

Received: 6 August 2018 | Revised: 30 January 2019 | Accepted: 15 April 2019

DOI: 10.1002/jtr.2289

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

WILEY

# Chinese venturers to Pacific Small Island Developing States: Travel and lifestyle

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**Funding information**

School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Grant/Award Number: 1-ZE5X

**Abstract**

This study emphasizes the necessity to understand the needs of the growing Chinese market, while also assessing how ready Small Island Developing States of the South Pacific are for these new visitors. Through a mixed method approach, combining individual visitor surveys and focus groups, this study investigates the lifestyle characteristics of outbound Chinese tourists to the Cook Islands and the motivation and travel behavior of these travelers. We refine a model for the travel lifestyle of Chinese tourists that has applicability to Small Island Developing States elsewhere around the world.

**KEYWORDS**

Chinese tourists, lifestyle, motivation, Pacific, SIDS

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

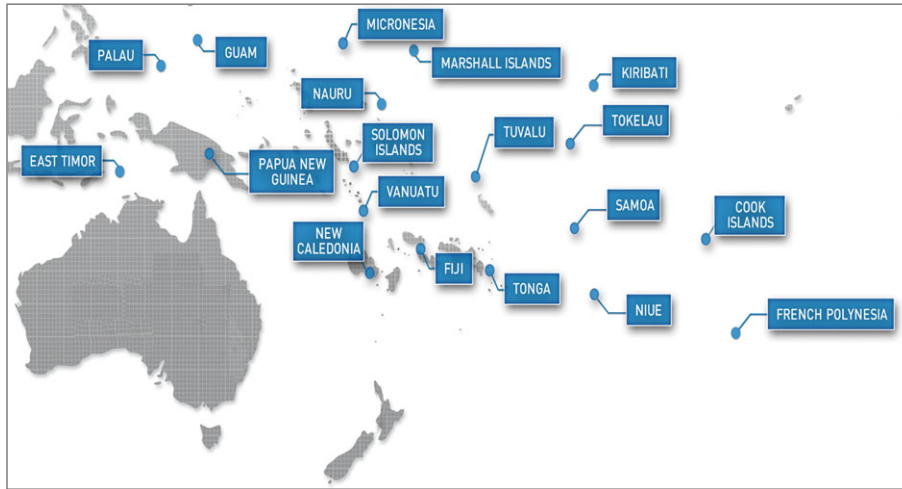
Tourism features prominently in the national development plans of many Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Pacific (Hampton & Jeyacheya, 2013). SIDS tend to share similar vulnerabilities and characteristics, including limited resources, remoteness, susceptibility to natural disasters, vulnerability to external shocks, excessive dependence on international trade, and fragile environments (United Nations, 2015). The Pacific SIDS includes 14 countries: the Cook Islands, Fiji, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu (United Nations, 2015; see Map 1). Due to a lack of robust data, it is difficult for Pacific SIDS to monitor whether tourism is reaching the strategic objectives of national governments or international development agencies and aid donors. This is especially the case with respect to community development and the sustainable management of natural and cultural resources (UNWTO, 2014).

From a source market perspective, the People's of Republic China (China) has emerged as an increasingly important player in the South Pacific region over the last decade through the expansion in trade and economic ties, aid, and diplomatic initiatives (Zhang, 2015). Visits by Chinese President Xi Jinping to the region in 2014 and 2015 symbolize the growing presence of this "strategic partnership" and the strengthening of economic and political ties (Zhang, 2015). Commentators have pointed out that this stronger presence provides valuable new opportunities for regional economic development (Zhang, 2007). China's trade with the eight SIDS<sup>1</sup> that have mutual diplomatic ties increased more than seven times from 2000 (US\$248 million) to 2012 (US\$1.767 billion; Yu, Chang, & Wang, 2014). There has also been a significant growth in investment from China including the acquisition of various natural resources and real estate (Zhou, 2015).

<sup>1</sup>Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu, and Federated States of Micronesia.

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**MAP 1** Refined model of travel lifestyle: Chinese tourists in Pacific Small Island Developing States [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

Chinese businesses have an increasing presence in the Pacific SIDS in terms of investment in tourism resources such as accommodation, and the Chinese government has also provided development assistance and loans to support improvements in transport infrastructure and the cornerstone facilities such as convention centers. Global spending by Chinese tourists has reached new heights in recent years in 2017 with a total of USD258 billion and ranking number one all tourism source markets (UNWTO, 2018). Pacific SIDS are seeking to attract this lucrative market. Since March 14, 2015, nationals of China and Fiji can enter each other's country without a visa, as agreed by both governments (South Pacific Tourism Organization, 2015). Further initiatives, such as the launch of Fiji's first travel guidebook in Chinese, are expected to attract even more Chinese tourists to Fiji (South Pacific Tourism Organization, 2015). The Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Niue, Palau, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu offer visa on arrival for Chinese tourists; likewise, other Pacific SIDS, including Fiji, Samoa, and Tonga, offer visa free access travel to Chinese residents (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). As Pacific SIDS governments prepare to welcome more Chinese tourists, the questions arise as to whether they are targeting the right market from China and whether they are prepared for the needs of these visitors.

