Tourism, Links, & Islandness off Florida’s Gulf Coast

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Introduction

Small islands are undeniably popular tourist destinations (Baum, 1997: 21; Lockhart, 1997: 5; Royle, 2001: 188). Pull factors such as the island’s remoteness and boundedness combine to create a condition of “islandness” that is one of the most attractive—and at the same time most elusive—characteristics of small islands (Weale, 1991: 81). This condition of islandness can be attributed, at least in part, to an island’s separation from the mainland and to the physical effort required to access the island (Weale, 1991: 82). Yet, no island’s isolation is total. Every island depends, to some degree, upon a range of links to its mainland. Fixed links are thus only one, even if perhaps the most salient and visible, example of such links. The nature of these links can be one of the key defining characteristics of an island’s identity and appeal. It is then problematic that one of the main contributors to an island’s attractiveness as a tourism destination—its islandness—can be both diminished and enhanced by the nature and availability of fixed or mobile links, which—in the case of non-populated islands—may be present merely to facilitate access to tourists, the very category and market to whom the concept of islandness may be most crucial (Baum, 2000: 215–216).

This chapter probes into the nature of islandness and the influence of fixed or mobile links on three, largely uninhabited, state-administered islands in the Gulf of Mexico, along the west coast of Florida, “linked” to the mainland by
various and different means. Through interviews with state officials, environmental groups, and tourists themselves, evidence for the effects of various degrees of linkage between islands and the mainland upon the condition of islandness will be presented and critiqued.

**Florida’s Gulf Islands GeoPark**
The coastline of Florida is virtually outlined by small barrier islands, and the state’s beaches are recognized by many as being among the most beautiful in the world. The gulf coast is especially known for its expanses of powdery white sand, clear warm water, and famous sunshine. The barrier islands are no exception. In fact, as is true with all small islands, the proportion of coastline to total land area is quite high as compared to mainland beaches. It is, therefore, no surprise that many of the barrier islands have been developed and marketed as ideal tourist destinations. This development varies in degree from island to island. One aspect of development that varies widely among Florida’s islands is the concept of the fixed link.

This chapter focuses upon three of these gulf coast barrier islands. In order to isolate the link variable, three islands have been chosen that are alike in most ways except for the nature of their physical link to the mainland and the resultant level of development: Honeymoon Island, Caladesi Island, and Anclote Key. The three islands are located in the Gulf of Mexico, off the western coast of Florida. All are designated as state parks by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.
and all are uninhabited, except by resident Park Service employees and a small compound of retirement condominiums outside of the park boundaries on Honeymoon Island. These condominiums were not included in the study area for this research. Approximately 1,500 residents reside in two communities outside of the state park on Honeymoon Island. According to the manager of The Royal Stewart Arms (the larger of the two complexes), about half the residents are seasonal and half live there year-round. Together with some other state-administered islands in the area, the three islands in this study make up the Florida Gulf Islands GeoPark (Florida State Parks website). Geographically, the islands are relatively the same size, support similar flora and fauna, and are affected by the same weather systems.

Each of the islands in this study is, to a different degree, linked to the mainland. Honeymoon Island has a fixed link in the form of a causeway, making it the most easily accessible. It used to be called Hog Island, but it became Honeymoon Island in 1939 when a developer built 50 palm-thatched bungalows for honeymooners (Honeymoon Island State Park website). Caladesi Island, which was carved out of Honeymoon Island by a hurricane in 1921, can be accessed by a mobile link: specifically, an hourly ferry service from the mainland (Caladesi Island State Park website). Anclote Key, the most disconnected of the islands in this study, is accessible only by private boat (Anclote Key Preserve State Park website).

The three islands are of relatively the same size: Honeymoon and Caladesi Islands are approximately 400 acres each and Anclote Key is about 200 acres (Florida State Parks website). They are covered with pines and palms and are ringed with white sand beaches. The three islands lie very close to one another along Florida's west coast near Tampa.

Dunedin (population: 35,000) and Tarpon Springs (population: 21,000) are the two urban areas closest to the three islands in the study area. The largest coastal city in the area is Clearwater (population: 108,000), but more island-specific information is to be found at the Historical Societies of the two smaller towns (Dunedin website; Tarpon Springs website). Dunedin and Tarpon Springs are also linked to the islands more directly. Honeymoon Island is connected by causeway to Dunedin and the majority of boaters visiting Anclote Key depart from Tarpon Springs or from the neighbouring town of Holiday (population: 21,000), which, however, does not have its own historical society.

