

A perception of International Tourists toward Tourism Products in and around Yangon

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Abstract: *This research studied the perceptions of international tourists towards tourism products in and around Yangon. Field research consisted of a sample size of 385 respondents at 5% tolerable level of error by applying a simple random sampling method. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis. The findings show that overall perception by respondents is neutral to all tourism products of the study. Respondents are indifference in the perception of attractions, travel agents and restaurants when they are distinguished by age levels, gender, education level and purpose of travel. Similarly, there is no difference in perception of international tourists in the following aspects: accommodation when distinguished by age levels, gender; transportation when distinguished by nationality, age levels, gender and purpose of travel; entertainment when distinguished by nationality, gender, education levels and purpose of travel; gifts and souvenirs when distinguished by gender, education level and purpose of travel. Surprisingly, the findings suggest that difference in gender has no effect on perception of international tourists towards any products of study.*

Key words: *perception, tourism products, attractions, accommodation, transportation, travel agents/tour operators, restaurants, entertainment, gifts and souvenirs, international tourists, Yangon.*

1. Introduction

Historically, Myanmar was not a popular tourist destination as the sector was slow to develop due to the large influence from the military regime. Recently, since the country has opened, higher numbers of visitors are flocking to the country every year. As the trend of foreign visitors increases for Myanmar, the issue of quality and quantity supply for tourism products arises.

Tourism is travel for pleasure, sightseeing, recreation or business purposes that also provide tour related services for tourists from a supply-side (Mak, 2003). As tourism is getting more and more popular, it becomes a source of income for many countries by providing services for tourists. Myanmar, the second largest country in Southeast Asia, is one of the developing countries with an infant tourism industry.

Myanmar's tourism industry is not yet developed largely due to the country's isolation for many years due to economic sanctions and other restrictions. However, the situation has changed recently because of the internal political and economic reforms of the new civilian government as well as the external lifting of almost all international sanctions.

According to the data from the Myanmar Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, international tourist arrivals in the year 2013 were 2044307, entering the country through both international airports and

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This study measures the perceptions of international tourists towards tourism products in and around Yangon, Myanmar.

border check-points. Arrivals at the Yangon International Airport in 2013 doubled that of year 2012. Myanmar Ministry of Hotels and Tourism announced the total income from the tourism sector in 2013 accounted for 926 million US dollars which was the increase of 73% from 2012. During the meeting with the Singaporean business delegations and Myanmar officials on 10 May 2012, the Union Minister for the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism and Sports admitted that the infrastructure as well as the rules and regulations of the tourism sector in Myanmar needs improvement in order to develop the industry. Therefore, the Myanmar government is taking steps to upgrade tourism-related infrastructure such as roads, bridges, airports and other tourist facilities.

They are also standardizing hotel accommodation and tourist transport by introducing a star rating system and monitoring quality assurance. The tourism promotional events are being organized in collaboration with the private sector. In order to smooth the travels of visitors, an e-visa system will be used which is now at the final stage of testing before launch. Additionally, to improve the skills, knowledge and capacity of tourism personnel from public and private sectors, intensive training is being provided.

The focus of the study is to analyze international tourists' perceptions of attractions, accommodation, transportation, travel agents and tour operators, restaurants, entertainment, and souvenirs in Yangon. The key objectives in this study are: (1) to identify international tourists' demographics and travel patterns to Yangon, (2) to identify the perceptions of international tourists towards tourism products in and around Yangon (3) to understand the difference in perceptions of international tourists regarding demographic characteristics and purpose of travel, and (4) to explore the strengths

and weaknesses of the current tourism products available in and around Yangon.

The scope of the study is to explore how the independent variables; nationality, age, gender, educational level and purpose of travel, affect perceptions towards tourism products including attractions, accommodation, transportation, travel agents or tour operators, restaurants, entertainment as well as gifts and souvenirs which are selected as dependent variables. The main area of study is Yangon which is not only the most important gateway to Myanmar but also the center of trade and tourism.

This study is limited to the Yangon area only and accordingly, the results of the research might not represent the perceptions of international tourists towards other major tourist destinations. The scope of the study is also limited with regard to certain tourism products specifically attractions, accommodation, transportation, travel agents, restaurants and entertainment, and gift and souvenir shops. Thus, the findings cannot be applied to other products and services relating to the tourism industry as a whole.

2. Literature Review

- Perception

Perception is commonly defined as the process of selecting, organizing and interpreting the new incoming information to a meaningful understanding according to Kotler (2004), Middleton and Clarke (2001). Regarding the perception of purchase of a product, it is a combination of experience, learning, attitude and motivation obtained from a previous purchase (Middleton and Clarke, 2001).

