

The Chinese are coming – is Fiji ready? A study of Chinese tourists to Fiji

Sera Vada-Pareti

ABSTRACT

Many tourism destinations are diversifying to new markets, and specifically to the Chinese outbound market to sustain their tourism industry. China has also been the fastest growing emerging market for Fiji. However, China is not a homogenous market. Their motivations and expectations differ from people from Western countries or even those from other parts of Asia. There has been limited research carried out on the Chinese outbound tourists to Pacific Island Countries. This study employed a survey questionnaire to 149 Chinese visitors to Fiji to identify the socio-demographics of Chinese visitors to Fiji and to assess their perceptions of Fiji as a tourist destination following their visit. The results provided a basic understanding of the profile of the Chinese tourist to Fiji in terms of their gender, marital status, education, residence, previous outbound experience, destination attributes and perceptions of their visit to Fiji.

Key Words: *Tourism, South Pacific, Fiji, Chinese outbound tourism, diversification.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is now Fiji's largest industry, employing over 40,000 people and generating more foreign exchange than any other sector since 1989 (Fiji Ministry of Tourism, 2012). Tourism in Fiji has also been a key driver of economic recovery despite the political coups in 1987, 2000 and 2006, thus showing the resilience of tourism to the political environment in Fiji (Harrison & Pratt, 2010). However, since the start of tourism development in Fiji in the 1920s, the main source markets for Fiji's tourism industry has been Australia, New Zealand and the United States. The heavy dependence on this trinity of traditional source markets (Hall & Page, 1996) has not changed and this is a major cause for concern as any economic recession or unease in the political environment in these traditional markets can result in the likely decline of international tourist arrivals to Fiji.

Many tourism destinations have resorted to diversification of source markets in order to compete with other tourism destinations and gain a larger share of tourist arrivals (Agrusa, Kim & Wang, 2011; Xinhua, 2007) but more specifically, a growing number of tourism destinations are looking towards the Chinese outbound market as a potential source market to offset the decline of visitor arrivals from traditional source markets that have been affected by exogenous shocks (Song & Lin, 2009). The risk of major global financial risks have increased, thus calling for a greater need for tourism destinations to reduce reliance on traditional source markets to improve resilience and perhaps, explore possible diversification into other source markets that are better sheltered from future global financial shocks. The option to diversify to the Chinese outbound market was also considered attractive due to findings that the Chinese economy is less likely to be affected by global financial shocks relative to other countries due to its closed financial system.

Most tourism literature has focused on tourists' perceptions and level of satisfaction in relation to travelling in Western countries and few studies specifically focused on Asian countries. There is also the suggestion of the need for tourism destinations to appreciate that China is not a homogenous market (Zhang and Heung, 2002). Over the past decade, there has been a growing number of studies carried out to identify and understand the motivations of Chinese outbound tourists and their decision making process (Hanqin & Lam 1999; Hsu & Lam, 2003; Kim, Guo & Agrusa, 2005; Lo & Lam, 2004; Pan & Laws, 2001). Whilst much research has been carried out on the implications of the Chinese outbound market in developed countries such as Australia (Pan & Laws, 2007; Sparks & Pan, 2009), New Zealand (Zhao, 2006) and the United States (Ritchie, Amaya & Frechtling, 2010), there has been limited research carried out on the Chinese outbound tourists to Pacific Island Countries (PICs). For Fiji, the decision to focus on the Chinese outbound market has been attributed to the rapid growth in visitor arrivals from China. There has been no evident quantitative or qualitative studies conducted on the Chinese outbound market to Fiji. Therefore, there is an identified gap in academic literature where there is a lack of research carried out on the Chinese outbound market especially to PICs and Fiji.

The main research objectives of this research were:

To provide a better understanding of the development and the growth of Chinese outbound tourism; and

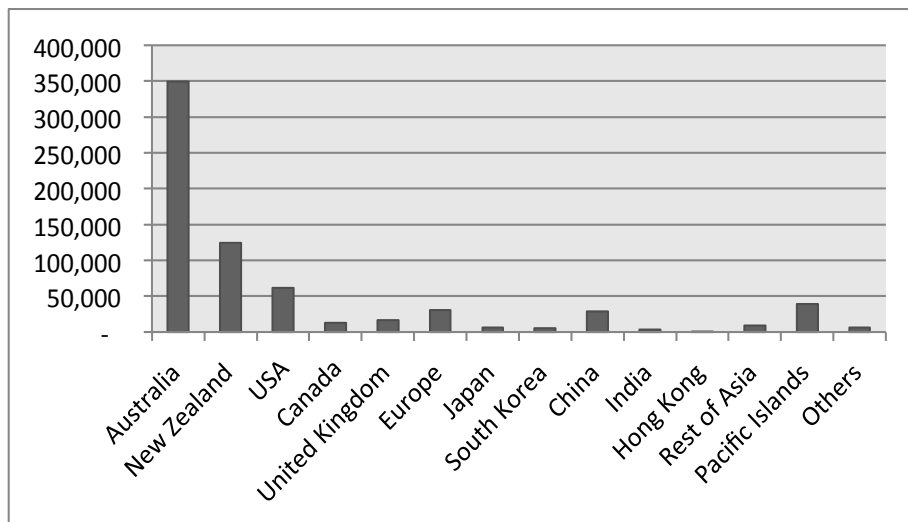
To identify the socio-demographics of Chinese visitors to Fiji and to assess their perceptions of Fiji as a tourist destination following their visit.

To achieve the first objective, a thorough literature review was undertaken using a variety of sources. This secondary data analysis complements the primary data collection that was completed to answer the second research objective. A survey questionnaire conducted among 149 Chinese visitors was implemented to identify the socio-demographics of Chinese visitors to Fiji and to assess their perceptions of Fiji as a tourist destination following their visit. The next section describes tourism in Fiji; the development and the growth of Chinese outbound tourism and diversification to the Chinese outbound market.