Methods: Stories and Histories
As described above, the three islands in the study area have been carefully chosen to be alike in all ways except for the manner of linkage to the mainland, thus isolating the variable being tested. Using a comparative methodology, unique characteristics of each of the three islands were isolated, and therefore one could then be comfortable in the assumption that these characteristics were more likely to be related to the island's linkage, that being the only major variable among them. Data was also gathered to support the hypothesis that each of the three islands attracts tourists with a unique set of expectations and values related to travel. This data was collected originally during the summer of 2004 to support the author's MA thesis at the Uni-
University of Montana (Fielding, 2005).

First to be established was whether these islands were indeed affected by their various forms of linkage to the mainland. Once the existence of the “bridge effect” was detected, its specific implications were examined (Baldacchino, 2004b). The focus of this examination was upon the impact of the bridge effect upon tourism and tourist perceptions of islandness. To gain this information, the tourists themselves were consulted. The responses from these interviews provided the bulk of the original data, though other information was collected from other stakeholders in the area’s tourism industry as well as through archival research.

**Interviews with Tourists**

On-site fieldwork was undertaken during June 2004, and consisted mainly of semi-standardized interviews with a random sampling of tourists on each of the islands’ beaches. Out of the 328 people approached, only 28 of those who would have been eligible (i.e., those 18 years of age or older) declined to be interviewed. Several reasons may explain this high success rate (91.5 per cent). First, the interviewees were in a relaxed, comfortable environment: namely, the beach. Tourists on the beach were generally very receptive to the interview requests. Second, a number of young, knowledgeable, and gregarious research assistants volunteered to undertake the interviews and were directly responsible for the high response rate of this project. Each assistant was briefed in proper interview techniques but all can give credit for their success to their own interpersonal skills and academic ability.

After receiving approval to conduct the interview, and explaining the Institutional Review Board’s Informed Consent Form, the researcher would begin the interview. Each participant was told that they would be asked a few questions about their trip to the beach today, followed by a few questions about their travel in general. Most participants enthusiastically answered the questions and seemed to enjoy being given the opportunity to talk about travelling. Depending upon the loquaciousness of the participant, the interviews lasted between 10 and 60 minutes. The interview consisted of ten questions, some with follow-up probes. A representative selection of the questions themselves is listed below in the results section of this chapter.

When the interviews were completed, 300 interview forms were available, 100 from each of the three islands, each with answers to 10 standard questions along with many, freely given comments on what was usually one of the interviewees’ favourite subjects: the islands where they like to spend their free time. This data was entered into three spreadsheets, one for each island visited.

**Historical Research**

In order to place the findings of this study into their proper historical context, a visit was made to the historical societies in the coastal cities of Dunedin and Tarpon Springs. Both institutions have considerable archives that contain information in a variety of media (such as newspaper clippings, photographs, and film) regarding the islands and the evolution of their relationships with the two communities. Each island has its own distinct history, yet each is inextricably linked, historically, to
the mainland. This research was vital to the overall success of the project. To know geography is to understand a place, and for one to understand a place, it is necessary to know its history.

**Results: A Tale of Three Islands**

This section describes the relationship among the linkages, islands, and tourists on Honeymoon Island, Caladesi Island, and Anclote Key, as determined from the results of my interviews conducted in June 2004. By carefully blending qualitative and quantitative data, an attempt will be made to show how the “bridge effect” plays out in these particular island places (Baldacchino, 2004b: 1).

Our basic hypothesis, and the main one subjected to testing in this study, is that, the more isolated an island, the more likely is it that its islandness would be a significant feature that would draw in some tourists but keep away others. Thus, the profile of visitors to an island would be largely a function of the ease, or difficulty, with which the same island can be accessed.

**The Appeal of the Islands**

Tell me about this island. Why do you like to visit here?

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Figure 1: Description of island using “islandness”-related words (by %) (n=300).

Each interview would start by asking interviewees to describe their location and why it is appealing to them: this would give them a chance to use their own words, free from even unintentional leading, to express what draws them to an individual island. Should our hypothesis hold true, interviewees on Anclote Key would use islandness-related words most frequently, showing that they perceive a higher degree of islandness on Anclote Key than do the tourists on Honeymoon or Caladesi.
Islands. (For the purposes of this study, a list of islandness-related words and concepts was compiled from island-related texts—see Appendix). To test this hypothesis, the interview results spreadsheet was examined, and islandness-related words were marked for each of the three islands and then compared the three sets of results to see which had the higher occurrence.

The results did indeed follow the pattern predicted by the hypothesis (Figure 1). Honeymoon Island’s tourists had the lowest incidence of islandness-related words at 25 per cent, while Anclote Key’s tourists had the highest at 53 per cent. As expected, Caladesi Island’s tourists ranked between those of the other two islands with one-third using islandness-related words to describe their location.