The characteristics of tourism products should have potential to influence the experience and perception of tourists. Murphy (2000) analyzed how perception and quality is 'formed' when a product or service presenting to a tourist which is

either at or above consumer expectation. Further stated, Murphy (2000) defined perception as an idea to mirror short and simple positive evaluation towards tourist experience while travelling.

- Perception of Service Quality

According to Heskett, Sasser and Schlesinger (1997), the difference among expected, perceived and delivered qualities of services are defined as service quality.

“Value is commonly defined as the ratio of quality and the acquisition cost (price) to purchase this quality. Value and quality are used interchangeably in the tourism value chain. From a customer's perspective these quality values can be interpreted as expected service qualities relative to experienced service qualities” (Weiermair 2000, 399).

The concept of quality perceived is a comparison between the expectations and presentation received by customers; quality could be stated as being the overall evaluation done by a consumer about the excellence of a service (Wood, 1997). Therefore, quality is viewed as a degree of difference between perception and consumer expectation towards a product or service given.

- Perception of Price

Consumers in any industry generally judge products' value and quality by accessing the price information (Dawar and Parker, 1994). Price is regarded as a multidimensional clue, having both positive and negative roles in which price has been found to have strong predictive validity on consumers' market responses and behavior across cultures (Lichtenstein, Ridgway and Netemeyer, 1993).

- Perception of Destination

A tourism destination was conceptualized by Hu and Ritchie (1993) as a place where tourism facilities and services can be enjoyed by visitors. Destination perception is regarded as the process of receiving,

selecting, organizing and interpreting information in order to visualize destination (Mayo and Jarvis, 1981). Andreu, Bigne, and Cooper (2000) stated that people perceived images by using their previous knowledge of the places, or their experiences of the destination.

The evaluation of tourist knowledge will affect the image of the destination perceived by individuals. When a visitor thinks of a destination to travel to, the overall image of the destination is considered (Kozak and Rimmington, 1999).

- Tourism Product

The definition of tourism product by McGrath (1999) is that a product from any valued chain of the tourism industry like a destination, transportation, hotel, food and beverage, travel operator or an attraction of natural or manmade resources is a tourism product. In a simpler definition, Kotler (1984), stated tourism products could be anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption that might satisfy a want or need for example physical objects, services, persons, places, organization and ideas.

A “Tourism products include everything tourists purchase, see, experience and feel from the time they leave home until they come back home. They include accommodation and travel at the destination; everything purchased including food and beverages, souvenirs, amusement and entertainment” (French, Craig-Smith, Collier, 1995).

3. Conceptual Framework and Methodology

The relationship between independent variables: demographics and tourists' characteristics, and dependent variables; perceptions towards tourism products namely attractions,

accommodation, transportation, travel agency/tour operator, restaurants and entertainment as well as gifts and souvenirs is examined in this study. Previous studies have found that cultural differences, behavior, and social class may influence expectations and perceptions. For example, Lewis (1991), Mayo and Jarvis (1981) (cited in Kozak&Rimington 2000 p.261) explain that “tourists with lower levels of income and education, from lower socio-economic groups, and from higher age brackets, all are likely to have lower expectations.” Apart from age, gender and education level, different nationalities having different cultures, purpose of travel is assumed to be an important independent variable in this research which may influence perceptions of tourists towards tourism products available in Yangon.

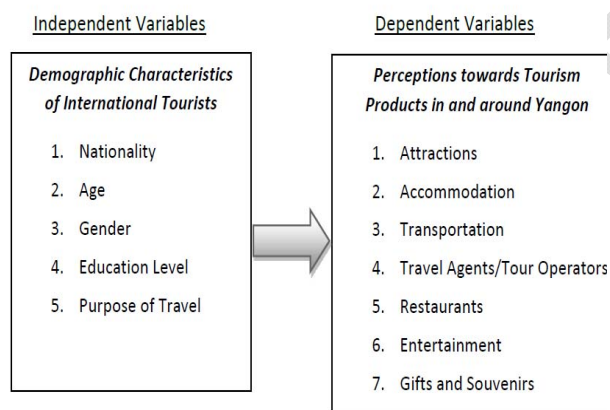


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

This research is a descriptive and quantitative research to describe characteristics of respondents and their perceptions regarding the variables presented in the conceptual framework. The main objective of descriptive research is to describe characteristics of a population or phenomenon (Zikmund, 1994).

For this study, research methodology was based on primary data by using a

questionnaire designed by the researcher as well as the secondary data from textbooks, journal articles, related empirical studies and statistics from Ministry of Hotel and Tourism Myanmar. According to the research framework, the items of the questionnaire were designed for the independent variables in part 1 and the dependent variables in part 2.

