

COMPARING FIRST AND REPEAT VISIT DOMESTIC TOURISTS' EVALUATIONS OF DESTINATION ATTRIBUTES AND SATISFACTION - THE CASE OF NINGXIA, CHINA

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Abstract

This study compares first-time and repeat visit domestic tourists regarding their evaluations of the tourism destination attributes in Ningxia, a province in North West China and their overall satisfaction with their visit to the province. Quantitative research method was applied in the study. The data were collected from 423 domestic tourists visiting Ningxia in December 2017. The results revealed that they were most satisfied with cultural attraction and directions and signage to attractions. Internet was preferred information sources for both first visit and repeat visitors. Taxis and own cars were their main means of transportation. First-time and repeat visitors shared same views for overall satisfaction of visiting Ningxia. An independent t-test was used to determine the mean differences in evaluation of destination attributes among travellers with first time and repeat visitors. Independent t-test were conducted, the dependent variables

were destination attributes factors and the independent variables were visitors' first time and repeat visitors. Significant differences were shown some attributes in terms first time and repeat visitors, which are weather condition, condition of lodging facilities, food and services at the restaurants, a family-oriented destination, entrance fees at attraction, helpfulness of service providers, internet WIFI services. Both groups would revisit Ningxia and recommend Ningxia to others.

Keywords: First visit, repeat visit, domestic tourists, destination evaluation, tourist satisfaction, China

INTRODUCTION

In 2017 a total of 4.53 billion mainland Chinese tourists made domestic and overseas trips, the number equivalent to three times China's population of 1.38 billion, to top the world list in tourism volume. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in its report also forecast that the number of outbound tourists from China and emerging economies will grow at a much faster pace than travellers from developed countries in 2018. Once a privilege reserved for government officials and the social elites, tourism has boomed in the past decade in China, where growing affluence and higher disposable incomes, as well as easier access to travel documents have allowed Chinese citizens to travel more and widely (South China Morning Post, dated 25 January 2018). China's economic growth in the early twentieth century has given rise to a significantly large middle-class population, who can afford to visit to well-known and interesting tourist destinations. Their experience of traveling to new places is also a symbol of their prosperity (Wang & Qu, 2004).

Chinese people are eager to travel at home first before going to more exotic and costly destinations abroad. Domestic travel is made easier with the continuous development of China's transportation networks such as high-speed trains, highways, new airports and ports (Anders & Jeff; 2007). "Visiting outdoor natural scenery" is the most preferred travel activity of the domestic Chinese tourists, probably due to the growing speed of modernization and the scale of change in society. While "visiting relics/historical/heritage sites" is the second most preferred travel activity. One of the main motivations of Chinese tourists is mankind's natural interest and desire to discover the various cultural or ethnic identities within their own country (Wang & Qu, 2004; Zhou et al., 2006).

According to the China Statistical Yearbook of 2016, the total domestic tourists were 744 million in 2000 and had reached 4.000 billion in 2015 (Refer to Table 1). The data shows the percentage increase in domestic tourism, measured by person-times, between the two years (2000 and 2015) as 437.6% or an average annual increase of almost 30.0%. Meanwhile, the domestic tourism incomes in 2015 was 3,419.51 billion yuan, which is nearly ten-fold (or an increase of 978.55%) when compared to 2000's domestic tourism income of 317.55 billion yuan.

Table 1. Number of China's Domestic Tourists from 1994 - 2015

Year	Domestic tourists (Million person-time)	Tourism Expenditure (100 million yuan)	Per Capita Expenditure (yuan)
1994	524	1,023.55	195.3
1995	629	1,375.77	218.7
1996	640	1,638.44	256.2
1997	644	2,112.77	328.1
1998	695	2,391.22	345.0
1999	719	2,831.99	394.0
2000	744	3,175.55	426.6
2001	784	3,522.44	449.5
2002	878	3,878.44	441.8
2003	870	3,442.33	395.7
2004	1,102	4,710.77	427.5
2005	1,212	5,285.99	436.1
2006	1,394	6,229.77	446.9
2007	1,610	7,770.66	482.6
2008	1,712	8,749.33	511.0
2009	1,902	10,183.77	535.4
2010	2,103	12,579.88	598.2
2011	2,641	19,305.44	731.0
2012	2,957	22,706.22	767.9
2013	3,262	26,276.11	805.5
2014	3,611	30,311.91	839.7
2015	4,000	34,195.19	857.0

Source: China Statistical Yearbook 2016

One of the usefulness of domestic tourism is it could enhance national awareness and sense of belonging, a tourist awareness of and his or her identification with the country increase, when they visit and experience different parts of the country. To an informed tourist, exposure to a

country's past heritage and resources, contemporary efforts, and future aspirations is a must for it will educate the tourist with the dynamism of the country at work (Jafari, 1981; Sindiga, 1996). Domestic tourism can be an integrating force that enhances the love of the country.