TOURISM IN FIJI

Fiji was one of the first Pacific nations to embrace tourism after World War II and its long history and experience with tourism is characterised by a relatively strong and effective National Tourism Organization. Currently, Fiji has a much wider source market than its major competitor, Maldives, with most of Fiji's tourist arrivals coming from Australia, New Zealand, United States, Europe, Japan, Korea and China (Narayan, 2000; Rao, 2002). Given the geographic proximity, Australia and New Zealand continue to be Fiji's dominant source markets (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Visitor arrivals to Fiji in 2014



Source: Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2015

Chinese tourist numbers to the South Pacific region are small with only Fiji noting a significant rise in arrivals over the last decade. It was only in 2009 that Fiji recorded 4,087 visitor arrivals from China which was a mere 0.8% of total visitor arrivals to Fiji. However, the number has soared to 28,333 in 2014 (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2015).

Tourism is one of the major drivers of Fiji's economic growth and is the largest source of foreign exchange (Fiji Ministry of Tourism, 2012; Read, 2010). The direct contribution of travel and tourism to Fiji's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2013 was FJ\$1.1m (13.8% of GDP) and this was forecasted to increase by 7.9% in 2014 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2014). This primarily reflects the economic activity generated by the tourist industry such as hotels, travel agents, airlines and other passenger transportation services, restaurants and leisure industries directly support by tourists. Travel and tourism in Fiji also generated 43,000 jobs directly in 2013 (12.4% of total employment) and this is forecasted to grow by 6.4% in 2014 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2014).

Tourism earnings have shown positive growth over the past four years (Table 1) which also highlights Australia, New Zealand and the U.S being Fiji's largest source markets with China becoming the fastest growing emerging market.

Table 1: Tourism earnings for Fiji: 2010 – 2013

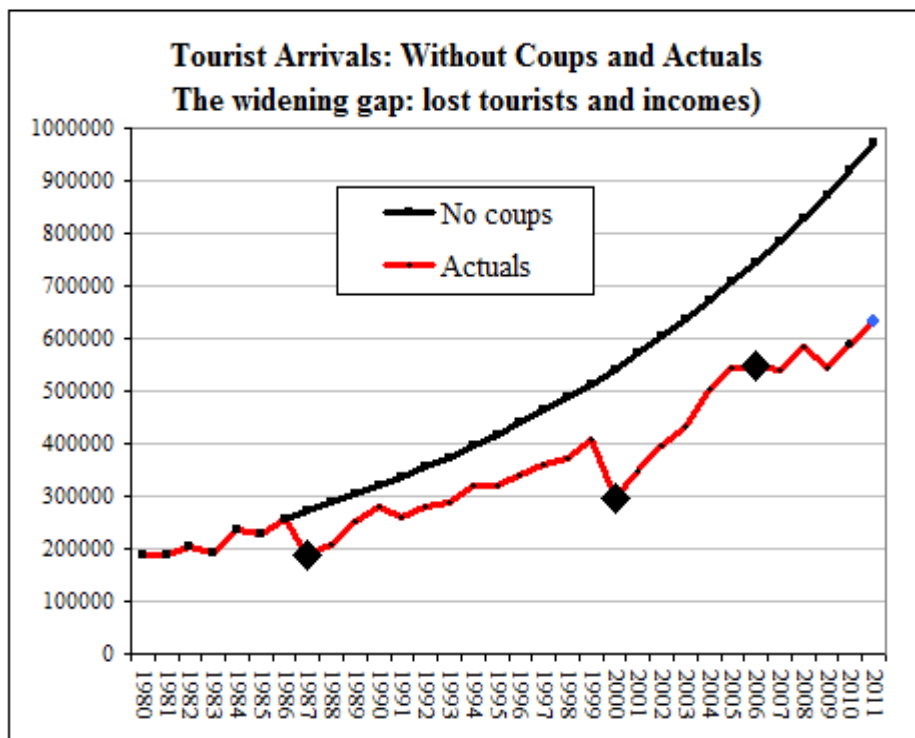
TOURISM EARNINGS [FJD Millions]	(2010) 1,194	(2011) 1,287	(2012) 1,300	(2013) 1,318
Australia	624.2	689.2	699.1	704.8
New Zealand	187.1	200.7	215.6	206.3
United States of America	97.6	99.8	102.2	106.6
Continental Europe	58.6	63.5	59.1	61.9
Pacific Islands	52.8	44.3	46.6	49.3
United Kingdom	47.0	47.6	35.3	41.4
China	31.0	42.1	44.3	40.7
Canada	21.8	24.7	24.4	23.7
Rest of Asia	17.4	25.8	18.5	19.5
Japan	26.0	19.4	14.3	18.3
Others	12.8	9.7	10.2	13.7
Korea	11.8	9.4	7.8	9.1
India	2.8	3.5	6.3	7.5
<i>Cruise Ship passengers*</i>	2.6	4.3	3.8	7.2
Taiwan	2.5	3.9	11.5	6.7
Malaysia	1.0	2.9	1.0	1.5

Source: Fiji Ministry of Tourism, 2014

Tourism in Fiji has also been seen to be a key driver of economic recovery despite the political coups in 1987, 2000 and 2006. The trend of total visitor arrivals from 1980 to 2011 (Figure 2) shows that the political uncertainty in Fiji had a negative impact on international tourist arrivals. Consequently, tourist earnings also declined due to the perceived uncertainty of the safety to visit Fiji during these periods. More specifically, the 1987 coup caused a 26% decline in arrivals, the 2000 coup caused a 28% decline in arrivals and 29% decline in earnings, whilst in 2006 only a 1% reduction in visitor arrivals was recorded with a 5% decline in earnings. It is also noted from the above table that tourism earnings from China have not grown as fast as India; however, the earnings from Indian tourists are lower for the time being.

