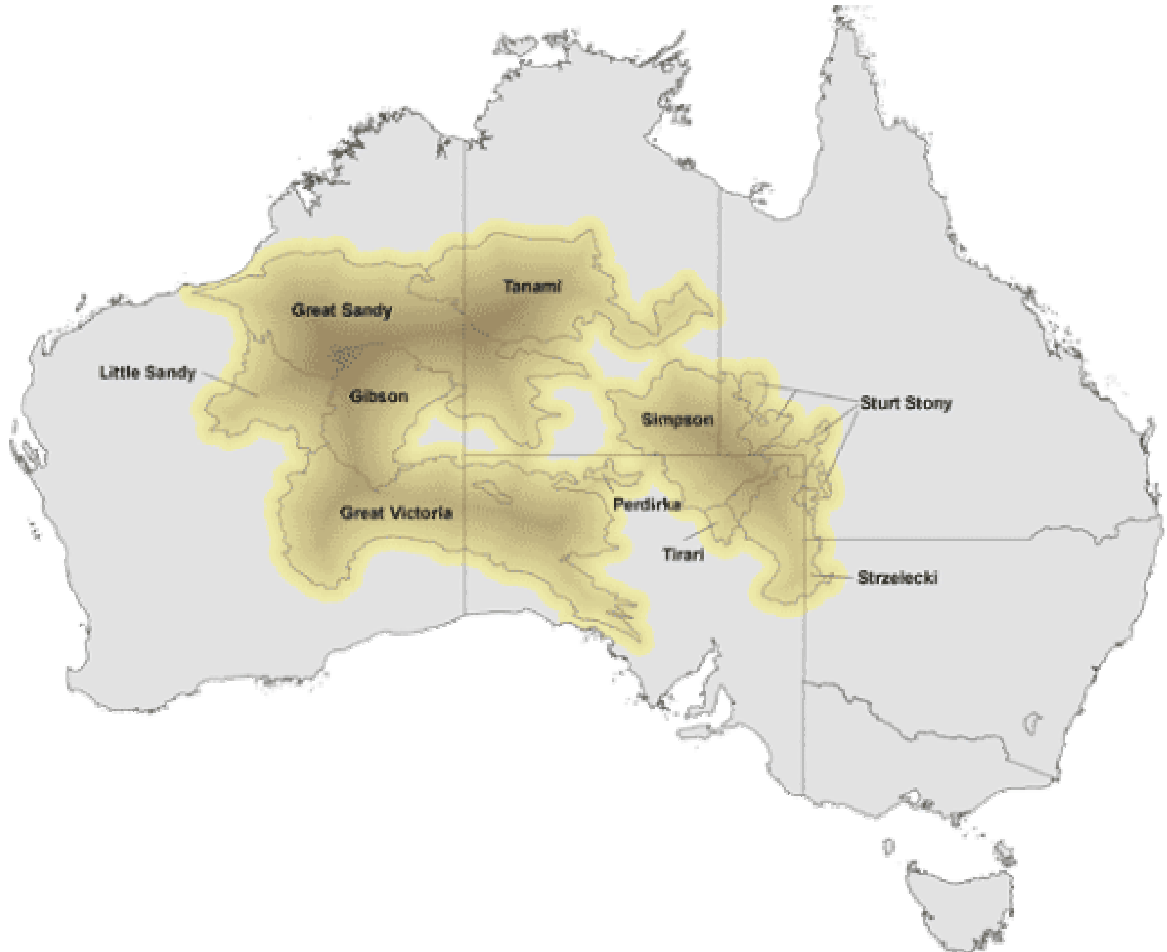
9.3. Appendix C: The Organisation of Tourism in Australia