Domestic Chinese destinations, such as Sanya, and short-haul international destinations, such as Thailand, Philippines, and Malaysia, all provide sun, sea, and sand (3S) for tourists. Why then are Chinese tourists prepared to take long-haul flights to visit the Pacific SIDS? What kinds of experiences are they looking for? To address these questions, this study aims to understand the motivations and behaviors of Chinese tourists who visit Pacific SIDS, using the case of the Cook Islands. It compares the experiences and satisfaction levels of Chinese and non-Chinese tourists who travel to the Pacific SIDS destinations with an emphasis on the Cook Islands. Finally, this study profiles Chinese lifestyle tourists and discusses related theoretical and empirical implications.

This study is the first to investigate the characteristics of Chinese outbound lifestyle tourists traveling to Pacific SIDS. Vada-Pareti (2015) used a survey questionnaire to identify the socio-demographics

of Chinese visitors to Fiji. However, this study only provided a basic understanding of the profile of Chinese tourists to a specific Pacific destination. Although the Pacific SIDS have the least experience with Chinese tourism in the region, they are experiencing some of the highest growth rates among all visitor source markets. In 2015, the Chinese market posted the highest relative growth of 73.6% (4,520,250 visitors) to the South Pacific region (South Pacific Tourism Organization, 2016). This study aims to provide an understanding of the readiness of the Cook Islands and the Pacific SIDS more generally to attract the Chinese lifestyle tourism market. This research is extremely timely, as it can guide marketing plans, product development initiatives, community awareness programs, and human resource development plans. Studies of China outbound travel have mainly focused on developed country contexts. This study on Chinese tourism in Pacific SIDS aims to fill this research gap and generate outcomes and insights that benefit SIDS around the world.

## 2 | BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH

### 2.1 | Chinese tourists in Pacific SIDS

The latest figures show that China outbound tourism in 2017 surged to a new record of 135.13 million (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2017). These outbound Chinese travelers have extended their trips around the world, including the Pacific SIDS. For example, Fiji's annual tourist arrivals reached a new high of 842,884 in 2017, a 6.4% increase compared with 2016 (South Pacific Tourism Organization, 2018). The Chinese market grew from 4,000 visitor arrivals in 2009 to 48,796 in 2017, with more than 10-fold increase (South Pacific Tourism Organization, 2015, 2018; UNWTO, 2015a, b). Palau welcomed just shy of 122,726 visitors in 2017, up to 16% from 2013 (South Pacific Tourism Organization, 2018; UNWTO, 2015a, b). This increase was largely on the back of Chinese visitors (Jiji, 2015), whose number increased more than 300% to 57,866 visitor arrivals, over Palau's total population

(South Pacific Tourism Organization, 2018; UNWTO, 2015a, b). Although profits are up, some are worried that the long-term damage caused by the increased arrivals may be too great to the Pacific SIDS (Jiji, 2015). These figures in the Pacific SIDS raise questions about what motivates these Chinese tourists to visit the region.

## 2.2 | Arrivals to the Cook Islands

Tourism accounts for 69.1% of Cook Islands' GDP in 2017 (South Pacific Tourism Organization, 2018). Tourist arrivals to the Cook Islands increased by 17.1% (or 21,346) to 146,473 in 2016, compared with a 3.0% growth in 2015 (South Pacific Tourism Organization, 2017). This increase partly reflects the change in the traveling habits of visitors combined with competitive airfares and additional airlines servicing the Cook Islands. Chinese arrivals to the Cook Islands continuously increased with a consecutive growth rate of 40% in 2015 (610) and 2016 (852; Ministry of Finance & Economic Management, 2017). In terms of the purpose of visit, all four segments showed strong growth in 2016, hovering around the 17% mark. The leisure segment continued to have the largest share of 86% (or 125,901) arrivals. The remaining 14% was shared among the other segments, including visiting friends and relatives, business, and other purposes (South Pacific Tourism Organization, 2017).