In the case of Fiji, whilst tourist arrivals did not fully recover to anticipated pre-coup arrivals, this trend, to some extent, was the result of heavy discounting and marketing, but also shows the resilience of tourism to the political environment in Fiji (Harrison & Pratt, 2010). In addition, tourism also stood as a key driver during the Global Financial Crisis in 2009 whereby tourism earnings brought in over F\$280 million in comparison to F\$200 million brought by the sugar industry (Reddy, 2010).

Figure 2: Tourist arrivals to Fiji: 1980-2011



Source: Narsey, 2012

THE CHINESE OUTBOUND TOURIST

The China outbound travel market has been one of the fastest-growing international markets over the past decade and according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), China will be the world's top tourist destination by 2020, receiving a total of 140 million international visitors annually. In addition, China is expected to rank as the fourth largest outbound tourist generating country contributing 100 million visitors annually to the world travel market. The increase in Approved Destination Status (ADS) destinations has also widened the range of choices for Chinese travellers. The Approved Destination Status (ADS) is a status granted to a foreign country by the Chinese government which allows outbound Chinese tour groups to travel to that country. Without an ADS agreement, a destination country is not allowed to receive tour groups from China and vice versa, and it cannot promote its tourism business in China (He, 2010). It serves as a transitional programme for the Chinese Government to establish a well-managed, orderly and controlled system which allows a greater number of its citizens to travel abroad. Chinese travel expenditure is also expected to be the second-fastest growing in the world at close to twice the global average (UNWTO, 2011).

Current tourism literature have focused mostly on travellers' perceptions and satisfaction levels in relation to travelling in Western countries but there are few studies which address Asian countries. China has a very different cultural background compared to Western countries and therefore has different preferences and motivations (Zhang & Heung, 2012). Existing studies has shown that this market is complex and an awareness of items of interest include whether motivations of Chinese tourists differ from Western tourists; how Chinese tourists interact with each other and their hosts and how they view unfamiliar natural environments (Pearce, Wu & Osmond, 2013). Over the past decade, there have been a growing number of studies carried out to learn about the motivations of Chinese outbound tourists and their decision making process (Hanqin & Lam 1999; Hsu & Lam, 2003; Kim, Guo & Agrusa, 2005; Lo & Lam, 2004; Pan & Laws, 2001).

The discussion below focuses on findings from a recent report by the 2014 China International Travel Monitor which examined the profile of the average Chinese traveller by looking at the reasons for their international travel, the length of their trip, whether they prefer to travel independently or as part of an organized group, their preferred travel companions, the most popular travel times and their average spend (China International Travel Monitor, 2014).

INCREASE IN TRAVEL ABROAD

Chinese international travellers now take more trips abroad than ever before. In 2014, Chinese travellers traveled 4.67 times in the past five years compared with 3.53 trips in 2013 (China International Travel Monitor, 2014). China's economic boom has generated a wealthy minority that has a strong appetite for luxury goods and services including travelling abroad. China's international travellers are also amongst the wealthier of China's citizens with an average annual household income of US\$39,784 in 2013 (China International Travel Monitor, 2014).

REASONS FOR TRAVEL AND LENGTH OF STAY

Nearly all of China's international travellers travel abroad for leisure purposes (China International Travel Monitor, 2014). Previous studies have shown that Chinese tourists' motivation to visit short-haul destinations was to acquire new knowledge and build stronger relationships as well as a desire for shopping in a destination where transportation systems and available services were of the highest standard (Hanqin & Lam, 1999). On the other hand, a key driver of long-haul travel by Chinese tourists was the attraction of visiting a capitalist society (Hsu & Lam, 2003).

Recent findings also note that the most popular activities for Chinese travellers are sightseeing (73%); dining (64%) and shopping (56%) which clearly show that whilst shopping is an important attribute for Chinese travellers, sightseeing is seen as a more important destination attribute (China International Travel Monitor, 2014). In terms of length of stay, Chinese travellers typically spend between one to two weeks away when travelling internationally. Leisure trips are generally shorter (1.4 weeks on average) whilst trips to visit friends and relatives or for education reasons are the longest in length. In addition, at least 54% of Chinese travellers travel with a partner and children or with family members (China International Travel Monitor, 2014).

GROUP TRAVEL

There have been opposing views on the preference of Chinese tourists travelling on group tours in comparison to independent travel. According to Huang and Weiler (2010), it is expected that a growing number of Chinese travellers will choose a more independent travel mode as the market matures. However, in the foreseeable future, it is expected that the majority of Chinese travellers will continue to use package tours which include tour guiding as their core services (Xinjun, 2011)

BOOKING TRENDS AND MAIN TOURIST GENERATING CITIES

Social media has played a significant role in influencing Chinese tourists and suggests that travel and social media share a strong connection in China (Kristensen, 2013). A distinct characteristic about the Chinese travel market is that it is the experienced tourists and not the travel professionals that are trend setters. Recent findings showed that 91% of Chinese internet users reportedly have a social media account and many Chinese travellers now share their photos and experiences on social media during and after an international trip (China International Travel Monitor, 2014).

In terms of the main tourist generating cities in Mainland China, it is noted that although Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou continue to remain the key tourist generating cities, the attractiveness of outbound tourism is also spreading towards many of the smaller regions in China and that this change should be adequately reflected in the travel products that are packaged and promoted by ADS countries (Kim et al, 2005).

DESTINATION WISH LIST

There is a far greater appetite to see new destinations rather than returning to former favourites (China International Travel Monitor, 2014). European destinations are the most popular amongst Chinese travellers in terms of places they wish to visit in the second half of 2014 (Table 2). According to the China National Tourism Administration (2014), Europe is the continent with the most ADS countries and China's outbound tourist flow to Europe is becoming more intricate as the number of ADS countries continues to grow. Asia is next with 53% of the vote and the continent is slightly more popular amongst younger travellers below the age of 35 years (China National Tourism Administration, 2014).

