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## Research Paper

## Stopover destination image: A comparison of salient attributes elicited from French and Australian travellers

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## ABSTRACT

In the first 40 years of the destination marketing literature there has been little research published in relation to stopover destination image. While the destination image research stream has been one of the most popular in this domain, most studies to date have not been context-specific. That is to say the image of a destination has commonly been measured without reference to a specific travel situation. The aim of this research was to identify attributes of destinations deemed salient to travellers when considering a stopover during long haul travel. Underpinned by Personal Construct Theory, the study used the Repertory Test technique in personal interviews with French travellers. The findings are then compared to attributes elicited from Australian travellers in an earlier study. While there were a few key differences between the two samples, the commonality of stopover destination attribute salience will enable the development of a questionnaire to measure stopover destination image. Importantly, a number of the elicited stopover destination attributes have not been commonly used in generic destination image studies. The study highlights the value of engaging with the traveller in the questionnaire design stage, and goes some way to support the proposition that, due to the short stay nature of stopovers during long haul travel, destination attribute salience might differ to that for other travel situations.

## 1. Introduction

Long-haul air travel is a major component of international passenger movements, accounting for an estimated 17% of global international visitor arrivals in 2014 according to a recent ITB world travel trends report (see [IPK International, 2015](#)). Of interest in this project is long-haul air travel between Europe and Australasia, and due to resources the focus of this study is narrowed to outbound travel from France. In the 20-year period between 1995 and 2014 the number of international departures by the French in a calendar year increased by 50%, from 18.7 million in 1995 to 28.2 million in 2014 ([World Bank, 2016](#)). France is an important market for long-haul destinations in the southern hemisphere. In Australia, for example, during the year ended 31 July 2016 there were just over 120,000 French visitor arrivals, ranking France as the 15th largest source of visitors (see [Tourism Australia, 2016](#)). In New Zealand, France was ranked 13th in terms of visitor numbers for the year ended August 2016, with 36,360 arrivals (see [Statistics New Zealand, 2016](#)).

A major research project by [Tourism Australia \(2014\)](#) into how international travellers perceive Australia found while Australia was

then the 22nd most visited country by French nationals in 2012, it was the third most preferred long-haul destination for future travel, behind Canada and the USA. However, key obstacles preventing French travellers from planning a visit to Australia were identified as: expensive airfares, high cost of living expenses, and long flight time. Flying time between Europe and Australia ranges upwards from 20+ hours and necessitates transiting one or more countries en route. Depending on the specific airfare rules, such transits enable passengers to consider a stopover in each direction of at least one night to break the long journey.

The traditional stopover destinations between France and Australasia are in the eastern hemisphere. France provides the second highest number of European visitors to Hong Kong ([Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2016](#)), and the third highest number of European visitors to Singapore ([Singapore Tourism Board, 2016](#)). The average length of stay for international visitors to Hong Kong is four nights ([Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2015](#)) and in Singapore is three days ([Singapore Tourism Board, 2014](#)), which highlights the transient nature of visitation to the two strategically placed destinations. This main route from Europe to Australasia via the eastern hemisphere has been traditionally

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known as the ‘Kangaroo Route’. The first flight on this route from Brisbane to London by Qantas was in 1935 and featured at least 10 stopovers, including Paris (Sutton, 2016). Qantas’ first use of the term, which has been trade-marked by the airline, was the 1947 launch of a Sydney to London flight, where the main overnight stopover was Singapore. In recent years a number of new stopover destinations for long haul travel between Europe and Australasia have emerged in competition to Singapore and Hong Kong, most noticeably Dubai and Abu Dhabi through the growth of United Arab Emirates carriers Etihad and Emirates. ‘Traveller’ magazine recently described the 2013 alliance between Qantas and Emirates as ‘one of Australian travel’s biggest shakeups’, opening up Dubai as a new stopover destination in competition to Singapore (Traveller.com, 2013). Major stopover options in the eastern hemisphere now include: Singapore, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, Dubai, and Abu Dhabi. Key stopover destinations when travelling via the longer western hemisphere route include New York and Los Angeles.

In general there has been a lack of published research into the phenomenon of stopovers during long-haul travel. There is a lack of an accepted definition of what constitutes a stopover, and a lack of insights into stopover destination preferences and traveller behaviour. Given the increasing range of stopover destinations available to consumers worldwide, this is an important research gap. While the topic of destination image has been the most popular in the destination marketing literature (Pike & Page, 2014), there has been little published in the context of stopover destinations. The aim of this study was to identify those attributes of stopover destinations deemed salient to French travellers when considering long haul travel to Australasia, and to compare these to the findings from a similar study in Australia; to facilitate the development of a context-specific questionnaire to measure stopover destination image.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Destination image

Destination image was one of the first topics to be published in the destination marketing literature (see for example, Gearing, Swart, & Var, 1974, Matejka, 1973, Mayo, 1973), and in the ensuing four decades has become established as one of the key pillars of destination marketing research (Pike & Page, 2014). This sustained academic interest supports Hunt (1975) assertion that perceptions of destinations by travellers are so important in the destination selection process they can affect the viability of the destination. In other words, destination image is as important as tangible destination features. This is based on the marketing axiom that ‘perception is reality’, meaning what an individual believes to be true will influence their decision making (see Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572 in Patton, 2002).