## 2.3 | Lifestyle and travel

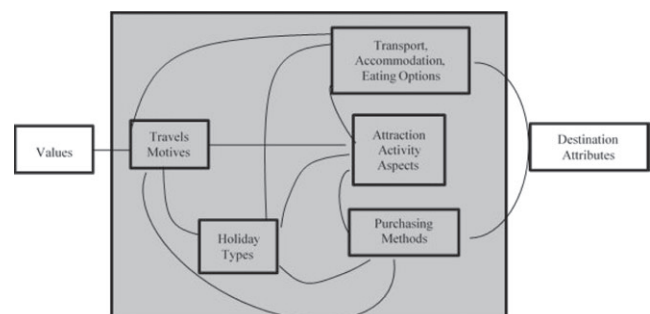
People have many motives for visiting 3S destinations, including those in the Pacific SIDS. It seems obvious that 3S vacations provide opportunities for travel activities that are not possible in the context of everyday life (Prebensen, Skallerud, & Chen, 2010). By analogy, lifestyle is defined as “any distinctive and therefore recognizable mode of living” (Sobel, 2013, p. 3). This definition suggests that a lifestyle consists of “expressive” behaviors that are directly observable or deducible from observation (Sobel, 2013). Van Acker, Mokhtarian, and Witlox (2014) studied how travel behaviors were affected by lifestyles. These authors drew on the works of sociology scholars, such as Weber, Bourdieu, Ganzeboom, and Schulze, to describe the communicative character of lifestyles: Individuals express their social status through specific patterns of behavior, consumption, and leisure. In marketing, lifestyle is “a composite of motivations, needs, and wants and is influenced by factors such as culture, family, reference groups, and social class. The analysis of consumer lifestyles is an important factor in determining how consumers make their purchase decisions” (WebFinance Inc., 2017).

As early as the 1980s, lifestyle variables were used in tourism market research to show something that was real, meaningful, and relevant, beyond demographics. Early studies, such as Woodside and Pitts (1976), categorized types of travelers in terms of their different lifestyles. The lifestyles of domestic travelers included dining in restaurants, picnics, and boating activities. Tourists who travel abroad usually prefer visiting art galleries and museums, attending classical concerts and parties, and going boating and hunting and are inclined to have higher incomes (Woodside & Pitts, 1976). Scholars have

considered lifestyle variables as more effective predictors of segmentation than demographics (Abbey, 1979; Lee & Sparks, 2007; Srihadi, Sukandar, & Soehadi, 2016). These variables can provide tour designers with additional insights for the development and management of travel marketing activities (Abbey, 1979; Chen, Huang, & Cheng, 2009).

Lifestyle can be a useful tool to help tourism marketers categorize customers and study the differences in their consumption behaviors by considering all of the elements in their daily lives, including activities, interests, and living habits (Chen et al., 2009). Through a study of the Pennsylvania tourism market, Shih (1986) found that key lifestyle segments included *belongers*, *achievers*, and the *socially conscious*. Woodside and Lysonski (1989) also presented a model for travel destinations and choice based on lifestyles, which they considered an element of traveler variables, including value systems, life cycle, income, age, and previous destination experience. Srihadi et al. (2016) considered six factors in analyzing lifestyle travelers to Jakarta: culture adventurous, shopaholic, aspiring indulgers, conservative, sport adventurous, and foodie. Linking to lifestyle segments, Plog (1974) developed psychographic groupings for tourism fields. According to Plog's (1974, 2001) findings, a traditional tour destination would be appealing first to *Venturers* and last to *Dependables*. In general, *Venturers* will first discover a new travel destination. After the trip, *Venturers* begin to talk about their trip experience with people around them, and other tourists then follow the trend.

Lawson, Thyne, Young, and Juric (2000) first proposed a model for travel lifestyles, where travel motivations were primarily associated with attractions and activities that supported the general structure of the means-end chain of the focus of the model (see Figure 1). Other studies also proposed that leisure travelers usually consider the attractions, eating options (food), factors of enjoyment (activity), and exploration (transport) as their motivations for selecting a destination (Heung, Qu, & Chu, 2001; Kim & Prideaux, 2005). Transport is an enabler of tourism and a key element of lifestyle (Zhou & Huang, 2016). Although some lifestyle segments choose a varied range of transport modes, some adventure travelers will base their decision making on convenience and freedom (Lawson et al., 2000). In their study of New Zealand, Lawson et al. (2000) found that different payment methods indicated different lifestyles. However, Lawson et al.'s (2000) model only introduces a basic conceptual framework of key lifestyle elements. No further studies were conducted to provide comprehensive details and empirical support or test and verify the model.



Source: Lawson et al. (2000)

**FIGURE 1** Countries of Pacific Small Island Developing States

## 2.4 | Travel motivation

According to cultural determinism theory, culture shapes human behavior. People learn how to behave through their interactions with society. This covers a variety of different realms, including how people live, what they eat, and how they think and communicate (Steigerwald, 2005). Specifically, a person's values, attitudes, and orientation are determined by their lifestyle (Cohen, 2011). A recent study by Iversen, Hem, and Mehmetoglu (2016) on nature-based travelers to Norway found that travel motives and cultural values could differ between different lifestyles. This study looks at what attractions and activities would motivate Chinese tourists to visit and participate in travel experiences.

Motivation can be defined as a state of need or a condition that compels an individual to take a particular action that elicits satisfaction (Moutinho, 2000). Motivation may refer to psychological or biological needs and wants, including integral forces that arouse, direct, and integrate a person's behavior and activity (Dann, 1981; Pearce, 1982; Uysal & Hagan, 1993). People may take a trip to fulfill their physiological (food, climate, and health) and psychological (adventure and relaxation) needs (Mayo & Jarvis, 1981). It is important to examine peoples' motivations to understand their travel decision-making process and assess whether their expectations have been met (Snepenger, King, Marshall, & Uysal, 2006). Motivation is a dynamic concept and may vary depending on the person, market segment, destination, or decision-making process (Uysal & Hagan, 1993; Witt & Wright, 1992). More research is thus needed to study motivations in various countries, markets, segments, destinations, and lifestyles.