Table 2: *Destinations that Chinese travellers would like to visit in 2014*

Rank	Destination wish list	Reality
1	Australia	USA
2	France	Hong Kong
3	New Zealand	Thailand
4	USA	Japan
5	Switzerland	France
6	Canada	UK
7	UK	Italy
8	Singapore	South Korea
9	Hong Kong	Taiwan
10	Germany	Malaysia

Although Fiji is not mentioned in the above destination wish list, it is imperative to note that Fiji is in an advantageous position with direct flights and access to Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong. Chinese tourists in these countries still need to be persuaded to visit Fiji and therefore, more focussed destination marketing strategies need to be employed to raise the profile of the destination to Chinese travellers in Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong. It would also be valuable for Fiji to evaluate new Chinese migrants to Australia and New Zealand in terms of the family market so that they consider including Fiji in their travel itinerary either as a secondary destination or post-business destination.

METHODOLOGY

A survey questionnaire was employed to 149 Chinese visitors to identify the socio-demographics of Chinese visitors to Fiji and to assess their perceptions of Fiji as a tourist destination following their visit. There have also been other studies that have used small sample sizes. For example, a study carried out on Chinese tourists to New Zealand involved a sample size of 384 which was calculated as an appropriate sample size that would produce data that is significant at the 95% confidence level for a population of 35,000 (Ryan & Mo, 2001). In addition, a study on Chinese tourists' perceptions to the US was also based on a small sample size of 206 business tourists and those visiting friends and relatives (Jang, Yu & Pearson, 2003)

The questionnaire in this study contained four categories of questions. Section I and II of the questionnaire outlined the social and demographic information of Chinese tourists to Fiji and their previous outbound experience. Section III and IV required the Chinese tourists to indicate the destination attributes that they consider important when choosing a destination. The questionnaire design was based on a similar study by Ryan (2002) whereby the questionnaire was based on an importance evaluation mode of attitude measurement, meaning that consumers are more likely to repeat behaviours in activities that are important to them. The destination attributes outlined in the questionnaire were attained from a similar study carried out by Zhou, King & Turner (1998) which examined the perceived image of Canada by potential Chinese tourists. The questions were aimed at understanding the characteristics, perceptions and levels of satisfaction of the Chinese visitor to Fiji.

The questionnaire was translated to Mandarin with assistance from the Confucius Institute at the University of the South Pacific. The survey questionnaire was then distributed using convenience sampling with the assistance from Rosie Holidays and Mana Island Resort. Rosie Holidays is a tourism industry icon and is also a name synonymous with the pioneering of innovation and operational excellence in Fiji's tourism. Rosie Holidays has become a multi-million dollar international business servicing over 85,000 visitors to Fiji. It is 100% locally owned and a family-run company which operates and markets the Fiji Islands in over 30 international markets. Mana Island Resort is a Japanese owned resort. It is located 32km West of Nadi and situated on a 300 acre island nestled in the heart of the Mamanuca group. The resort offers an extensive range of accommodation from honeymoon bures to luxury suite rooms or the modern yet traditional Fijian bures.

The collection of data took place from July to November 2013 and was administered during the Chinese tourists' stay in Fiji and collected prior to their departure from Fiji. The results and answers were then translated back to English by an independent translator.

FINDINGS

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The findings from the survey questionnaire created a basic understanding of the profile of the Chinese tourist to Fiji. This could assist tourism stakeholders in Fiji to formulate marketing campaigns that are specifically targeted at relevant market segments.

Table 3: Socio-demographic information of Chinese tourists to Fiji

Socio-demographic variables	Results
Gender	55% females 45% males
Marital status	67% married 33% single
Age	21% between 18 – 24 years of age; 49% between 25 – 34 years of age 14% between 35 – 44 years of age; 12% between 45 – 54 years of age; Remaining 4% is above the age of 55 years;
Education	8% have high school qualifications 79% have a university degree 13% have postgrad qualifications
Usual place of residence	30% reside in Beijing 16% reside in Shanghai 8% reside in Guangzhou 4% reside in Tianjin 42% reside in ‘other’ areas of China

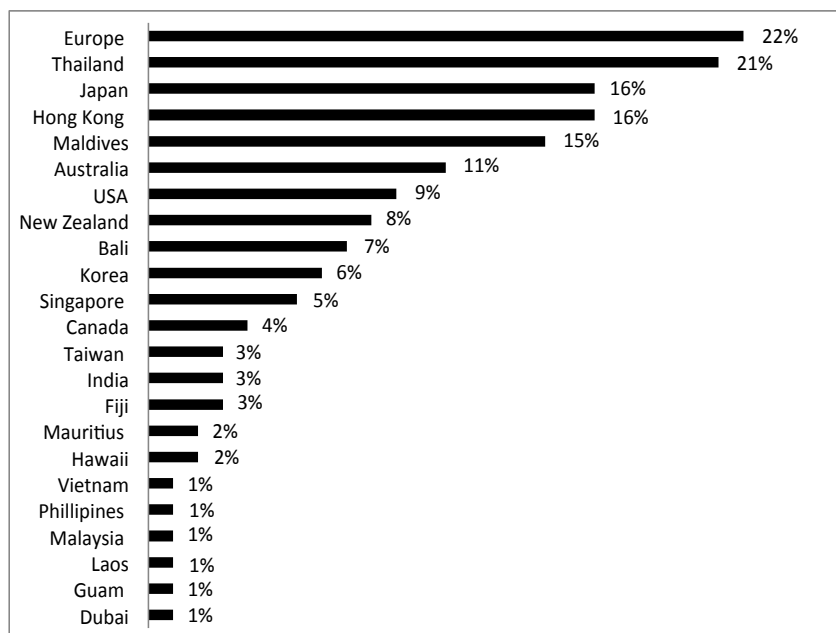
The above table shows that Chinese tourists to Fiji are both males and females and gender does not play a major role in influencing the decision to visit Fiji. However, there are both married couples and singles below the age of 24 years with mostly married couples above the age of 24 years. In addition, Chinese tourists to Fiji are highly educated and hold a university degree and/

or postgraduate qualifications. Furthermore, the usual places of residence for Chinese tourists are Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