Major reviews of the destination image literature have been undertaken by Chon (1990), Gallarza, Saura, and Garcia (2002), (2007a); Pike (2002), Tasci, Gartner, and Cavusgil (2007), Stepchenkova and Mills (2010), Zhang, Fu, Cai, and Lu (2014), and Josiassen, Assaf, Woo, and Kock (2015). A recurring theme in these reviews is acknowledgement the majority of studies adopt a quantitative approach using questionnaires with destination attribute rating scales. However, there has been a noticeable lack of attention towards the influence of travel context on destination image (Pike & Page, 2014). That is, many destination image studies have been undertaken without a specific travel situation in mind.

The concern here is the proposition that an individual might consider different destination attributes for different travel situations (see Barich & Kotler, 1991, Crompton, 1992). Destination attractiveness is assumed to vary according to the travel context. Therefore, if attribute importance differs between travel situations, such as between a family summer holiday, a weekend short break, and a honeymoon for example, the destination image questionnaire should be tailored to reflect

this. Examples of context-specific destination image studies have included: conventions (Chacko & Fenich, 2000), short breaks (McClennan, 1998; Pike & Ryan, 2004; Pike, Gentle, Kelly, & Beatson, 2017), skiing (Hudson and Shephard (1998), winter long-stay (Crompton, Fakeye, and Lue (1992), and spring breaks (Dillon, Domzal, & Madden, 1986) for example. However, the majority of the hundreds destination image studies to date have been undertaken without advising participants to think of a given travel situation. There has been a lack of attention towards the context of stopover destination image, and this remains an important gap in the destination marketing literature. Given the short stay nature of stopovers during long haul travel, and following the argument of Barich and Kotler (1991) and Crompton (1992) above, it is suggested destination attribute salience might differ to that for other travel situations.

### 2.2. Long-haul travel and stopovers

While the preferences of long-haul travellers can differ to those for shorter trips (see Ho & McKercher, 2012, McKercher, Chan, & Lam, 2008, McKercher & Lew, 2003, Yan, 2011), there is a lack of a widely accepted definition of long-haul travel (Bianchi & Pike, 2011; Bianchi, Pike, & Lings, 2014). Long haul air trips have been defined by distance, such as 3700 km (see Smith & Rodger, 2009) and also by flying time, which has ranged between four and eight hours (see Boerjan, 1995, Ferrari, Chevallier, Chapelier, & Baudouy, 1999, Scur et al., 2001, Medlik, 1996). By both types of measures, flying from Europe to Australasia is representative of long-haul travel.

There is also no accepted definition of the term ‘stopover’ in the tourism literature. The International Air Transport Association has defined a stopover as being at least 24 hours at an intermediary port (see Beaver, 2005). A stop lasting less than 24 hours is generally regarded as an airport transit or layover. This study adopted a working definition of a stopover as a stay of between one and four nights while en route to an onward long-haul destination. This is based on the definition for the average length of stay for short-break holidays (see White, 2000), and is in keeping with the average length of stay for the traditional stopover destinations, Singapore and Hong Kong.

### 2.3. Destination attribute salience

The majority of destination image studies have used a questionnaire with Likert-type rating scales for a battery of cognitive attributes (Pike, 2002, 2007). However, despite over 40 years of research in this field there is not yet an accepted destination image scale index. The aim should be to present survey participants with a battery of attributes that are likely to be ‘salient’, and therefore relevant, for a given travel situation, in their destination decision process. While there is likely to be a large range of attributes that will be important to travellers, many of these are not considered in decision making and are therefore not salient during decision making (see Mayo & Jarvis, 1981, Myers & Alpert, 1968). Salience concerns the order in which the mind considers different attributes in decision making, and the most salient of important attributes will be those that are top of mind when a travel situation is being considered. While there will be a commonality of salience of some destination attributes across different travel situations, the lack of research attention to stopover destination image means the literature cannot necessarily be relied on as a source for attribute selection for a stopover destination image questionnaire; even though many studies have used this approach to design the questionnaire. As mentioned, the vast majority of destination image studies have not specified a travel situation to survey participants. While the wealth of literature is a valuable resource for identifying important destination image attributes, what is also required is a qualitative method to engage with travellers to identify features deemed salient when considering a stopover during long-haul travel.

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