Studies have identified key attributes that motivate international travelers including those from China. Kim and Prideaux (2005) stated that "cultural experience" and "novelty seeking" are important factors that motivate people to travel to foreign countries. Different cultural backgrounds may also influence peoples' motivations for traveling abroad. Srihadi et al. (2016) found that travelers with an Asian background tended to be in the shopaholic segment. Other factors that can motivate Chinese tourists include "enjoying various tourist resources," "social status," "leisure facilities," "gaming," "culture," and "history" (Kim & Prideaux, 2005). Zhang Qiu and Lam (1999) pointed out that Chinese travelers consider knowledge, prestige, and enhancement of human relationships as the most important push factors. High-tech image, expenditure, and accessibility were identified as the most important pull factors. Moreover, travelers from China were looking for unique, modern, friendly, and convenient holiday destinations (Zhang Qiu & Lam, 1999). More recently, broader developments in China have also been considered. Zhou and Huang's (2016) study of self-drive travel in China confirmed the change of lifestyle including changing family size, purchasing private cars and spending on more upgraded expenditures on every category in Chinese society. They encouraged authorities and businesses to plan for and meet these new societal demands. Although China is the world's major outbound travel market, research is lacking to understand this lifestyle segment of Chinese travelers.

## 3 | METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method approach was adopted to understand the travel lifestyle of Chinese tourists to the Cook Islands. Babbie (2013) discussed mixed qualitative and quantitative methods and concluded that empirical research was strengthened when qualitative and quantitative results informed each other. The key method involved a questionnaire survey. We analyzed the data from the ongoing New Zealand Tourism Research Institute (NZTRI) web-based International Visitor Survey (IVS) in the Cook Islands (Cook Islands Government). A simplified Chinese version of the IVS was added to the original English version in the last quarter of 2015. Visitors (all nonresidents) to the Cook Islands were asked to complete an online survey within 2 weeks of completing their visit. This IVS covered 24,213 respondents (71 Chinese) from June 2012 to November 2018. During the years of data collection in the Cook Islands (2012 to 2018), 71 Chinese visitors (from mainland China) was captured that equates to 3% of the total Chinese arrivals during the period. During the same survey period, 24,213 visitors participated the survey which is also 3% of the total arrivals.

To further explore tourists' perceptions, experience, and reasons behind those behavioral patterns reported in the IVS, focus groups were conducted among the target tourists: Chinese residents who had experienced outbound travel in the past 2 years.

Due to the small number of tourists in China who have traveled to Pacific SIDS, informants for the current study include not only those who have visited a Pacific SIDS but also those experienced travelers who have traveled to other island destinations, which provide similar tourism resources to Pacific SIDS. Results from the focus groups can address the perceptions of both the existing and potential tourists for Pacific SIDS. In which, three informants had been to a Pacific SIDS such as Fiji, and 60% of the respondents traveled to Pacific Islands including Hainan, Hawaii, and islands in Southeastern Asia. Five focus groups, including 45 individuals from 15 cities and regions, were conducted in Hangzhou and Shenzhen between November 2016 and January 2017 (see Appendix A for the informant profile).

Prior to each focus group, to ensure that informants were familiar with the Pacific SIDS, a 15-min introduction was delivered to the informants by the research team regarding destination culture, tourism resources, and other relevant travel information. The focus group structure included three parts. First, to familiarize informants with the topic, they were asked about their recent outbound travel experiences. Second, after the warmup, informants were asked to put themselves into the scenario of visiting the Pacific SIDS. Basic information about all destinations was provided and a series of questions relating to their visit to the Pacific SIDS were asked. This included their travel motivations, facilitators, constraints, information channels, and any suggestions for the related operators and authorities. Lastly, their demographic information was collected. Once enough information was gathered, the research team stopped conducting new focus groups.

Audio files of the interviews and focus groups were transcribed into textual data. Transcripts were interpreted and analyzed by

thematic analysis using the qualitative analytical software Nvivo 11. The coauthors conducted intrateam communication on a regular basis during the research process to ensure the accuracy and objectivity of the coding process.

## 4 | FINDINGS

### 4.1 | Travel motivation

We have an IVS focused on the Cook Islands and focus groups that cover all Pacific islands travel, both findings are now used to reveal the travel motivations for Chinese travelers to Pacific SIDS. As reported in the IVS, Chinese tourists traveled to the Cook Islands mainly for holidays (66%), honeymoons (14%), and business or conference purposes (14%).