PREVIOUS OUTBOUND EXPERIENCE

A number of empirical studies have suggested that past experiences with a destination were likely to influence visitors' perceived destination image and future behaviour (He, 2010; Mao & Zhang, 2012). The findings showed that Chinese tourists to Fiji are fairly well-travelled with the majority having visited Europe (Figure 4). From this sample, 22% of the respondents had visited Europe, thus showing that whilst the Chinese outbound market is well travelled within the Asia Pacific region, it is not only confined to short-haul destinations but also long-haul. In addition, Maldives is noted as an island destination in the top five countries visited.

Figure 3: Destinations travelled by respondents in the past three years



Overall, tourists from Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and others seem to have a similar level of distribution of spending, however their median levels of spending are slightly different. A Mann-Whitney U test was carried out to find out whether there was a statistically significant association between tourist expenditure and socio-demographic variables used in this study. The results showed that there was no significant statistical association between tourist expenditure and gender (p-value = .598); marital status (p-value = .811); age (p-value = .146); education (p-value = .337); and usual place of residence (p-value = .318). In other words, the test suggests that the average expenditure for all respondents was approximately the same, regardless of gender, marital status, age, education and place of residence.

EVALUATION OF CHINESE TOURISTS EXPERIENCE IN FIJI

A key objective of this study was to assess the perceptions of Chinese tourists based on their experience in Fiji to assist key tourism stakeholders in developing appropriate marketing that are directed and aimed at the target market. The experiences of this sample of Chinese tourists to Fiji were assessed and based on first-time and repeat Chinese visitors to Fiji.

MAIN REASON FOR TRAVEL TO FIJI

From the 149 respondents, 93% were first-time visitors to Fiji whereas 7% were repeat visitors. This is similar to Chinese tourists to the Maldives whereby a high percentage of Chinese tourists (95%) are first-time visitors (Cripps, 2013). From the respondents, 86% of first time tourists visited Fiji for holiday, followed by business (8%) and education (2%). On the other hand, an interesting finding to note is that the high percentage of this segment that visited Fiji more than twice had returned for business; followed by holiday then education. Interestingly, recent findings revealed that business travelers continue to be younger on average and half of all business travelers live in one of China's most prosperous provinces (China International Travel Monitor, 2014).

TOURIST TARGET MARKETS

For Fiji in particular, three target markets have been identified: honeymooners, luxury and diving segments. The feedback from Chinese respondents also indicated their preference of Fiji as a honeymoon destination. For example:

“The honeymoon house is fantastic”

“Fiji is the best place to go for honeymoon”

PREFERRED FLIGHT TO FIJI

There are currently two major ports of entry for Chinese inbound visitors to Fiji, through Hong Kong via Fiji Airways or through Seoul via Korean Air. There are also some Chinese tourists visiting Fiji as an add-on destination after Australia or New Zealand. For both first-time and repeat visitors, Hong Kong appears to be the preferred flight route to Fiji, followed by Seoul, Australia and New Zealand. Chinese tourists prefer to travel via the Hong Kong route on Fiji's national airline – Fiji Airways because it is cheaper and more convenient if they are based in the south of China. Chinese tourists from the north of China would most likely travel on Korean Airlines. Due to the reduction in seat inventory on the Fiji Airways Hong Kong flights, the airline has increased its frequencies through four flights a week from Nadi to Hong Kong. This shows that the Chinese market is one of the long-haul emerging markets that support the sustainability of Fiji's tourism industry as the market uses Fiji's national airline compared to Korean Airlines.

It is significant to note that a milestone for Fiji tourism included Rosie Holidays chartering two direct flights from Shanghai to Fiji on February 14 and 21, 2015 to target Chinese tourists during their Chinese New Year (Ross, 2015). Rosie Holidays has also confirmed that additional

direct charter flights will be coordinated in 2016 and other departure locations in China will be considered.

AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY IN FIJI

There is an increasing recognition in literature that length of stay is one of the most important determinants of tourists' expenditure whilst on a trip (Weiler & Yu, 2006). As per the questionnaire, there were only three options provided to respondents to identify their average length of stay in Fiji (1-7 days; 8-14 days; more than 28 days). In this study, 72% of first time visitors stayed between 1 – 7 days in Fiji. On the other hand, there was an equal distribution of repeat visitors that stayed between 1 – 7 days; 8-14 days and more than a month

MAIN REGIONS AND HOTELS VISITED IN FIJI

Nadi remains the most visited region in Fiji by Chinese tourists with 63%; followed by Denarau (24%); Mamanucas (9%); Yasawas (2%) and Suva (1%). Mana Island Resort in the Mamanuca Islands was identified as the most preferred accommodation for Chinese visitors to Fiji. It is important to note also that 94% of visitors to Mana Island Resort were on holiday with 68% being married couples so this segment most likely would be on honeymoon, anniversary or any normal holiday that couples would take.

Similar findings are also confirmed for Hilton and Sonaisali whereby a higher percentage of their visitors were on holiday with majority being married couples.

MAIN INFORMATION SOURCE

The results from a chi-square test carried out showed that there was statistical significant association between the main information source and hotels visited by the Chinese tourists to Fiji (p-value = 0.031). In other words, it was identified that the information that visitors received for Mana Island Resort are well spread out between advertising media (travel agency, word of mouth, TV advertisements and newspaper/magazines) which suggests that the resort's marketing team have utilized different advertising media and therefore enjoyed the maximum exposure. On the other hand, visitors that stayed at Hilton and Sonaisali Island Resort identified travel agencies as their main information source. Sonaisali Island Resort is an island resort located 25 minutes from Nadi International Airport. The Resort reopened as DoubleTree Resort by Hilton Fiji in early 2015 with 123 rooms in an expansive oceanfront location (Lal, 2014).