The first part of the questionnaire inquired about the demographic facts of the respondents including the purpose of travel of each respondent. The details of the demographic data asked in this part were nationality with nominal scale, age with ordinal scale, gender with nominal scale and educational level with ordinal scale. Apart from the demographic characteristics, the nominal-scaled purpose of travel such as vacation, business travel, etc. were recorded.

The second part of the questionnaire was designed to investigate the perceptions of respondents based on attraction, accommodation, transportation, travel agents/tour operators, restaurants, entertainment, and gifts and souvenirs. Twenty-seven questions were asked to access the perceptions on five-point interval scales from 1, which states “Strongly Disagree”, to 5, which states “Strongly Agree.” The scales between “Strongly Disagree” and “Strongly Agree” are “Disagree”, “Neutral” and “Agree.”

Simple random sampling was employed for this research, as questionnaires were distributed at random and every individual from the target population had an equal chance of being selected as a respondent. The study targeted international visitors visiting Myanmar and did not include domestic travelers. 385 questionnaires were distributed to randomly selected international tourists in and around Yangon.

All of the collected data from the total sample of 385 questionnaires were analyzed by using the Statistical Package

for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0. For the descriptive purposes of this study, frequency count, bar charts, percentage distributions, mean value and standard error were utilized in order to analyze part 1 of the survey which was concerned with demographic characteristics and purpose of travel.

In the inferential part, a one-way ANOVA and independent T-test were applied as the analysis techniques to test the hypotheses of the study. In order to test the hypothesis of dependent variables regarding gender, an independent T-test was applied to check whether the difference between the means for two gender groups of tourists was significant by means of their perception towards tourism products.

One-way ANOVA was utilized to compare the means of more than two groups or levels of an independent variable. In this research, independent variables in part 1 of the questionnaire namely nationality, age, education level and purpose of travel are comprised of more than two responses; hence a one-way ANOVA is more appropriate than an independent T-test.

4. Findings and Discussion

The major nationalities of tourists, who traveled to Yangon during the study period, were Asian (40.3%), followed by European (25.2%), American (17.9%) and others (16.7%). In terms of age group, the dominant age level was 21-40 years old at 49.9% while teenagers below 20 years old were the smallest group of travelers. Then, male travelers (62.3%) out-numbered female travelers (37.7%). For education level, 51.2% of respondents earned master degree or higher level of education. Finally, the main reason of traveling to Yangon, Myanmar is for holiday vacation which constituted 52.7%, followed by business purpose of 45.7%.

The overall perception towards each tourism product is analyzed by means score. The means scores for all tourism

products studied reflect the **neutral** perception of international tourists towards them since the scores are 3.29 for attractions, 2.77 for accommodation, 2.91 for transportation, 3.23 for travels agents and tour operators, 3.26 for restaurants, 2.9 for entertainment and 3.29 for gifts and souvenirs.

It was concluded from hypothesis testing that international tourists showed indifference of perception in the following aspects: attraction when distinguished by age levels, gender, education levels and purpose of travel; accommodation when distinguished by age levels and gender; transportation when distinguished by nationality, age levels, gender and purpose of travel; travel agents and tour operators when distinguished by age levels, gender, education and purpose of travel, restaurants when distinguished by age levels gender, education levels and purpose of travel; entertainment when distinguished by nationality, gender, education levels and purpose of travel; gifts and souvenirs when distinguished by gender, education levels and purpose of travel.

On the other hand, there are differences in the perception of international tourists towards tourism products in and around Yangon in the following aspects: attractions when distinguished by nationality; accommodation when distinguished by nationality, education levels and purpose of travel; transportation when distinguished by education levels; travel agents and tour operators when distinguished by nationality; restaurants when distinguished by nationality; entertainment when distinguished by age levels; gifts and souvenirs when distinguished by nationality and age levels. It is obvious that differences in nationalities have significant influences over five dependent variables except entertainment and transportation. Surprisingly, difference in gender had no

effect on perception of international tourists towards any products of the study.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

A number of recommendations are proposed based on the results of questionnaire responses from quantitative study and the recommendations are drawn mainly from the means score of the chosen tourism products of the study. As one of the research objectives is to explore the strengths and weaknesses of the current tourism products available in and around Yangon, the average mean scores of tourism products are compared to identify which have strengths and weaknesses. Average mean scores of all tourism products of the study are in the range of neutral perception by the respondents and therefore this implies that all tourism products are at satisfactory level but need improvements. When comparing among the overall scores of products, perceptions towards attraction, travel agents and tour operators, restaurants as well as gifts and souvenirs are better than those of accommodation, transportation and entertainment.