The focus groups provided more insights into motivations to travel to Pacific SIDS. Informants indicated that their motivations to travel to Pacific SIDS included enjoying time traveling with family and friends, exploring other cultures, relaxing, and learning. In particular, most of the informants mentioned that enjoying family time was their motivation to travel to Pacific SIDS: "... We can share the same travel experience in a destination. It can be a small island, which allows us to escape from the daily routine. I value the feeling that we are together wherever we are. When we are back from a trip, we can always recall our memory of being together in that place" (Focus Group 2).

Due to differences in culture and the exotic nature of the Pacific SIDS destinations, exploring different cultures was an important motivation for Chinese tourists. As reported in the focus group, "I like to seek out different cultures in a trip, not only to observe as an outsider, but to immerse myself into that culture and to feel it by interacting with the locals." "I am interested in the local customs and how people live in a different place" (Focus Group 5). In addition, relaxing was a motivation for some travelers to visit Pacific SIDS destinations: "Compared with the island destinations in China, such as Sanya, those islands are really low in tourist density. This is a luxury for us. We do not need to fight for everything and travel among a huge number of tourists. Only in these exotic destinations, you can entirely relax and enjoy the holiday" (Focus Group 1). Table 1 lists the other motivations that Chinese tourists mentioned for traveling to Pacific SIDS.

### 4.2 | Tourist profile and travel behavior

The Cook Islands IVS data reveal that Chinese tourists tend to be younger and better educated and have a lower household income than other visitor markets. The IVS shows that 73% of Chinese tourists were aged between 18 and 39. In contrast, 72% of non-Chinese tourists were aged higher than 39. The majority of the tourists to the Cook Islands had tertiary or university education. For Chinese tourists, this figure was 92%, compared with 69% from other source markets. For 36% of tourists who traveled to the Cook Islands, their household income was NZD 50,001–100,000 (USD 33,731–67,460) per annum. For Chinese tourists, 42% earned less than NZD 50,000 (USD

**TABLE 1** Focus group motivations for traveling to Pacific Small Island Developing States

Name	Sources	References
Travel motivations	5	93
Enjoying time with family	5	23
Exploring other cultures (including cuisine)	4	13
Relaxing	5	13
Learning	5	8
Enjoying time with friends	3	5
Team building (colleagues or company event)	2	5
Study tour or education preparation for kids	3	5
Enriching experiences	3	4
Shopping	3	3
Enjoying the natural scenery	2	3
Novelty seeking	2	2
Better value for money (comparing with domestic travel)	1	2
Escaping from a high-density population	1	2
Medical tourism	1	2
Self-rewarding	1	1
Escaping from daily routine	1	1
Celebration	1	1

33,730) per annum. For non-Chinese tourists, 47% earned more than NZD 100,000 (USD 67,460). Latest census figure shows that per capita annual income in China is RMB 25,973.8 (USD 4,400) in 2017 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2018). These Chinese visitors to the Cook Islands are therefore in a high income group. During their trip to the Cook Islands, Chinese tourists spent more money per person per day than non-Chinese tourists on accommodation (NZD 99 = USD 67 vs. NZD 39 = USD 26), shopping (NZD 24 = USD 16 vs. NZD 13 = USD 9), domestic flights (NZD 41 = USD 28 vs. NZD 5 = USD 3), and cruises (NZD 9 = USD 6 vs. NZD 2 = USD 1).

In terms of transport mode, Air New Zealand dominates the air transport market to the Cook Islands. They were followed by Virgin Australia. More Chinese tourists (16%) chose to fly with a budget carrier (Jetstar) compared with only 2% of non-Chinese. Chinese visitors to the Cook Islands were more likely to be visiting the for the first time (68%) than other tourists (49%). Whereas 71% of non-Chinese tourists traveled to the Cook Islands with their spouse/partner, only 44% of Chinese tourists were in couples. A high portion (14%) of Chinese tourists were on a honeymoon trip, whereas non-Chinese tourists (4%) are more likely to travel to the Cook Islands as a leisure destination, rather than a specialized honeymoon destination. Regarding travel companions, Chinese tourists tended to travel either in a small group, including two to four companions, or traveled alone. More Chinese (62%) than non-Chinese tourists (11%) claimed that they were traveling alone.

Chinese tourists spent an average of 7 days in the Cook Islands compared with 9 days for a non-Chinese tourist. Although Chinese

tourists tended to stay shorter, they are more likely to visit and spend time in outer islands beyond Rarotonga, especially Aitutaki and to a lesser extent Atiu. Chinese flying to Aitutaki is with a much higher proportion (72%) than the non-Chinese tourists (22%). Aitutaki is heavily more favored by Chinese tourists, even though it can only be accessed by a 50-min domestic flight from Rarotonga.

Chinese tourists participated in different kinds of activities when visiting the Cook Islands. These included water-based and land-based activities and touring, cultural interaction, and shopping. Chinese tourists particularly enjoyed water-based activities, such as beaches (98% participated), swimming (91%), snorkeling (86%), lagoon cruises (86%), and kayaking (56%). The preferred land-based and touring activities among Chinese tourists included restaurants, bars and cafes (98%), sightseeing (80%), vehicle rentals (52%), public transport (71%), and cultural events (71%). Cultural interaction with the locals particularly appealed to Chinese tourists, including visits to the local market (78%), participating in the island night feast and show (74%), and dance/language/art classes (47%). The IVS investigated shopping as a key activity for Chinese tourists, where the most popular categories were local produce, crafts, pearls, and arts.

