Second Homebodies: Investigating Patterns of Movement and Migration within Homeowner Winter Visitors in Yuma, Arizona

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Introduction

This research investigates the movement patterns of second homeowner winter visitors in Yuma County, Arizona, a desert city known for a high population of "snowbird" winter migrant visitors. Prior research on second homeowners has commonly employed Urry's (2000) framework of "scapes" and "flows" to assess mobilities of such populations. Nomadicism has been identified as a critical concept in understanding the lifeworlds of second homeowners and seasonal migration (McHugh, 2006), yet the scope of which nomadic tendencies permeate the "snowbird" winter visitor's experience remains somewhat undefined. Spatio-temporal dimensions may affect the nature of second homeownership differently across cultural contexts (Paris, 2010), and owners' relationships with second homes may vary considerably depending on factors such as life stage, family characteristics, employment, and social class (Perkins & Thorns, 2006).

Toward gaining a deeper understanding of snowbird movement and migration, this research employs data from a random sampling of Yuma seasonal homeowners. Movement and migration are explored at three levels: **seasonal migration** (from primary home to seasonal home in Yuma County); **overnight trips** taken during the duration of the Yuma winter stay (from Yuma to other destinations); and **day trips** to local and regional tourism attractions (within Yuma County).

Figure 1. Example segment of Yuma suburban landscape by satellite view, illustrating commonality of planned development communities and RV/mobile home parks (source: Google)

Methods

During the 2017-2018 winter/spring season, questionnaires were mailed to 1,054 randomly-selected Yuma County homeowners with out-of-county permanent U.S. addresses, using a list from the county tax assessor. In total, 349 surveys were returned (response rate: 33%). Of these, 283 fit the criteria of being "winter visitors" (staying 30 days or more that season), to be the focus of this research. Data were analyzed using ArcGIS and SPSS. High/low clustering, grouping analysis, ANOVA, logistic regression, and chi-squared tests were used to explore patterns within and relationships between variables.

Results

Winter Migration (Primary Home to Yuma County)

Table 1 highlights key demographic characteristics of this sample. Travel parties were generally white, retired, and traveling in couples. The majority did not have college degrees.

The homeowners came from 25 different states. The mean direct distance traveled between primary home and Yuma was **1,511 km** (Figure 2). Figure 3 shows the locations of Yuma winter visitors' primary homes across the U.S. grouped by mean state temperature. Some respondents listed their Yuma County zip as their current primary home address, reflecting a split/dual residency. The most common state of origin was **Washington (30%)**, followed by **Oregon (16%)**, **Arizona (9%)**, and **Idaho (9%)**. While this sample was delimited to U.S. residents, it is estimated that about 13% of the overall Yuma seasonal homeowner population is **Canadian**. Typically, snowbirds aim to escape cold, wet and/or snowy winter environments. To investigate this phenomena within our sample, mean annual temperature was explored as a grouping variable. States shown in green and gold recorded mean temperatures lower than the mean overall temperature (50.28 F) and comprised 83% of the total cases.

Table 1. Demographics and travel party characteristics

Variable	Statistic
Age	74 (mean; $\bar{x}$ = 7.2)
Race	98% white
Education	68% no college degree
Employment	98% retired
Travel party size	2.4 (mean)
Travel party characteristics	72% traveling with family only
Gender	51% male, 49% female

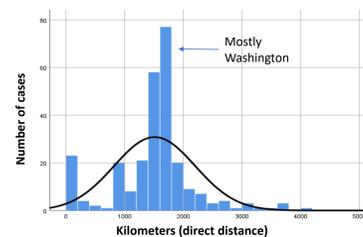*Note: Demographics are based on the primary survey respondent.*

Figure 2. Number of homeowner winter visitor travel parties by distance (km) between primary home and Yuma

Results (continued)

The distribution of zip codes was found to reveal statistically significant clustering patterns using both Morans I (z-score = 4.34; p-value = 0.000014) and Gertis-Ord General G (z-score = 2.53; p-value = 0.01145) analyses. Some explanation for this clustering may be found in the homeowners' survey responses regarding the top reason they first selected Yuma as a winter destination (Table 2). "Friends/family members staying in Yuma" was the most common response, along with "word of mouth" and "winter weather." Additional socio-cultural factors not explored by this research may also contribute to this non-random clustering effect.
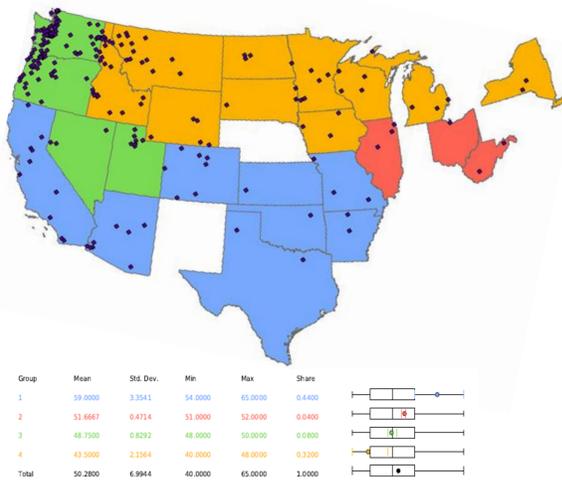
Group	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Share
1	59.0000	3.3541	54.0000	65.0000	0.0450
2	51.6667	0.4714	51.0000	52.0000	0.0400
3	48.1500	0.8292	48.0000	50.0000	0.4900
4	43.5000	2.1364	40.0000	46.0000	0.3200
Total	50.2800	6.9944	40.0000	65.0000	1.0000