These results suggest that the identity and appeal to tourists of an island without fixed or mobile links is based to a greater degree upon its islandness, and also that it is seen to possess a higher level of islandness than the islands with fixed or mobile links. On the opposite end of the continuum is the fully linked island, which did not seem as insular, but appealed to tourists based upon, among other traits, its accessibility, as will be shown below.

The words used provide qualitative evidence of the feelings that people have about the islands they visit. On Anclote Key, tourists—who prefer referring to themselves as beachgoers—used words such as remote, secluded, and desolate: words that emphasize the insularity of the place. On Honeymoon Island, descriptors were used such as convenient, close to home, and you can park close and don’t have to walk far. These descriptors emphasize the island’s accessibility. In fact, 27 per cent of those interviewed mentioned Honeymoon Island’s accessibility as one of its major attrac-
tive qualities (Figure 2), including the two respondents who commented that they did not like Honeymoon Island, but they came only because it was conveniently accessible from their homes. By comparison, only 13 per cent of the “beachgoers” interviewed on Anclote Key mentioned ease of access as an attractive characteristic of that island: all visitors to that island had to travel to the island by boat, most probably their own. Accessibility was mentioned as an attractive feature by only 3 per cent of the respondents on Caladesi Island. This may appear an anomalous figure at first glance, because it does not fall between those of Honeymoon Island and Anclote Key, as the general hypothesis would predict. However, for all but 4 of the interviewees, the trip to Caladesi Island involved a ride on the Caladesi Connection Ferry. This could often mean trading convenience for adventure, but it also highlights the necessary resort to a means of public transport, which may in itself suggest a stronger sense of remoteness.

Aside from remoteness and accessibility comments, the most common descriptors given by those who liked the island where they were interviewed were about the natural beauty of the island. (Very few had negative comments regarding the island where they were being interviewed: Honeymoon Island 5 per cent, Caladesi Island 1 per cent, Anclote Key 0 per cent). Tourists on all three islands remarked about the colour of the water, the fineness of the sand, and the warmth of the sun.

**Transportation**

*How did you get here today?*

*What is your favourite method of travel on vacation?*

Budget travel has always been important to tourists, and island travel can sometimes be at odds with the concept of travelling on a budget. According to Royle:

> It is still true that with an island location, there must always be greater transportation costs, there is always that one extra journey to be made, often requiring a transfer from one mode of transportation to another (Royle, 2001: 112).

Honeymoon Island, with its lack of ferry fees or cost of boat ownership, is the most affordable island in the study area to access, and attracts many of its tourists primarily for this reason. This being the case, it is still true that tourists do not choose their destinations only on the basis of economic concerns. The actual transportation used may play a role. One of the goals of this research is to provide data for the question raised by Butler, namely that:

> [t]here is relatively little known about how tourists view the travel component of their vacation; whether they regard it as a necessary evil to be overcome, or whether it is a major part of the attraction of the vacation (Butler, 1997: 36).

Interviewees were asked how they like to travel. On Anclote Key, 35 per cent of interviewees reported “boat” as their most preferred method of travel on vacation (Figure 3).
It is unsurprising that these individuals chose to visit an island that requires the use of a boat for access. Compared with the 5 per cent of interviewees who prefer boats on each of the other two islands, this data indicates that the mode of transportation was a major part of the attraction of Anclote Key. The fact that only 5 per cent of those interviewed on Caladesi Island prefer to travel by boat corroborates the explanation of why that island had the lowest incidence of “accessibility” being mentioned with the reasons for its appeal. Anclote Key, with 35 per cent preferring to travel by boat, seems much more accessible to people who consider themselves fortunate to get to use their favourite mode of transportation to travel to their destination. Because 36 per cent of the tourists on Caladesi Island prefer the automobile to all other modes of transportation, the fact that the island is not accessible by automobile would limit its perceived accessibility.

