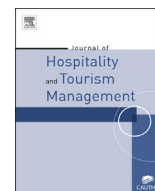




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Understanding travel motivations of Chinese tourists visiting Cairns, Australia

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ABSTRACT

Using survey data sets collected in 2008 and 2012, this study provides insights into the demographic profile, travel characteristics and travel motivations of Chinese tourists to Cairns. Strong correlations between the push and pull factors indicate that the attributes Cairns offers largely match the Chinese tourists' push motivational factors, which may explain why China has been Cairns' fastest-growing inbound tourism market. The special attributes of Cairns such as the Great Barrier Reef and reef-associated activities could be promoted in the Chinese market to strengthen Chinese tourists' push motivations. This study also suggests that certain groups such as females, people under 30 years of age and high income earners could be specifically targeted in tourism promotions as these groups tend to place higher values on the features and lifestyle of Cairns. Given that most of the respondents are experienced travellers, the findings of this study provide some empirical support for the travel career pattern theory of travel motivation.

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1. Introduction

China has become an important and fast-growing tourist source market for Australia. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013), tourist arrivals from China reached 685 100 in the 2012–2013 financial year, making it Australia's second largest inbound market behind New Zealand. China has already been the largest total expenditure market to Australia and will remain the most valuable inbound market for the next decade (TRA, 2011). Tropical North Queensland (TNQ) is renowned for its World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef (GBR) and rainforests. China has now become TNQ's largest source market in terms of the number of international visitors with 94 000 Chinese arrivals in the 2011–2012 financial year, an increase of 27% from the previous year (Tourism Queensland, 2011). Meanwhile, the number of nights spent in TNQ by Chinese visitors in the 2011–2012 financial year increased by 21% to 226 000 nights. Cairns, the major tourist destination in TNQ, received the majority of the Chinese tourists who visited this region. However, compared to other Australian cities that Chinese tourists visited, TNQ had a relatively small market share. For example, in the 2010–2011 financial year, TNQ

ranked fifth in terms of Chinese visitors (74 000) after Sydney (277 000), Melbourne (233 000), the Gold Coast (118 000) and Brisbane (83 000) (Tourism Australia, 2011). Therefore, understanding the demographics and the travel motivations of Chinese tourists is important for the sustainable growth of the TNQ tourism industry given that visitor numbers from traditional source markets such as Japan and the UK have been declining in recent years and that the growth of the Chinese market has not offset the decline from these markets (Tourism Queensland, 2011).

Although the motivations of Chinese outbound tourists have been researched (Hsu, Cai, & Li, 2010; Hua & Yoo, 2011; Johanson, 2007; Lu, 2011; Ryan & Mo, 2001; Zhang & Lam, 1999), there has been little research on the travel motivations of Chinese visitors to Cairns and TNQ. Chow and Murphy (2011) noted that because of China's cultural background and its recent open policy on travel to Western countries, Chinese tourists' specific psychological characteristics have not been well understood by many industry service providers and destinations. This study attempts to develop a socio-demographic profile of Chinese travellers to Cairns, to identify their travel motivations and to examine the relationship between the demographic variables and the motivations.

2. Literature review

Motivation is a psychological term, which refers to the driving force within individuals that impels them to action (Mayo & Jarvis,

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1981; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2003). In the field of tourism, travel motivation means a set of needs that predisposes a person towards a certain tourist activity (Pizam, Neumann, & Reichel, 1979). Travel motivation has been a significant topic in tourism studies because it is the key factor underlying all tourist behaviour and is fundamental to tourism development (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981; Pearce, 1995). Researchers have developed travel motivation theories such as the travel career ladder (TCL) approach (Pearce, 1988), the optimal arousal theory (Iso-Ahola, 1982), the allocentric–psychocentric theory (Plog, 1974) and the leisure motivation approach (Beard & Ragheb, 1983). Notably, the push and pull theory has been widely utilised by researchers to study tourist motivations and destination attributes (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977; Hsu & Huang, 2008; Kao, Patterson, Scott, & Li, 2008; Kim, Lee, & Klenosky, 2003; Yuan & McDonald, 1990). Under this theoretical framework, push factors refer to the drivers that lead to a decision to travel outside a person's place of usual residence, while pull factors refer to the drivers that cause an individual to choose one destination over another once the decision to travel is made (Klenosky, 2002).