For attractions, improvement in information availability about attractions should be emphasized since the perception mean score is lowest out of four operational components namely variety of attractions, service quality of service providers, price or admission fees, and information availability. However, all aspects of attractions should be improved in order to reach a very good range of perception. In terms of accommodation, online observation systems should be drastically improved because the large majority of accommodation around the world is reserved and paid for online. Stakeholders and authorities should promote online reservation systems for

accommodation in order to keep abreast with the international standard.

When evaluating transportation facilities, the quality of transportation was suggested to be refined, followed by the improvement in the convenience of transportation in and around Yangon. Overall scores for travel agents or tour operators is satisfactory as all scores are higher than three, but it is strongly recommended that more upgrades in the service quality and information provided by travel agents is made.

Regarding restaurants, there are some noted weaknesses in quality and hygiene of food available in Yangon – hence it is highly recommended to make all food hygienic in order to better cater to international tourists. Finally, for gifts and souvenirs, scores for all aspects are satisfactory, but perceptions towards price of gifts and souvenirs got the lowest score out of four operational components. Prices of gifts and souvenirs need to be better adjusted for international tourists.

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Table 1 Summary of International Tourist' Demographics and Purpose of Travel

Demographics and Purpose of Travel	Finding
1. Nationality	Asian (40.3%), European (25.2%), American (17.9%), Others (16.7%)
2. Age Level	Under 20 years old (1.6%), 21-40 years old (49.9%), 41-60 years old (37.4%), over 60 years old (11.2%)
3. Gender	Male (62.3%), Female (37.7%)
4. Education Level	High school or lower level (9.9%), Bachelor Degree (39.0%), Master Degree or higher level (51.2%)
5. Purpose of Travel	Travel purpose of holiday (52.7%), Business purpose (45.7%), and Other purposes (1.6%)

Table 2 International Tourists' Perceptions towards Tourism Products in and around Yangon

Research Items	Mean	Interpretation
1. Attraction	3.29	Neutral
2. Accommodation	2.77	Neutral
3. Transportation	2.91	Neutral
4. Travel agents or Tour operators	3.23	Neutral
5. Restaurant	3.26	Neutral
6. Entertainment	2.9	Neutral
7. Gifts and Souvenirs	3.29	Neutral

Interpretation for is as follows:

4.5-5.0 = Very Good; 3.5-4.4 = Good;
 2.5-3.4 = Neutral 1.5-2.4 = Poor
 1.0- 1.4 = Very Poor

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of Perceptions of International Tourists towards Tourism Products in and around Yangon

	Mean	Std. Deviation
There are varieties of attractions in and around Yangon	3.64	0.922
Service quality of attractions in and around are good	3.25	0.932
Price or Admission fees of attractions are reasonable	3.43	1.061
Information about attractions are readily available	2.83	1.010
Quality of accommodation in and around Yangon is good	3.09	0.931
Price of accommodation in and around Yangon are reasonable	2.63	1.051
Online reservation of accommodation is convenient	2.51	1.008
Accommodation are readily available at all time	2.85	0.989

Transportation to Yangon from international destinations is convenient	3.09	0.979
Transportation in and around Yangon is convenient	2.95	1.046
Quality of transportation in and around Yangon is good	2.56	1.016
Price of transportation in and around Yangon are reasonable	3.04	0.920
Service quality of travel agents or tour operators is good	3.22	0.931
Information availability from travel agents or tour operators is good	3.18	0.963
Tour guides in and around Yangon are hospitable and satisfactory	3.32	0.851
Prices for tour guide are reasonable	3.18	0.831
Sightseeing tour program for attractions in and around Yangon are interesting	3.23	0.824
There are many varieties of cuisine in and around Yangon	3.44	1.074
Taste of food and drink in and around Yangon is good	3.43	0.985
Quality and hygiene of food and drink in and around Yangon are good	2.89	0.934
Prices of food and drink in and around Yangon are reasonable	3.34	0.960
There are many varieties of entertainments in and around Yangon	2.79	0.909
Quality of entertainment in and around Yangon is good	2.85	0.804
Prices of entertainments in and around Yangon are reasonable	3.07	0.875
There are many varieties of gifts and souvenirs in and around Yangon	3.27	0.981
Quality of gifts and souvenirs in and around Yangon is good	3.27	0.941
Prices of gifts and souvenirs in and around Yangon are reasonable	3.34	0.925
Attraction overall mean	3.29	0.98
Accommodation overall mean	2.77	0.99
Transportation overall mean	2.91	0.99
Travel agents or Tour operators overall mean	3.23	0.88
Restaurants overall mean	3.26	0.99
Entertainments overall mean	2.90	0.86
Gifts and Souvenirs overall mean	3.29	0.95