The answers given for the second question of the interview were highly predictable. Almost everyone interviewed arrived at the island by the “common” mode of transportation for that island: that is, on Anclote Key 100 per cent arrived by private vessel (98 by boat and 2 by jet-ski); on Caladesi Island 96 per cent arrived on the ferry and 4 per cent by private boat; and on Honeymoon Island, 100 per cent arrived by crossing the causeway (99 by automobile and 1 by bicycle). It should also be noted that Anclote Key is effectively inaccessible to most of the interviewees on Honeymoon Island and Caladesi Island. While, obviously, everyone interviewed on Anclote Key had access to a private boat, only 17 per cent of those on Honeymoon Island and 9 per cent of those on Caladesi Island reported owning or having access to a private boat in the Tampa Bay area. On each of these islands, two interviewees reported that they owned a boat, but that it was moored in their hometowns, many miles from Florida and impractical for transportation across such great distances.
Rental boats are available in Tarpon Springs, but this option is not often used for travel to Anclote Key; no one interviewed on Anclote Key had arrived by rented boat. Clearly, access to a private boat was a differentiating factor in the visitor profile of Anclote Key, as against Caladesi and Honeymoon Islands.

The results of these questions about transportation were telling. People do not tend to travel by unusual modes, although the mode of travel does affect their choice of destination. The data indicate that the mode of travel is an important part of a vacation, and that it does have an impact on the overall travel experience. In casual conversation with some of the interviewees on Anclote Key, the interviewer mentioned that causeway plans were approved in 1977 but never acted upon (Robinson, 2004). In every case, the interviewee showed disappointment at this information and often voiced concern that this would “ruin the island.” Transportation, and access to its specific modes, certainly affects the overall travel experience and, in this study area, it exercises a notable effect upon islandness as well.

**Marketing Islandness**

*How did you find out about this island?*

In order to determine the methods by which information about these islands was being disseminated, all interviewees were asked how they had first found out about the island. For many, this was an exercise in long-term memory because they had been visiting the islands for so long. Others were interviewed on their first visit to the island, and they knew exactly how they had first “discovered” it.

Results were coded into four categories (Figure 4) based upon the general source of knowledge about the island reported by the tourists. These categories are:

- word-of-mouth: any information from an individual, but not available to the general public;
- local: long-term knowledge based upon residence in the area;
- media: published information in newspapers, books, radio, or television;
- exploring: “finding” the island while not necessarily looking for it (i.e., while out driving or boating); this category also includes those who found the island on a map and decided to visit it.

As emerges from Figure 4, all the islands in the study area were represented by similar methods of information dissemination. One notable exception was Caladesi Island, where a decrease in tourists with local information was counterbalanced by an increase in those who had learned of Caladesi Island through the media.

To examine this occurrence more closely, the specific media sources mentioned by tourists on Caladesi Island were examined. The majority of information about Caladesi Island was actually obtained through the internet (38 per cent), with newspapers and tourism brochures as the second most common source (19 per cent each); guidebooks trailed at 12 per cent, and television was last at just 4 per cent. Much has been published about Caladesi Island, often with reference to its ranking as *Fourth Best Beach in the USA* (Leatherman, 2006):
Figure 4: Source of information about location (n=300).

Caladesi Island State Park ... is one of the Top 10 beaches in the country. The waters are nearly placid, being protected by Honeymoon Island to the north. The white sand is soft and cushy at the water's edge, inviting one to take a dip in the sparkling clear water. Wooden boardwalks take you across the sand dunes and past the palm trees so that you can explore some of the inland trails or get a bite to eat at the snack bar on this offshore island which is only reachable by boat. Caladesi is a real getaway beach; it is the closest beach as the crow flies from Tampa, but few residents here have ever heard of it. This means that the beach is never crowded...

The abundance of existing published material about Caladesi Island can explain why so many tourists reported media as their source of information about the island; but why does the increase in media-derived information coincide with a decrease in local information, rather than another category or all categories equally? Perhaps, tourists who travel to more novel destinations (i.e., those found by exploring or word-of-mouth recommendations) are less likely to visit a place that has a strong presence in the mass media. There is much existing literature on traveller typologies (e.g., Cohen, 1979; Smith, 1977), and this aversion to familiar or popular destinations can be seen in those travellers at the more novelty-seeking end of the continuum.
Island Activities

What activities are you participating in today?

In order to determine whether usage by tourists differed from one island to another, each interviewee was asked what exactly they were doing at the beach on the day of the interview. There came a broad range of answers to this question. Each island attracted its share of active and passive tourists, participating in a variety of beach activities. It should be noted that few tourists were participating in just one activity. Rather than ask them to choose their most common or favourite activity, all of the activities listed by each interviewee were recorded. For this reason, Table 1, below, contains more than the standard 100 responses per island.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Honeymoon Island</th>
<th>Caladesi Island</th>
<th>Anclote Key</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boating</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids/Family</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Recreation</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Activities reported on each island (n=300, more than one response per interviewee)

There was little significant difference in usage among the three islands. Still, there are some interesting facts that can be learnt from the responses to this question. The responses were coded into eight categories for ease of analysis, as follows:

- Boating
- Eating: picnics or eating at the café if applicable
- Fishing
- Kids/Family: playing or socializing with family
- Nature: shelling, hiking, bird watching
- Passive Recreation: sunbathing, reading, sleeping
- Sports: kayaking, swimming, jogging, soccer
- Other: religious activities, no answer given, etc.