Crompton (1979) was the first to identify tourists' seven push factors (escape from a perceived usual environment, self-exploration and evaluation, relaxation, prestige, regression, enhancement of kinship relationships and social interaction) and two pull factors (novelty and education). Crompton's study of push and pull factors indicates that tourism-related businesses may wish to pay greater attention to socio-psychological motivations when they develop product and promotion strategies. However, Pizam et al. (1979) argue that pull factors do not play any role in motivation since they are just commonsense explanations of a certain touristic activity and should not be considered in studying tourism motivations. In fact, more researchers have acknowledged that pull factors represent a result of the features and attributes of a tourist destination (Pan & Ryan, 2007; Prayag & Ryan, 2010; Turnbull & Uysal, 1995). Despite this, it is difficult to sever the relationship between push and pull factors. Klenosky (2002) argues that push and pull factors are not mutually exclusive or entirely independent of each other. For example, Cha, McCleary, and Uysal (1995) argue that travellers are pushed by their own internal forces and simultaneously pulled by destination attractions and attributes. The latter may respond to and reinforce the former (Dann, 1981). Wu and Pearce (2014) articulate the links between push and pull factors: airline ticket promotions, recommendations from friends and relatives, travel blogs and personal travel experiences are strong forces that cement the internal push factors and the external pull factors.

There is little consensus among tourism researchers as to what motivates people to travel (Harril & Potts, 2002). Filep and Greenacre (2007), Pearce (2011) and Pearce and Lee (2005) have developed a prominent travel career patterns (TCP) model, which is an adaption and extension of the TCL approach to understanding travel motivation. The TCL approach suggests that a tourist advances up a hierarchy of travel motives as his or her travel experience increases. The TCP model de-emphasises the hierarchical focus of the TCL approach and stresses the dynamic nature of travel motivations. A good motivation theory should integrate and summarise previous work and is of dynamic nature (Pearce, 2011). The TCP model meets these criteria and groups the motives into three layers: for all travellers, regardless of their previous travel experiences, there is a core layer of motives, including the need to escape and relax, to experience novelty and to build relationships; a middle layer of motives indicates that tourists with more travel experiences tend to seek close contact with the host community and the local environment as well as striving to fulfil self-development and self-actualisation needs; an outer layer of

motives includes seeking romance and looking for isolation (Pearce, 2011). The motivations of the outer layer are less important to experienced travellers. Guided by the TCP model, Paris and Teye (2010) found that four backpacker travel motivations were significantly influenced by previous travel experiences. Cultural knowledge and relaxation, which showed no significant difference in relation to previous travel experiences were identified as a core to backpacker motivations. Huang and Hsu (2009) suggest that most Chinese travellers to Australia are at a relatively lower travel career compared to their Western counterparts, and therefore some common motivations such as novelty, escape and enhancing personal relationships could be more important to them. The TCP model is particularly useful in guiding the design of some package tour products to be promoted in China.

Hua and Yoo (2011) reported that the China outbound market was relatively under-researched and that during the period 1999–2010 only eight articles reported on the motivations of Chinese outbound tourists. The most common motivational factors for Chinese tourists to travel overseas in these studies were knowledge, prestige, enhancing personal relationships, relaxation, experiencing different cultures and lifestyles, and shopping. The authors identified five factors that motivated potential Chinese travellers to visit the USA: ego enhancement, international exposure, communication opportunities, financial incentives and destination stimuli. With the push and pull model, Lu (2011) identified four push factors and four pull factors for Chinese tourists to Canada. The push factors were prestige, family ties, exploration and escape/leisure; the pull factors were the high quality of Canadian life, shopping activities, unique attractions and sports. A good understanding of these factors is essential for a country with abundant travel resources and tourist attractions in developing the right tourism products and designing a successful marketing campaign.

3. Methodology

In-depth interviews are commonly used at the exploratory stage to generate insightful information about what motivates people to travel (Hsu & Huang, 2008). Early works such as Crompton (1979) and Pearce (1982) employed this approach. In recent years, tourists' travel blogs and online remarks have been used to categorise motives (Bowen & Clarke, 2009; Wu & Pearce, 2014). Pearce and Lee (2005) combined the interview technique and the quantitative survey in developing the TCP model. Filep and Greenacre (2007) argue that a qualitative essay approach reduces the problem of interviewer bias and is more effective than some other qualitative methods. They also used a quantitative approach to verify the validity of the qualitative study. Various statistical techniques, including factor analysis, ANOVA and regression, are frequently used to generate quantitative results (Hsu & Huang, 2008). For example, Paris and Teye (2010) applied the TCP model to backpacker travel motivations using principal component analysis and discriminant analysis. Guided by motivation theories such as the TCP model and push and pull theory, this study draws motivational items from previous literature to see if they can explain Chinese tourists' travel motivations. As a result, quantitative methods including principal component analysis are the principal means used.

Two surveys were conducted in 2008 and 2012 among Chinese tourists over 18 years of age who travelled to Cairns. In both years tour groups were the main form of travel to Australia, but in 2012 there was a significant increase in the number of individual travellers who organised their own trips. A travel operator in Cairns provided assistance with the distribution of questionnaires for the first survey from April to July 2008. The 2012 survey was conducted from April to October at Cairns Airport by one of the authors.

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