GROUP TRAVEL

Many studies have shown that group tours are the preferred mode of outbound travel for most Chinese tourists when taking vacation overseas (Lam & Tsu, 2004; Tse & Hobson, 2008). It is interesting to note that the results from this particular study indicates otherwise that the majority of respondents (64%) to Fiji were not on a group tour and 51% were females within the age bracket of 25 – 34 years of age. The reason for this is that Fiji has a waiver visa requirement which makes it easy for Chinese tourists to travel to Fiji independently.

PRE-TRIP PLANNING

It has been noted that it is critical to find out the time taken for Chinese tourists to plan their trip to Fiji. According to Agrusa et al, (2011), the amount of pre-trip planning required for long-haul travel can act to mitigate some of the psychological risks where Chinese outbound travelers assess the cultural similarities of the country to be visited. The findings from this study showed that the majority of respondents (74%) took 2 weeks to 1 month to plan their travel to Fiji, whether their reasons to visit were for holiday, business, and education or for visiting friends and relatives.

DINING EXPERIENCE

According to recent findings, Chinese travelers rate food as the most important amenity provided by a hotel (China International Travel Monitor, 2014). From this particular sample of Chinese tourists to Fiji, it was identified that 49% preferred Chinese food; 35% preferred Fijian food; 10% preferred Western, whereas the remaining 3% was divided between Indian and others (seafood) respectively.

For first-time visitors, it was interesting to note that more Chinese tourists (54%) did not prefer Chinese food whilst in Fiji, but instead they preferred Fijian food. The preference for Fijian food may be attributed to the low quality and lack of choices for Chinese food available in Fiji which were noted in the negative feedback highlighted in the questionnaire that strongly indicates the need for considerable improvement to the selection of foods at resorts.

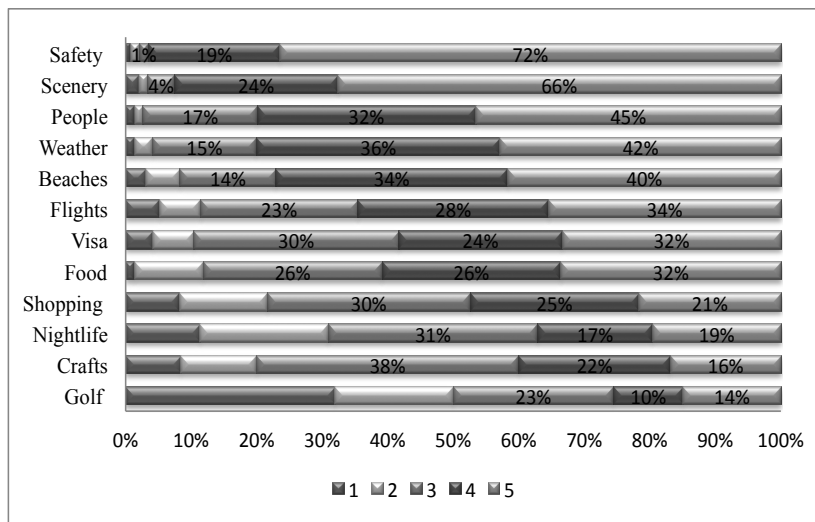
“Not too much choices for food....”

“Food was not good and better to provide Chinese food....”

“Food not suitable for Chinese visitors”

OVERALL DESTINATION ATTRIBUTES AND FIJI EXPERIENCE

The previous section looked at the respondents' previous outbound experience and whether different destination attributes influenced their decision to travel to a particular destination. The following section will look at respondents' visit experience during their time in Fiji and whether the destination attributes or experience met their pre-trip expectations. In line with the objective of assessing the perceptions of the Chinese tourists in Fiji, this study used a 5-point Likert scale to gauge the level of importance and agreement on Fiji's destinations' attributes. From the questionnaire survey, respondents were asked to rank the destination attributes that influenced their decision to visit a country. Respondents provided their responses as not important at all (1); not very important (2); neutral (3); important (4); and very important (5).

Figure 4: Rating of destination attributes

The stacked bar plot above essentially indicates that safety is the main destination attribute that takes precedence when Chinese tourists choose to visit a tourism destination. Although 74% of these respondents had travelled abroad in the past three years, safety continues to remain a critical destination attribute that influences their decision of whether to travel to a particular destination. According to recent findings, safety is the primary concern that influences Chinese travellers decision with 59% of travellers that admitted that anxieties over safety would influence them not to make bookings altogether. In addition, 46% also admit that the political situation would also be a deterrent to travelling (China International Travel Monitor, 2014).

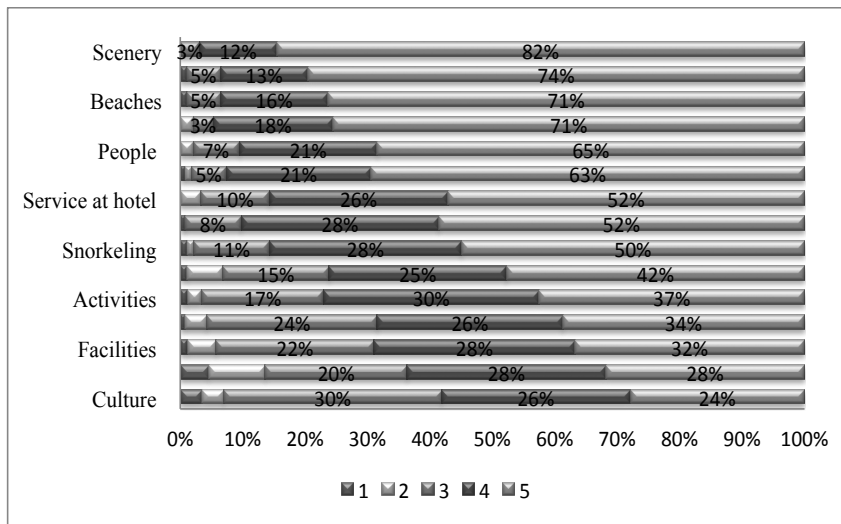
Scenery (including weather and beaches) as well as people also constitute important destination attributes. A study carried out by Kim, Guo & Agrusa (2012) specific to long-haul travel also stressed the importance of safety and beautiful scenery as two preferred destination attributes for Chinese tourists.