Boating was only reported as an activity by six interviewees on Anclote Key and one on Caladesi Island. Although we already know that many more travelled by boat, these answers are significant because they show how few people considered boating to be one of their leisure activities as against being a means of transportation.

Honeymoon Island was the location with the fewest number of tourists who reported eating as one of their activities. This is surprising because it is the location
with the most developed cafeteria and the closest access to stores at which picnic supplies can be purchased. Equally surprising, Anclote Key had the greatest number of tourists who reported eating, even though the island has no facilities except for a few picnic tables in a clearing about 100 metres from the beach. One possible explanation for these seemingly anomalous figures is that a trip to Anclote Key usually lasts longer than a trip to either of the other islands in the study area. Therefore it is logical that someone visiting Anclote Key would plan to have a meal while on the island, and would bring along provisions to this effect.

Anclote Key also had the greatest number of people who were fishing. One interviewee explained that the snook (a type of fish) spawn in the small bay on the south side of the island and that made it an ideal location for such a sport. Caladesi Island had the fewest tourists who were fishing. This is possibly due to the fact that it is difficult to carry all the necessary fishing equipment aboard the ferries, which are often crowded.

The greatest occurrence of family activities was found on Honeymoon Island, although the differences among the three islands were not great in this category. According to many interviewees, Honeymoon Island's accessibility and facilities make it appealing to tourists with children.

Caladesi Island had the largest number of tourists seeking nature. This is probably due to the fact that Caladesi Island has the most developed and accessible hiking trail of the three islands. Anclote Key's trail is still under construction and Honeymoon Island's trail was closed during much of the study period because of prescribed burning that was being done by the Park Service.

Unsurprisingly, the most common activities reported fall into a category that has been termed passive recreation. Beaches are often places of comfort and relaxation, and many of the interviewees in this study were enjoying this aspect of the islands. The smallest number of tourists participating in passive recreation was found on Anclote Key, which was unsurprising when considered alongside the traveller type information below. Those tourists who are attracted to a more remote location are often more likely to be active participants in their recreation activities.

The three islands had relatively the same number of tourists participating in sports activities. Because no island in this study had any more sporting facilities (for example, volleyball nets or horseshoe pits) than any other, it follows that they all appeal equally to the sporting set.

Looking at what activities are taking place on each island is a good way to determine their appeal to different groups of tourists. For a further and more specific comparison, let us consider the following, more direct, approach.

Direct Comparisons

Have you been to the other islands in the study area?
If so, how do they compare to this island?

Because this chapter is comparative by nature, it seems profitable to examine comparisons of the islands drawn by the interviewees themselves. On Anclote Key, the majority (58 per cent) of the tourists had also been to Caladesi Island and Hon-
Honeymoon Island. This was not the case on either of the latter islands, where only 8 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively, had visited both other islands in the study area.

Whether an interviewee had visited one or both of the other islands, it was important to record the comparisons they would make. Most of the comments given lend themselves very well to binary categorization, either positive or negative, though some must be considered neutral, conflicting, or absent (Table 2).

| Table 2: Comparison among islands in study area by interviewees (n=300) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| By Tourists                                                 | Regarding:     | Positive       | Negative       | Neutral        |
| Honeymoon Island                                           | Caladesi       | 16             | 29%            | 20             | 36%            | 19             | 35%            |
|                                                            | Island         |                |                |                |                |                |                |
|                                                            | Anclete Key    | 7              | 35%            | 9              | 45%            | 4              | 20%            |
| Caladesi Island                                            | Honeymoon      | 1              | 2%             | 40             | 87%            | 5              | 11%            |
|                                                            | Island         |                |                |                |                |                |                |
|                                                            | Anclete Key    | 3              | 33%            | 5              | 56%            | 1              | 11%            |
| Anclete Key                                                | Honeymoon      | 10             | 14%            | 46             | 67%            | 13             | 19%            |
|                                                            | Island         |                |                |                |                |                |                |

The table above represents the categorization of the comments by tourists on a given island, about the other islands. The first number in each column (Positive, Negative, and Neutral) represents the total number of people on a certain island who had only positive comments about the island in question. The percentages shown above are taken from only the number of tourists who had visited that island. If a tourist had never visited a certain island, his or her comments were not included in these calculations. The column labeled Neutral represents not only neutral comments (“I used to fish at Anclete Key”), but also conflicting comments (“Caladesi Island is nice but the ferry is too expensive”) or the lack of any qualitative comments at all (“I have been to Honeymoon Island”). For example, of the tourists interviewed on Caladesi Island who had visited Honeymoon Island, 87 per cent made only negative comments about Honeymoon Island.