Structure and Organisation of Tourism in Australia

National				INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS (National, State or Sector Specific)
Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources (DITR) • Is the primary source of tourism policy advice to the Australian Government • Provides advice on issues such as: bilateral tourism relations with other countries, visa regulations and passenger processing, transport and security, industry standards and regulation, taxation, education and training, and regional and niche tourism development				
Tourism Division in DITR • Develops and implements Federal Government policy and programs	Tourism Australia • Responsible for international and domestic tourism marketing of the country • Delivers research and forecasts for the tourism sector on a national level			
State Tourism Authorities (Tourism Northern Territory, Tourism QLD, Tourism NSW, Tourism WA) • Responsible for international and domestic State or Territory marketing • Facilitates destination development through research, policy and industry planning • Facilitates product development and distribution • Provides advice to industry and government				
Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs) • Provides regional marketing, leadership and development • Coordinates industry, local government and community destination marketing activities				
Regional				
Local Government Authorities (LGAs) • Coordinates local community and tourism businesses with state government and encourages cooperation within industries • Provides tourism infrastructure and facilities • Is involved in research & development and education and training	Local Tourism Organisations (LTOs) • Liaises with community, Local Government and RTOs • Conducts marketing activities	Visitor Information Centres (VICs) • Provides current information on local attractions, activities and events • Makes reservations for visitors • Provides up-to-date advice on local travel		
Local				