This could be interpreted as follows:

4.5-5.0 = Very Good; 3.5-4.4 = Good; 2.5-3.4 = Neutral
1.5-2.4 = Poor 1.0- 1.4 = Very Poor

Table 4 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statistical tool	Results
Null Hypothesis 1: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards attractions when respondents are distinguished by nationality.	One way ANOVA (0.002<0.05)	Rejected
Null Hypothesis 2: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards attractions when respondents are distinguished by age levels.	One way ANOVA (0.857>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 3: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards attractions when respondents are distinguished by gender.	Independent T-test (0.265>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 4: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards attractions when respondents are distinguished by education levels.	One way ANOVA (0.5>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 5: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards attractions when respondents are distinguished by purpose of travel.	One way ANOVA (0.05=0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 6: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards accommodation when respondents are distinguished by nationality.	One way ANOVA (0.000<0.05)	Rejected
Null Hypothesis 7: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards accommodation when respondents are distinguished by age levels.	One way ANOVA (0.185>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 8: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards accommodation when respondents are distinguished by gender.	Independent T-test (0.776>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 9: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards accommodation when respondents are distinguished by education levels.	One way ANOVA (0.026<0.05)	Rejected
Null Hypothesis 10: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards accommodation when respondents are distinguished by purpose of travel.	One way ANOVA (0.014<0.05)	Rejected
Null Hypothesis 11: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards transportation when respondents are distinguished by nationality.	One way ANOVA (0.136>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 12: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards transportation when respondents are distinguished by age levels.	One way ANOVA (0.064>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 13: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards transportation when respondents are distinguished by gender.	Independent T-test (0.797>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 14: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards transportation when respondents are distinguished by education levels.	One way ANOVA (0.006<0.05)	Rejected
Null Hypothesis 15: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards transportation when respondents are distinguished by purpose of travel.	One way ANOVA (0.055>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 16: There is no difference in the perception	One way	Rejected

of international tourists towards travel agents/tour operators when respondents are distinguished by nationality.	ANOVA (0.003<0.05)	
Null Hypothesis 17: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards travel agents/tour operators when respondents are distinguished by age levels.	One way ANOVA (0.073>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 18: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards travel agents/tour operators when respondents are distinguished by gender.	Independent T-test (0.509>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 19: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards travel agents/tour operators when respondents are distinguished by education levels.	One way ANOVA (0.187>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 20: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards travel agents/tour operators when respondents are distinguished by purpose of travel.	One way ANOVA (0.904>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 21: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards restaurants when respondents are distinguished by nationality.	One way ANOVA (0.011<0.05)	Rejected
Null Hypothesis 22: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards restaurants when respondents are distinguished by age levels.	One way ANOVA (0.205>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 23: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards restaurants when respondents are distinguished by gender.	Independent T-test (0.060>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 24: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards restaurants when respondents are distinguished by education levels.	One way ANOVA (0.522>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 25: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards restaurants when respondents are distinguished by purpose of travel.	One way ANOVA (0.889>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 26: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards entertainment when respondents are distinguished by nationality.	One way ANOVA (0.080>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 27: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards entertainment when respondents are distinguished by age levels.	One way ANOVA (0.041<0.05)	Rejected
Null Hypothesis 28: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards entertainment when respondents are distinguished by gender.	Independent T-test (0.548>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 29: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards entertainment when respondents are distinguished by education level.	One way ANOVA (0.051>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 30: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards entertainment when respondents are distinguished by purpose of travel.	One way ANOVA (0.102>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 31: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards gifts and souvenirs when respondents are distinguished by nationality.	One way ANOVA (0.000<0.05)	Rejected
Null Hypothesis 32: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards gifts and souvenirs when	One way ANOVA	Rejected

respondents are distinguished by age levels.	(0.019<0.05)	
Null Hypothesis 33: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards gifts and souvenirs when respondents are distinguished by gender.	Independent T-test (0.100>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 34: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards gifts and souvenirs when respondents are distinguished by education levels.	One way ANOVA (0.256>0.05)	Failed to reject
Null Hypothesis 35: There is no difference in the perception of international tourists towards gifts and souvenirs when respondents are distinguished by purpose of travel.	One way ANOVA (0.714>0.05)	Failed to reject

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