This table provides the most compelling data about the perceptions of tourists regarding the various islands in the study area. On Anclete Key, tourists have many more negative comments than positive about both Caladesi Island and Honeymoon Island. Some of these comments called the “islandness” of those two islands into question:

"Is Honeymoon even considered an island?"

"Honeymoon Island is attached to the land."

"Caladesi Island is predominantly gay." (This comment was made in contrast to Honeymoon Island being “family friendly!”)

"They are fine for tourists but Anclete Key suits me."
Links and Islandness off Florida

Most of the positive comments about Caladesi Island and Honeymoon Island by tourists on Anclote Key were made with regard to the facilities (such as docks, restrooms, and cafés) that are provided on those islands.

On Caladesi Island, the comments about the other two islands were also more negative than positive:

"Honeymoon Island is creepy. People do creepy things."
"Anclote Key is rough and has no facilities."
"Caladesi Island has softer sands. Honeymoon Island has more stones."

The chief complaint about Honeymoon Island was the rockiness of the beach. It is true that Honeymoon Island’s beach is rocky. Scott Robinson, manager of the Gulf Islands GeoPark, said that it is an ongoing project to keep sand on the beach and that each storm washes away the sand that had been placed there, exposing the rocks. These rocks on Honeymoon Island’s beach make walking into the water a difficult and sometimes painful experience. Aside from the rocks, the majority of the negative comments about Honeymoon Island recorded on Caladesi Island had to do with the crowds that can be found there. Baum argues that access by a limited number of people is a feature of islandness and the fact that Caladesi Island is accessible only by ferry clearly limits its accessibility (Baum, 1997: 24). To those who do access it, Caladesi seems more insular. As one interviewee said, “it seems like you’ve gone off to an island.” Anclote Key fared only slightly better than Honeymoon Island in the opinions of tourists on Caladesi Island. Those who commented positively about it said that they liked the seclusion that could be found there. Negative comments were based upon Anclote Key’s perceived dirtiness, lack of facilities, and difficult navigation. It should be noted that Anclote Key is surrounded by sandbars that are affected by tides and can make boating hazardous.

On Honeymoon Island, comments were not as decidedly negative as they were on the other islands in the study area, but many still clearly showed their preference:

“I don’t like the people on Anclote Key. They are old.”
“I don’t like Caladesi Island at all. You have to go by boat, no one is ever there, and there is nothing around.”
“They are both nicer, but more expensive and less convenient.”

Regarding Anclote Key, the positive comments were based upon the lack of crowds, the quality of fishing, and the fact that one must go there by boat. Negative comments about Anclote Key involved mostly the difficulty in accessing the island. Other unfavourable comments were that there were too many trees, not enough waves, or that it was visited by an undesirable type of tourist. Tourists on Honeymoon Island disliked Caladesi Island’s lack of people, its difficult (or expensive) access, and its lack of facilities. One tourist reported that after being dropped off by the ferry on Caladesi Island he “felt stranded,” an evaluation hearkening back to the idea
of an island as a prison (Royle, 2001: 22). Favourable comments about Caladesi Island involved its prettiness, lack of crowds, and absence of rocks. One tourist reported that Caladesi Island has dolphins, and one said that it was better for children.

It is interesting that, on every island, there were more negative comments about the other islands than positive ones. This indicates that people chose their destination deliberately and not simply based upon proximity or chance. The majority of interviewees were found on the island that, among the three in the study area, they liked best.

Choosing a Beach
When you are planning a trip to the beach or an island, what sorts of things affect your decision of which beach or island to visit?
Do you prefer island beaches or mainland beaches?

Knowing, then, that the majority of interviewees preferred the island on which they were found, it is important to ascertain just which qualities of a beach or island are most appealing to them. Each interviewee was asked to describe the characteristics that they look for when choosing a beach or an island to visit. As above, these answers were then categorized based upon the incidence of the aforementioned “islandness-related words.” As expected, Anclote Key was where the greatest number of tourists used islandness-related words to describe desirable characteristics of a beach or island, with 43 per cent. Caladesi Island followed closely at 38 per cent and Honeymoon Island trailing at 31 per cent (Figure 5). This indicates that tourists on all three islands value islandness, but with the value slightly increasing as the island’s attachment to the mainland decreases.