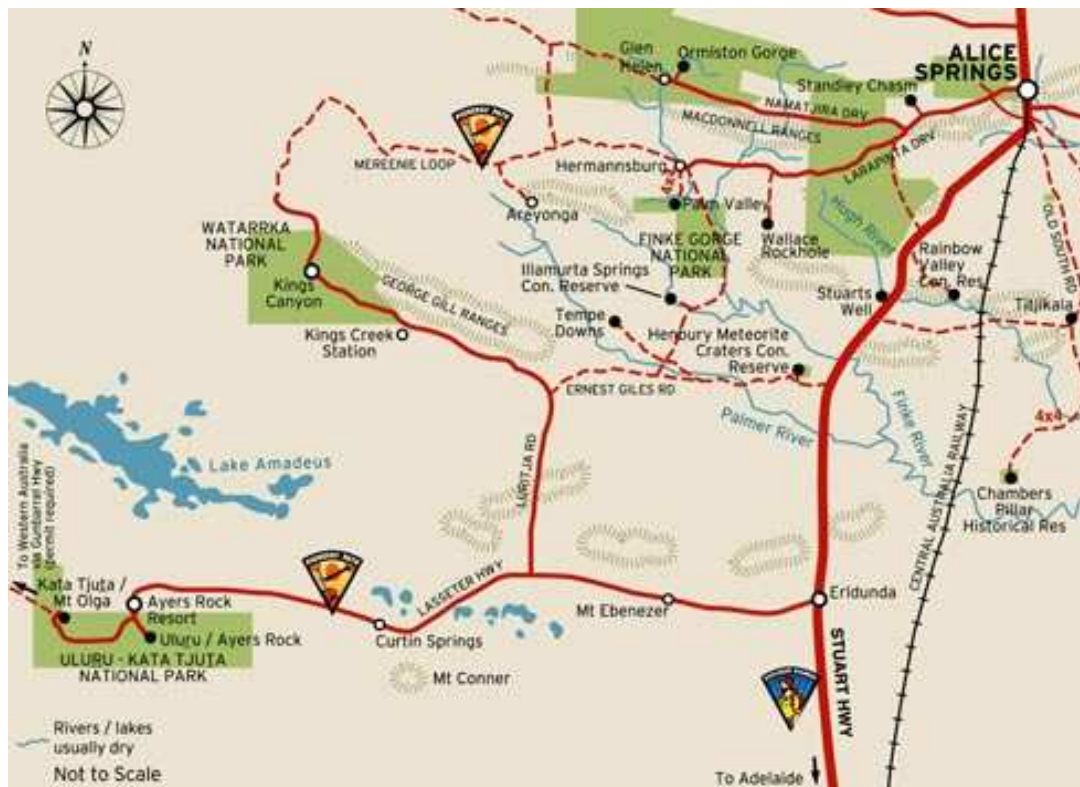
9.4. Appendix D: Maps

Major Deserts in Australia



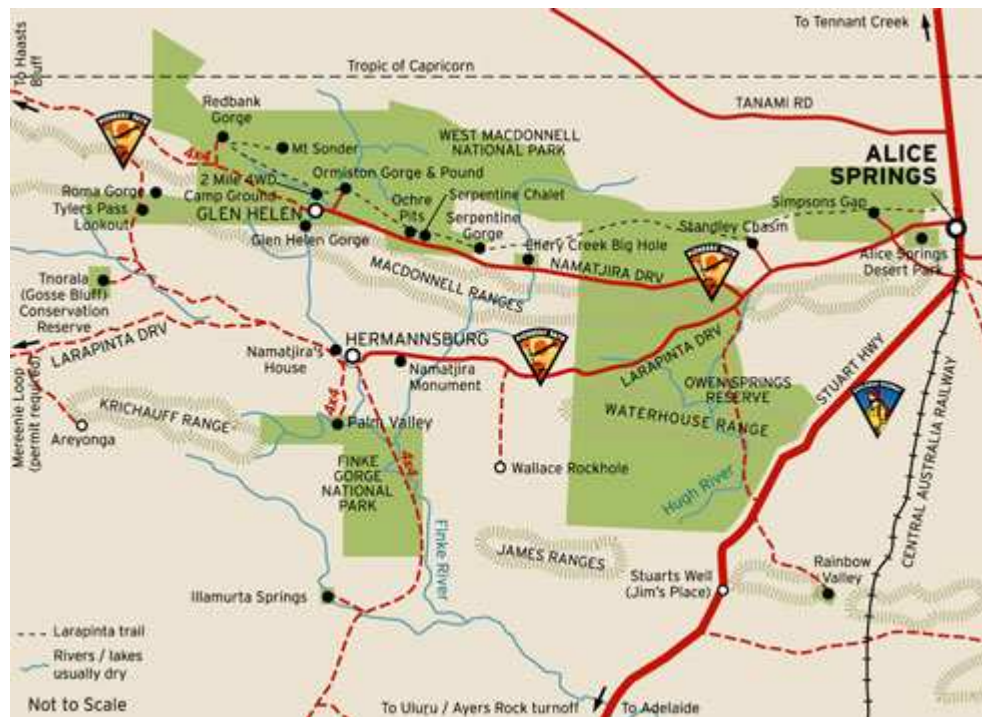
(Source: Department of Environment and Water Resources (2007), n.p.a.)

Alice Springs – Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park



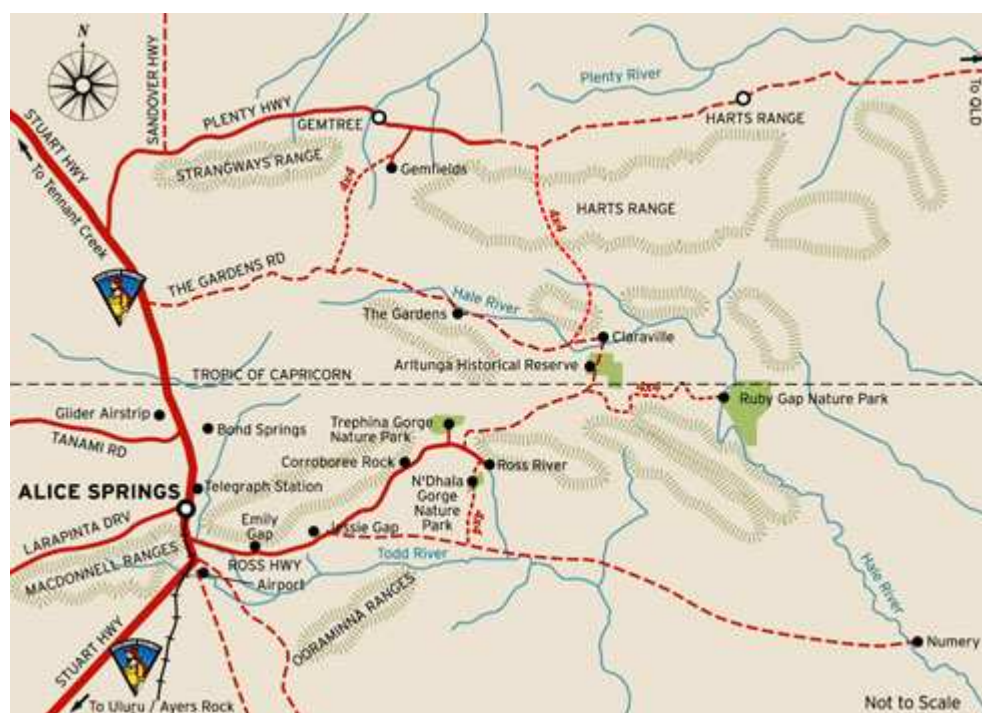
(Source: Tourism NT (2007), n.p.a.)

West MacDonnell Ranges



(Source: Tourism NT (2007), n.p.a.)

East MacDonnell Ranges



(Source: Tourism NT (2007), n.p.a.)

Road Network in the Northern Territory



(Source: Tourism NT (2007), n.p.a.)