The focus group showed similar results, highlighting that one of the main motivations for Chinese tourists traveling to Pacific SIDS is exploring different cultures. As reported by Focus Group 1, "One of the most appealing things for me is to experience the completely different culture in those Pacific islands. I can physically interact with the locals and understand the local culture in a deep way." "I got to know these destinations mainly from the Internet and television shows. Their way of living is so different. People looks happy with simple life. In my trip, I want to be one of them. When in Rome do as the Romans do." (Focus Group 4).

In general, all visitor groups were satisfied with their experience in the Cook Islands. The friendliness of the local people was most appreciated by the tourists. The satisfaction levels for the most popular tourism activities were similar for Chinese and non-Chinese tourists across a range of areas including visiting the beach, swimming, snorkeling, lagoon cruise, dining, sightseeing, and vehicle rental. However, Chinese tourists were less satisfied with unfamiliar activities, such as stand-up paddle boarding, deep-sea fishing, diving, whale watching, kite surfing, cultural interactions, and public transportation. In terms of shopping, Chinese tourists were less satisfied with local produce and pearls than non-Chinese tourists.

### 4.3 | Information and payment channel

In general, to obtain travel information, non-Chinese tourists relied more on recommendations from friends, their own travel experience, and travel agents. In contrast, Chinese tourists preferred social media, general travel websites, and travel books. The focus group results were largely consistent with the IVS findings. In particular, as shown in Table 2, the Internet was reported as the main source of information for Chinese tourists. Given the rapid development and wide Internet coverage across the country, China is now pioneering the online media

**TABLE 2** Focus group information channels

Name	Sources	References
Information channels	5	163
Internet	5	102
Travel blog website	5	26
Social media	5	22
Online travel agent	5	21
Search engine	4	8
Official website of destination	4	7
Local community forum	1	3
Online video websites	1	2
Resort website	1	1
Recommendation from relatives and friends	5	27
Traditional advertisement	3	15
Newspaper and magazine	2	10
TV	2	5
Travel agent	4	15
Book	1	2
TV shows	1	2

and e-commerce market. Travel blogs were the most commonly used source for researching travel information. Travel sites such as "Qyer.com," "Mafengwo," "Tuniu.com," and "Tripadvisor" were the most recognized platforms in the focus groups.

In addition to online blog platforms, social media was an important information channel for Chinese tourists. WeChat is the dominant social media platform in China. People can obtain travel information first-hand by following popular and authorized travel organizations, or by receiving travel photos, stories, and promotions shared by friends and relatives. The participants perceived these self-media platforms as more objective, reliable, and timely compared with traditional information channels, such as word-of-mouth marketing, travel agents, TVs, or radios. In addition, online travel agents were popular among Chinese consumers. They not only provided travel promotions and direct purchase access, but also included third-party reviews of their products. Chinese tourists favored this one-stop service.

Due to advancing e-commerce channels, 87% of Chinese tourists responding to the Cook Islands IVS paid for their travel to the Cook Islands online. In contrast, only 45% of non-Chinese tourists paid for their travel on the Internet. Whereas 41% of non-Chinese tourists asked travel agents to organize their trip, only 3% of Chinese tourists did the same. As Chinese tourists preferred to pay for their travel online, their prepaid expenditure (NZD 2,671 = USD 1,802) was much higher than that of non-Chinese tourists (NZD 1,997 = USD 1,347).

## 5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Market research has gradually switched from applying single demographics to considering multidimensional attributes as its

segmentation tool to pursue a more precise understanding of purchasing behavior (Abbey, 1979; Lawson et al., 2000). Lifestyle, understood as a promotional force driving behaviors (Lawson et al., 2000), is treated as an effective market segmentation tool, as it involves complex clustering procedures and extensive information, which can be directly used to profile the desired market. In the field of tourism, destination marketing organizations and tour operators are desperate to target the right markets. When compared with any single segmentation tool, travel lifestyle is a good way to comprehensively profile the market.

This study considered travel motivations, demographics, travel behaviors, information channels, and payment preferences of Chinese tourists to Pacific SIDS. Building on the concept of cultural determinism adopted by Steigerwald (2005) and Cohen (2011), travel motivation is an internal driving force that critically determines an individual's preferred lifestyle and travel behaviors (Iversen et al., 2016; Zhou & Huang, 2016). Starting with travel motivation, demographic characteristics and behavioral patterns also determine the profile of travel lifestyle Chinese tourists to Pacific SIDS.