![Graph showing islandness preferences](image)

Figure 5: The value placed by tourists upon islandness when choosing a beach or island to visit (n=300).
Rather than basing the assessment of the tourists’ preferences solely upon inference, the respondents were asked outright whether they preferred island beaches or mainland beaches. The results to this question followed the predicted pattern, but were rather extreme. Almost all (93 per cent) of the interviewees on Anclote Key preferred island beaches to mainland beaches, with only 2 per cent preferring mainland and 5 per cent reporting no preference. The results on the other two islands were nearly identical to each other, with the tourists on Caladesi Island preferring island beaches slightly more than those on Honeymoon Island. On both these latter islands, the majority of respondents reported no preference between island and mainland beaches (Figure 6).

The inference can be drawn, then, that a tourist’s appreciation and sense of distinctiveness toward an island beach is enhanced by whether and to what degree the island is isolated.

![Figure 6: Tourists’ preference for island or mainland beaches (n=300)](image)

**Travel History and Dreams**

Describe your ideal travel destination. Money is no object. What other places have you visited recently on vacation?

Based upon the results seen in Figure 6 above, it would appear that Anclote Key attracts a different type of tourist than does Caladesi Island or Honeymoon Island.
To test this, it was necessary to ascertain how important the concept of islandness was to the tourists interviewed on each island. To accomplish this, each interviewee was asked about his or her dream travel destinations and recent travel locations. If tourists were to be asked directly to assess themselves or their travel style, the responses might be subject to embellishment, as many people might like to project themselves as being more adventurous than they actually are. It seems logical that evaluating each tourist based upon his or her dream destinations and recent destinations is a good way to determine traveller type.

The answers given by tourists to the question of dream destination show virtually no predisposition of the tourists on any island toward island destinations. If one relied solely upon the island/mainland distinction of dream destinations, it would appear that tourists on the three islands in the study area were not distinguishable from one another in the value that they placed upon islandness. However, considering the results to the question about recent destinations, it becomes clear that, while all interviewees may dream of islands equally, those on Anclote Key were the ones actually visiting the islands.

It becomes clear that tourists on Anclote Key had recently visited island destinations more often than tourists on Caladesi Island or Honeymoon Island (Figure 7). The fact that those on Honeymoon Island had recently visited more islands than those on Caladesi Island was a bit of a surprise. A small percentage on each island reported no recent travel for pleasure.

![Chart showing recent destination categorized by island or mainland location (n=300).](image_url)


Discussion

It is fair to argue that visitors to the three islands differ from one another in somewhat predictable ways. Those on Anclote Key seem to value islandness the most, evidenced by their propensity to use islandness-related words when describing Anclote Key itself. They vastly prefer islands to mainland beaches both in word and in deed: 93 per cent of them say that they prefer island beaches to mainland beaches and they tend to visit island destinations more often than tourists on the other islands in this study. When at the beach, they are involved in less passive recreation and more fishing and are more likely to prefer to travel by boat than are tourists on the other islands.

Tourists on Honeymoon Island are more likely to value accessibility when describing what they like about their island and tend to value islandness the least of the three groups. This can be seen in the lack of islandness-related words that they use to describe Honeymoon Island itself.

On Caladesi Island, it was often (though not always) the case that tourists would fall somewhere between those on the other two islands in the ranking of responses. Some notable exceptions to this trend were that tourists to Caladesi Island (1) relied more heavily upon the mass media for information about their island; (2) were more likely to participate in nature-based recreation; (3) had visited mainland destinations most frequently; and (4) valued accessibility the least when describing their island.

Evidence was found to support the concept discussed in the work of Eric Cohen, which categorizes tourist types. Cohen offers a typology of tourists based upon their concept and concern with authenticity: existential, experimental, experiential, recreational, and diversionary tourists (Cohen, 1988: 371-386). In this case, tourists were found to be generally distributed along Cohen’s continuum in a manner that was traceable to the type of linkage between their island and the mainland. By and large, tourists on Anclote Key can be placed closer to the “existential” end of the continuum, tourists on Honeymoon Island toward the “diversionary” end, and Caladesi Island’s tourists somewhere in the middle. In general, those who visited the island without a fixed or mobile link were in search of a more “authentic” island experience and valued characteristics of an authentic island more.

Another important factor in the choice of an island destination is crowds. Lack of crowds is a perceived major indicator of islandness (Baum, 1997: 24; Birkett, 1997: 14-5) and was found most readily on Anclote Key. It was also one of the characteristics of the island most often mentioned positively by those who were interviewed on Anclote Key.