One of the major characteristics of Chinese outbound tourists is their passion for shopping and a recent study noted that Chinese tourists were one of the world's biggest spenders for shopping (Cripps, 2013). The results of this study indicated that 47% of respondents ranked shopping as being an important destination attribute. In addition, the results from this study also showed that only 59% of respondents indicated that the ease of obtaining a visitor visa was important, thus showing that this particular segment of tourists to Fiji did view obtaining visas as a major constraint to travelling overseas. The study also suggested that tourism destinations wishing to tap into the China market should simplify their procedures with particular reference to visa issuance.

97% of respondents confirmed that their visit to Fiji had lived up to their pre-trip expectations and that they would recommend Fiji to their colleagues, friends and relatives. Respondents were also asked to rate their impression or satisfaction on selected destination attributes following

their visit to Fiji. The results in Figure 6 show overall that their experience in Fiji exceeded their expectation as these were rated highly in the questionnaire. These positive responses also show that clearly Fiji does have favourable destination attributes that attract Chinese visitors to visit Fiji.

Figure 5: Rating of impressions of Fiji



The most common method to assess satisfaction was the expectation/disconfirmation paradigm. Consumers develop expectations about a product before a purchase is made. After the purchase, consumers compare actual performance to these expectations and if actual performance is better than the expectation, then there is positive disconfirmation (i.e. satisfaction) results and vice-versa (Oliver, 1980). The above findings show that there is positive disconfirmation or satisfaction from Chinese tourists based on their experience in Fiji. This is a critical finding for key tourism stakeholders in Fiji which basically shows that Fiji as a tourism destination does offer favourable destination attributes to the Chinese outbound market.

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Each destination attribute is unique to each respective tourist; therefore the following section will analyze and discuss the perceptions of Chinese tourists based on some of the main destination attributes, namely:

SCENERY

The findings showed that 80% of feedback focused on the beautiful environment in Fiji. This was supported by positive comments from respondents as follows:

“Beautiful beach and sunshine”

“Colourful ocean. Life here was is happy, warm and exciting”

“Perfect weather, beautiful ocean”

THE PEOPLE

91% of respondents indicated that they had a good to very good impression of the people in Fiji. With reference to academic literature, people as a destination attribute would refer to relationship needs and is situated higher up in Pearce’s Travel Career Ladder (Pearce & Lee, 2005). In this case, Chinese tourists feel that it is important to affiliate with people in the host country which ultimately contributes to a positive visitor experience. It is critical for Fiji to continue to maximize on the relationship or interactions between the locals and the Chinese tourists. Some of the positive comments from respondents include:

“The local people was very friendly”

“Friendly people and relaxing lifestyle”

“Everything here is so excellent, especially the people they are so kind, friendly”

SERVICES, FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

88% of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the service, facilities and activities provided at their respective hotel or resort. However, there were also notable comments which recommend the need for improvement in terms of services, facilities, and activities provided by resorts and hotels in Fiji.

“Facility in the hotel was too old. Travelling with an 8 year old child and not too many activities she can do”

“No free wi-fi and no TV in the rooms”

“Consuming prices was too high and not too much choices for food as well as shopping options. Internet facilities were also poor so we couldn’t communicate with outside world”

According to China Travel Trends (2012), the new Chinese tourists are demanding higher quality service. In a study by Li et al (2011), price level and quality grade requirements were two problems indicated by many Chinese respondents. In addition, the quality of facilities and variety of activities available in the resorts were also identified being less than adequate

and interesting to note that many Chinese hotels traditionally provide a large set of standard amenities which include toothpastes, toothbrushes, combs, shampoo and lotion, slippers and even disposable razors and shaving cream (Li et al, 2011).

WAY OF LIFE AND CULTURE

67% of respondents enjoyed the Fijian way of life and culture during their visit. However, there were comments about the insufficient time or opportunity to experience the local Fijian culture and crafts as elaborated in the comments below.

“Hoped to learn more about the local culture, how people live and have more exposure to the locals”

“Very less local crafts for shopping”

“Too short to stay in Fiji, don’t know much about the local culture”

A study carried out by Du & Dai (2006) on Chinese tourists that travel abroad suggested that the primary consideration for choosing outbound travel products is the culture of the destination, rather than the price.

SHOPPING

47% of respondents indicated that shopping was an important destination attribute when choosing to visit a tourism destination. Some studies have indicated that tourism shopping has become a particularly important activity for tourists and especially for Chinese and Japanese tourists who seem to have developed an affinity for outbound shopping (McKercher & Wong, 2004). Recent research suggests that Chinese tourists spend significantly more than tourists of other nationalities (Pottinger, 2002; Rosenbaum & Spears, 2005).

The respondents from this study however provided some negative comments related to the shopping options available in Fiji, and this might be due to the existing knowledge of limited options for shopping in Fiji.

“Not too much choices for shopping options”

“Most of the shopping malls are small and dark. Nadi town is very small and nothing to buy”

It has been highlighted in recent reports that one of the major reasons for Chinese to travel abroad is to buy luxury products due to the high tariffs that China charges for imported luxury products. The shopping in Fiji is not found in modern malls and high-end department stores with luxury branded products. Instead, shopping in Fiji is found within resorts, hotels and boutiques along city streets and is mostly limited to handicraft products such as hand-woven baskets, mats and

jewelry. As elaborated in the above discussion, scenery and safety were identified as the top two preferred destination attributes for Chinese tourists. Therefore, although the shopping in Fiji is quite limited compared to other developed countries, Fiji does possess destination attributes that appeal to Chinese tourists more than shopping.