Figure 3 (with table). Map of primary home locations showing state mean annual temperature groupings

Short-Term Travel/Side Trips

On average, these winter visitors spent **145 days** in Yuma during the 2017-2018 season. This extended time provides ample opportunity to explore the region, and Yuma is well-positioned to provide access to many world-renowned tourism destinations within a 6-hour drive (Figure 4). In total, **59%** of the travel parties reported leaving for an overnight at some point during their winter stay in Yuma. Of the 166 travel parties who did leave, 149 reported their destinations, with 9 of these reporting multiple trips/destinations. The median number of nights away from Yuma was **6**, with a mean of 12 and a range of 1 to 120 (reflecting a second homeowner population which may go back and forth between homes).

The most popular overnight destinations were the nearest major U.S. cities, **San Diego** and **Phoenix** (each reported by about 6% of total respondents), and elsewhere in **Arizona** and **California**. Six percent reported making trips to **Mexico**. Temporary visits back to the primary home regions were also common, as were visits to casino destinations (e.g. Las Vegas and Laughlin, NV). These trips are represented as outflows in Figure 5.

Table 2. Most important factor that first made visitors consider visiting/staying in Yuma County

Reason	n	%
Friends/Family members are staying in Yuma	165	58.3
Word of mouth	45	15.9
Winter weather in Yuma area	34	12.0
Affordability of Yuma	13	4.6
A previous trip to the area	8	2.8
Passing through/On a road trip	6	2.1
Other reason	5	1.8
Available RV/mobile spaces	4	1.4
Visit Yuma Visitor Guide	1	0.4
A travel or RV show	1	0.4

Figure 4. Tourism destinations within 6-hour drive from Yuma, shown with driving distance (km) and number of cases from this sample who listed visiting the specific destination (note: cases may be underreported)

Figure 5. Overnight trip destinations during Yuma winter stay (wider arrows represent more cases)

Results (continued)

Using Pearson's chi-square test, **age** was found to yield significant differences in terms of whether visitors left and returned during their Yuma winter stay (chi square = 26.74; *p*<0.001) (Figure 6).

Within-Destination Travel and Exploration

The survey instrument asked respondents which of the region's main tourism attractions they visited, which can be interpreted as one measure of movement and exploration within the destination community. Out of 11 possible attractions (e.g. casinos, historic sites, natural areas), respondents on average visited only **3.2 sites** ($\bar{x}$ = 1.9) during the 2017-2018 snowbird season (Table 3). For comparison, a separate dataset of winter visitors staying in RV and mobile home parks (mainly leased spaces) revealed a higher mean of 4.0 attractions ($\bar{x}$ = 2.2).
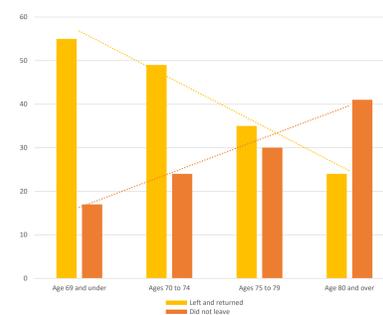
ANOVA was used to explore differences in attraction visitation between age groups (Table 3). While the mean number of sites visited was highest for the 75-79 group, the difference was not found to be significant at the 0.05 level. There was also no significant difference between age groups in terms of visitation to central (urban) attractions versus peripheral (rural/regional) attractions. Lastly, distance traveled between primary home and Yuma was not found to be correlated with the number of attractions visited.

Figure 6. Number of travel parties who left and returned to Yuma during winter stay, by age category

Table 3. Number of attractions visited by seasonal homeowners while in Yuma County (out of 11 possible)

Age Group	n	Mean	$\bar{x}$	Min.	Max.
Age 69 and under	70	3.0	1.8	0	9
Ages 70 - 74	69	3.0	1.9	0	8
Ages 75 - 79	59	3.7	1.9	1	8
Age 80 and over	60	3.0	1.9	0	9
Total	258	3.2	1.9	0	9

Conclusion

Yuma second homeowner winter visitors tend to be a fairly homogenous population – similar in age, race, and regions of primary residence, as well as in certain behaviors and motivations. Factors such as age and distance from primary home do not necessarily influence whether visitors are more likely to explore local or regional attractions. Older respondents, however, show less inclination to leave and return during their winter stay.

Homeowner winter visitors seem to exhibit some different behaviors than typical tourists. They are most drawn to their second home destination for factors such as weather/climate and the opportunity to spend time with family, and perhaps less concerned with participating in the region's key tourism activities. Even newer homeowner winter visitors might not prioritize visiting the destination's attractions. Many seasonal homeowners choose not to leave their winter destination community once they arrive, or might leave only for short overnight trips. By returning to the same destination every winter, these visitors are opting for a reliable and predictable annual travel experience, suggesting a desire for comfortable routine more than for new experiences and exploration. While Yuma winter visitors commonly travel over 1,500 kilometers to reach their second home, findings suggest that this population commonly exhibits "homebody"-like tendencies, emphasizing the important roles of rest, relaxation, and family in defining the snowbird experience. Practically, this research has implications toward understanding the regional economic impacts of seasonal residency and for the marketing and social engagement strategies utilized by snowbird destinations and attractions.

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