Tourists on all three islands in the study area shared certain characteristics. All tended to travel to their islands by the “normal” or “standard” modes: by automobile to Honeymoon Island, by ferry to Caladesi Island, and by private boat to Anclote Key. Moreover, tourists on each island who had visited one or both of the other islands seemed to prefer the island on which they were being interviewed, as is evidenced by the tendency of their comments about the other islands to be more negative than positive.
Conclusion: Islandness and Linkages

The data gathered in this study illustrate that the type of linkage between an island and the mainland has a profound impact upon the tourist experience on the island. Islands that are connected to the mainland by a fixed link maintain a closer connection to the mainland in the perception of their visitors. They attract visitors who value insularity the least when choosing a beach for recreation and who value ease of access the most. Tourists on islands that are accessible only by private boat value insularity the most, enjoy the necessary boat trip as part of their recreation experience, and prefer islands in general to mainland destinations. Islands with regular ferry service often fall between linked and unlinked islands on most measures of perceptions of islandness by tourists.

Different types of tourist are attracted to islands with different forms of linkage. This typology is not necessarily based upon socio-economic circumstances. In Florida, boat ownership is not always a sign of affluence. It is more a sign of lifestyle choice as boats are common throughout the state and are owned by people from varied economic backgrounds. The islands examined were all viewed positively by the tourists that visited them. Two types of seemingly contradictory appeal exist among these islands: the appeal of remoteness and the appeal of accessibility. The difficulty, or lack, of access is seen as an important component of islandness. When an island becomes more accessible, it also becomes less attractive to certain types of tourists. Conversely, an island can be seen as prohibitively remote to other tourist types if it does not have a convenient enough form of linkage. The presence or absence of a link from the island to the mainland, and the type of linkage used, are the characteristics which define an island's remoteness and/or accessibility best.

Choice of island destinations is not random, nor is it always based upon location. Tourists in this study have shown that they are willing to travel further and by costlier means in order to visit the island that they prefer. Island tourists choose the island that they want to visit based, to a high degree, upon the perceived character of the island itself, which in turn is based in part upon the type of linkage between that island and the mainland.

Thus, a major implication of this study is that planners and policy makers should work towards the availability of a variety of both linked and unlinked islands in their infrastructure development, should they be interested in a broad tourist base. Based upon the findings of this study, it becomes clear that a diversity of island linkages will best serve a diversity of island tourists.

However, in contrast, if the idea is to “sell” a distinct island destination to a specific tourist market segment, then the inherent “tourist products” of the island—events, attractions, facilities—may be less important than the manner in which the tourist is meant to reach the island, and how that access is communicated and marketed. Once a particular form of transport is determined as the key form of access to an island—the car, the ferry, or the private boat in the three island cases of this study—then a process of self-selection kicks into action, considerably conditioning and shaping who gets to visit an island, how these visitors feel (positively) about their island, and how they feel (negatively) about the other islands: even though these
islands are in the same geographical location, are all designated state parks, and serve a basically common mainland clientele. Anclote Key, and its visitors, would be likely to become similar to Caladesi and Honeymoon Island were access to it to be improved by a ferry, and eventually by a causeway.

Such a likely drift of identity and market segment is also a consequence of the fact that the three islands are almost totally depopulated, and so there is no significant resident interest group on the islands which may wish to influence the nature of islandness in any particular way. The only exception are the residents of the retirement condos on Honeymoon Island, who would naturally be interested in a quick and easy access to the mainland in the case of a health emergency, and so the fixed link to the mainland is a key asset in their case.

These three islands, therefore, are very much a product of the nature of their links to the mainland, and are likely to remain so.

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Appendix: Islandness-related Words and Concepts

1. Adventure in getting there (Baum, 1997: 21; Royle, 2001: 11).
2. Detached, self-contained (King, 1993: 13)
3. Different social mores (Baum, 1997: 22; Royle, 2001: 14)
4. Freedom and security (Clarke, 2001: 122)
5. Island of dreams (Ramsey, 1972: 91)
6. Islandness lost or reduced by bridge (Baldacchino, 2005a; Clarke, 2001: 11; Royle, 2002: 243-4; Weale, 1991: 81–2)
7. Isolation, remoteness (Baum, 1997: 24)
8. Limited number of people with access (Baum, 1997: 24)
9. Mysterious (King, 1993: 13)
10. No cars (Link, 1974)
11. Opportunity to escape, get away (Baum, 1997: 24)
12. Paradise, uninhabited (Birkett, 1997: 14–5)
13. Slower pace, relaxing (Baum, 1997: 22)
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