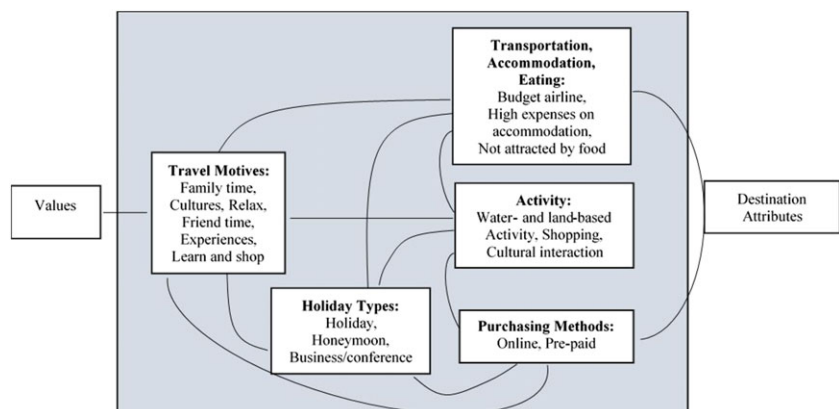
Through an analysis of the IVS and focus groups, this study establishes the lifestyle profile of Chinese tourists traveling to Pacific SIDS. This group of tourists was relatively young, better educated, and had lower household incomes than tourists from other countries. These tourists traveled to Pacific SIDS to enjoy time with family and friends, explore different cultures, relax, enrich their experiences, learn, and shop. Most of the Chinese tourists were first-time visitors and were more likely to use a budget airline on the final leg of their journey to the Cook Islands. Although they spent less on transportation, Chinese tourists tended to spend more on accommodation, shopping, and cruise activities. They relied heavily on travel information from different online sources. Most of their travel payment was prepaid online.

On the basis of this profile, we develop a model of travel lifestyle for Chinese tourists in the Cook Islands (see Figure 2). Their values, attitudes, and orientations determine their motivations to travel. For the Chinese lifestyle tourists to Pacific SIDS, the primary motivations were enjoying time with family and friends, exploring different cultures, relaxing, gaining experiences, learning, and shopping. These motivations directly influenced their type of holiday, such as where to go and their purposes for travel. Both the travel motivations and holiday types further shaped tourists' travel behaviors. The lifestyle

travelers preferred budget airlines to travel to the islands and spent more on accommodation, shopping, traveling in between the different islands, and lagoon cruising. They appreciated the local activities and attractions and the friendliness of the local people. Their behavior fits into Srihadi et al.'s (2016) cluster of "culture interest shopaholic" where Asian visitors who are interested in exploring different cultures and experiencing the local way of life while trying to shop even in local markets, store or malls. However, they were less satisfied with the local food and beverages, prices, public services, facilities, and infrastructure. They keenly participated in both water- and land-based activities. They also shopped and participated in activities that included opportunities for cultural interaction. As a distinctive feature for this kind of lifestyle traveler, online resources were the main source for travel information and most of their travel payments were prepaid online. These behaviors also influenced each other and contributed to the destination attributes in the Lawson et al. (2000) model of travel lifestyle. This group represents pioneers of the outbound tourism market by visiting exotic destinations, depending heavily on online travel information, and using advancing online payment methods.

This group of travelers are consistent with the concept of *Venturers* characterized by Plog (1974, 2001) in his model of psychographic groups in tourism. These travelers first discover a new travel destination and spread information about their travel experience after the trip. Other *Dependable* tourists to the country then follow. Moreover, this group of tourists has some similar characteristics that are recognized as "typical Chinese styles." For instance, they are particular about their food and beverages and enjoy tourism activities, sightseeing, and shopping. All of these features together present a profile of Chinese lifestyle travelers to Pacific SIDS.

Theoretically, by considering both travel motivations and a series of travel behaviors and patterns, this study explores the lifestyle profile of Chinese tourists traveling to Pacific SIDS, with a focus on the Cook Islands, and contributes to the literature on travel lifestyle and tourist behavior in general. Results enrich and specify the existing lifestyle model proposed by Lawson et al. (2000) with empirical evidence from Chinese tourists in Pacific SIDS. This profile represents a distinctive tourist group in China that pioneers the outbound tourism market by visiting exotic destinations. This work is among the first attempts to investigate the lifestyle characteristics of



**FIGURE 2** Model of travel lifestyle [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

Chinese venturers by considering both the psychological and behavioral patterns into the segment profiling. It is noticed that, tourists' lifestyles are highly culture bonded. One destination may be appealing to tourists from different regions holding different lifestyles. Results from this study indicate that Chinese visitors to the Cook Islands present different perceptual and behavioral patterns compared with non-Chinese visitors. We recommend that these emerging Chinese lifestyle tourists deserve an in-depth investigation for any growing destination.

Travel lifestyle as a market segmentation tool is also discussed in this study. Profiling the travel lifestyle of Chinese tourists sheds light on issues regarding tourism planning and sustainable development in Pacific SIDS by helping destination marketing organizations and tourism operators understand the rapidly developing Chinese market, including their travel motivations, preferences, and behavioral patterns. From a community perspective, revealing the tourist lifestyle profile not only provides residents with information on tourist behavior but also underpins the reasons for such behaviors. In the long term, it may thus help residents gain awareness and become tolerant of different tourists.