RECOMMENDATIONS

If tourism stakeholders decide to target the Chinese outbound market, the following recommendations are suggested:

Safety should be emphasized in promotional campaigns and advertising media. Safety as a destination attribute has been identified to heavily influence Chinese tourists' decision to visit a tourism destination. At present, promotional campaigns by tourism stakeholders focus on the beautiful scenery of Fiji to attract the honeymoon market, luxury and dive market. Based on previous studies, it is crucial from a destination management perspective to find ways to mitigate and alleviate the risk perceptions with Fiji from the perspective of both first-time and repeat visitors. Whilst not much can be done by tourism policy makers to alleviate risks such as crime and political unrest, a well-designed marketing strategy offering accurate information to travel agents through the internet and other media can contribute significantly to the alleviation of risk perceptions.

Tourism stakeholders and resorts in Fiji to improve their facilities and services for the Chinese market. This can be done by way of hiring Chinese coordinators, provision of additional amenities in the hotel rooms (such as toothbrushes and slippers), wi-fi or internet connection in individual rooms or alternatively in a business center. Chinese travellers rate food as the most important amenity provided by a hotel followed by the business center. More specifically, free Wi-Fi was ranked as the most important individual product and service provided by a hotel. In addition, tourism stakeholders should note that Chinese tourists prefer more opportunity and time to experience the local culture and crafts but this again needs to be aligned to the need for Chinese speaking staff to ensure correct interpretation and assistance, where necessary.

Tourism stakeholders should identify whether their Chinese guests are first-time visitors or repeat visitors to Fiji as these would assist in providing the relevant service quality and expectation. First-time visitors mostly visit Fiji for holiday whereas a high percentage of repeat visitors return to Fiji for business purposes. It is recommended that key tourism stakeholders in Fiji keep track of repeat visitors through a database and also carry out necessary communication with first-time visitors to continuously raise the awareness of current specials and rates in Fiji. In addition, travel websites on Fiji should be designed based on the information requirements of different groups. For example, websites designed for repeat visitors should have more of an analytical orientation such as a personal and private space on the website for individual visitors; features for first-time visitors could be more interactive such as expert suggestions, online group discussions, personal testimonials and other types of virtual communities (Lehto, Kim & Morrison, 2004).

CONCLUSION AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

It is evident that the academic literature in this area is sparse and provides little guidance on the decision-making processes of Chinese outbound tourists and how to best service this market. The motivations and expectations of Chinese tourists differ from traditional markets and if tourism stakeholders in Fiji do decide to target this emerging market, then it is vital to firstly understand the Chinese culture by educating or training their front-line staff to tailor their services according to the demands and expectations of Chinese tourists. Tourism stakeholders also need to acknowledge that targeting the Chinese outbound market requires substantial investment into tailoring their infrastructure and services to suit the Chinese outbound market as well as recognising that accommodating Chinese tourists could also have an impact on existing tourists from traditional markets.

In recent years, with more and more Chinese tourists travelling abroad, tourism destinations are becoming increasingly uncomfortable when confronting Chinese tourists' poor behaviour and causing concern and criticism (Zhang, 2013). Some of the case studies reflecting poor behaviour of Chinese tourists include defacing an ancient temple in Egypt; throwing cigarette boxes into the sea in the Republic of Palau; soaking feet in the fountain outside the Louvre Museum in Paris; Chinese graffiti on London's St Paul's Cathedral (Zhang, 2013). In response to these recent negative reports of Chinese tourists' poor behaviour, the Chinese National Tourism Administration issued a 64-page etiquette handbook that includes tips on what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour during an international tour. A study by Sofield & Li (2011) indicated that many of the marketing initiatives that work for Fiji's current source markets will fail to hit the mark in China and that it is critical to have an understanding of the key aspects of the Chinese value system, the culture, philosophy and world view of the Chinese people. One such example is that Chinese enjoy nature, but on their terms, meaning that nature needs to be packaged, tamed and beautified with landscaped gardens, concrete paths and stairs for trails that run through forests. Whilst Westerners may view this as spoiling nature, the Chinese however view this as men being in harmony with nature. Therefore, regulation and control measures need to be addressed in regards to limiting the number of Chinese visitors to Fiji through targeting Chinese visitors. In a recent study, it was highlighted that key tourist stakeholders in Fiji limit Chinese tourist numbers by targeting Chinese visitors during traditional low seasons only, allocating a limited number of rooms for Chinese guests or separating Chinese guests from traditional guests during dining (Vada, 2015).

Finally, it would be interesting to explore the risks that Chinese direct investment in Fiji would have on the tourism industry in terms of the degree of economic leakage of returns to China. It is also recommended that further in-depth research be carried out on destination Fiji's brand and the emphasis should be placed on both the tourists perspectives as well as the perspectives from tourism suppliers or stakeholders. The researcher worked for at Tourism Fiji from 2007-2009 and was responsible for the China market. During two promotional trips to Beijing and Shanghai in 2008, the researcher had the opportunity to discuss with travel agents on aspects of Fiji's destination branding. The destination branding and slogan in 2008 was '*Fiji me*' which did not seem to have a positive impact on the Chinese outbound market as Chinese tourists found it difficult to understand the meaning of the brand. Therefore, the recommendation from travel

agents in China was to re-create a brand specific for the Chinese market that is easily understood and appealing to the Chinese outbound market. In a combined desktop research carried out by Tourism Fiji and Fiji Airways (formerly Air Pacific), it was suggested that the brand 'Fiji me' be changed to 'My Fiji' specifically for the China market.

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