The following limitations should also be considered. First, the focus-group informants were asked to answer the questions based on the destination information given by the research team. In the future, onsite visitor interviews could be conducted to capture tourists' real-time experience. Second, as indicated in the literature, travel lifestyle is a comparatively abstract term with different definitions and applications. The purpose of this study is to profile the particular tourist market and discuss the implications for both academia and industry. Exploring the diverse meanings of lifestyle and categorizing tourists into different lifestyles may be of interest for future studies. Last, though the focus of the current study is to explore the psychological and behavioral patterns of travel lifestyle, the lifestyle values and destination attributes as mentioned in Lawson's et al. (2000) model are also vital to understand tourists' experiences and behaviors in destinations. Thus, future studies are encouraged to further explore any antecedents and consequences of travel lifestyle.

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**How to cite this article:** Lau CKH, Fan DXF, Milne S, Qiu H, Sun M. Chinese venturers to Pacific Small Island Developing States: Travel and lifestyle. *Int J Tourism Res.* 2019;21:665–674. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2289>

## APPENDIX A

### INFORMANT PROFILE

Informant	Gender	Occupation	Education level	Personal monthly income (RMB)	City/region
1	Male	Public Relations Manager	University	15,001–20,000	Shenzhen
2	Male	Front Office Manager	University	20,001–25,000	Shenzhen
3	Male	Health Care Specialist	University	20,001–25,000	Shenzhen
4	Female	Duty Manager	University	25,001–30,000	Hainan
5	Male	Vice President of Business Development	Associate Degree	Above 30,001	Beijing
6	Male	Assistant General Manager	Associate Degree	25,001–30,000	Shenzhen
7	Female	Director of Rooms	University	20,001–25,000	Zhuhai
8	Female	Business Development Manager	Associate Degree	20,001–25,000	Shenzhen
9	Female	Area Director of Sales and Marketing Champion	Associate Degree	Above 30,001	Shenzhen
10	Male	General Manager	Associate Degree	25,001–30,000	Shenzhen

(Continued)

Informant	Gender	Occupation	Education level	Personal monthly income (RMB)	City/region
11	Female	Civil Servant	University	15,001–20,000	Shenzhen
12	Female	Marketing Manager	University	20,001–25,000	Shenzhen
13	Female	Vice President	University	Above 30,001	Zhuhai
14	Female	Business Development Deputy General Manager	University	25,001–30,000	Zhuhai
15	Female	Teacher	University	15,001–20,000	Shaoguan
16	Female	Manager	Associate Degree	20,001–25,000	Hangzhou
17	Female	Tourism Group Owners' Representative	University	25,001–30,000	Suzhou
18	Male	Financial Manager	University	15,001–20,000	Changzhou
19	Male	Assistant of President	University	15,001–20,000	Beijing
20	Male	General Manager	Associate Degree	25,001–30,000	Nanjing
21	Female	General Manager	University	25,001–30,000	Yixing
22	Female	Public Relations Manager	University	15,001–20,000	Shanghai
23	Male	Finance Director	University	25,001–30,000	Hangzhou
24	Male	Civil Servant	Associate Degree	15,001–20,000	Zhejiang
25	Female	Business Development Manager	University	20,001–25,000	Shanghai
26	Male	Front Office Manager	Associate Degree	20,001–25,000	Hangzhou
27	Female	Director of Marketing and Communications	Associate Degree	25,001–30,000	Shanghai
28	Female	Front Desk Agent	University	15,001–20,000	Changzhou
29	Female	Chairman	University	25,001–30,000	Shanghai
30	Female	Lecturer	Associate Degree	15,001–20,000	Shanghai
31	Male	Lawyer	University	25,001–30,000	Beijing
32	Female	Director of Sales & Marketing	University	25,001–30,000	Hangzhou
33	Female	Club Lounge Manager	Associate Degree	20,001–25,000	Hangzhou
34	Male	Revenue Director	University	25,001–30,000	Shanghai
35	Male	Duty Manager	University	20,001–25,000	Zhejiang
36	Male	Food and Beverage Manager	Associate Degree	15,001–20,000	Xian
37	Male	General Manager	Associate Degree	25,001–30,000	Hangzhou
38	Female	Account Manger	University	15,001–20,000	Guangzhou
39	Male	Human Resources Coordinator	University	20,001–25,000	Shanghai
40	Female	Marketing Director	University	20,001–25,000	Hangzhou
41	Female	Assistant Human Resources Director	University	20,001–25,000	Shenzhen
42	Female	Revenue Director	University	25,001–30,000	Shanghai
43	Female	Deputy Operation Manager	University	25,001–30,000	Sichuan
44	Female	Training Manager	University	20,001–25,000	Shenzhen
45	Male	Director of Events Sales	University	20,001–25,000	Guangzhou