The Study Area

This study will be conducted in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, one of China's five ethnic minority autonomous regions (besides Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang and Guangxi). It is in north-west of China, linking the west region of China and the desert in the north. It is bordered by Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region to the North, Gansu to the South, and Shaanxi to the East. Covering a total land area of 66,000 square kilometres (about 25,484 square miles). Ningxia's population stood at 6.62 million in 2014. The Hui are counted as an ethnic minority whose religion is Muslim accounted for 35.6% of the total population (HKTDC Research, 26 February 2016).



Figure 1. Location map of Ningxia province in China

Among Ningxia's famous attractions are; two national scenic spots at Sand Lake and Shapotou, Ningxia Museum, Nangan Mosque, China Hui Culture Park, Helan mountain, Zenbeipu West Studio in Yinchuan, Sanguankou Great Wall of Ming Dynasty and Mt. Xumishan Grottoes Scenic Spot and Shui-dong-gou Ruins Museum (HKTDC Research, 26 February 2016).

The objectives of this study are to: (1) understand the profiles of first visit and repeat visit domestic tourists visiting Ningxia, (2) to identify the sources of information used by the first visit

and repeat visit tourists (3) investigate whether there is a significant difference in the evaluation of Ningxia's tourist destination attributes by first visit and repeat visit domestic tourists, and (4) investigate whether there is a significant difference in tourist satisfaction between first visit and repeat visit domestic tourists.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One could conclude that the marketing efforts to attract tourists to Ningxia is successful when looking at the number of tourists visiting the province. According to National Bureau of Statistics China (2016), Ningxia received 9.089 million domestic tourists in 2009 and this number doubles within six years or in 2015 to 18.358 million. This figure includes the first visit and repeat visit tourists. Tourists who choose to return to Ningxia means that they are satisfied with the products and/or services they received while vacationing in Ningxia. This leads to additional challenges to Ningxia Tourism Bureau to provide better products/services to satisfy both groups of tourists.

Destination attraction attributes derives from perceptions of certain common functional characteristics, such as; price levels, transportation, infrastructure, types of accommodation, climate; and psychological features (level of friendliness, safety, quality of services) (Correia, Zins, & Silva, 2015). Ritchie and Crouch (2003) added climate, beautiful scenery, attractive beaches, wildlife, tourism infrastructure and the quality of management can contribute to the image and competitiveness of a destination.

Study by Lew (1987), also show that perceptual attributes, such as value for money, accommodation, local food, beaches and water sports, quality of infrastructure, environment, nightlife and entertainment, and cleanliness and hygiene, might be the main distinguishing attributes between destinations. In accessing destination performance, several studies have used satisfaction surveys to gather information regarding tourists' opinions (Alegre & Garau, 2010; Patwary & Rashid, 2016). In these studies, satisfaction is generally measured post facto, globally or from an evaluation of the place's attributes. For these destination performance evaluation study, Coghlan and Pearce (2010) recommend real-time on-site surveys to better incorporate the affective dimension of the destination attributes, particularly important in the tourism experience.

From marketing and management perspectives, it is understood that a key to survive in the increasingly competitive tourism market is to offer unique, differentiated products and services that lead to memorable experiences that add value to the tourists (Patwary & Omar, 2016). Satisfaction is defined as "a function of the degree of congruency between aspiration and the perceived reality of experiences" (Lee, Graefe, & Burns, 2004, p. 74) or another definition is

provided by Hunt (1977, p. 49):“customer satisfaction with a product refers to the favourableness of the individual’s subjective evaluation of the various outcomes and experience associated with buying or using it”. Hence, the common understanding of customer satisfaction refers to the positive feelings or favourable evaluation after he/she consumed and experienced a product or service, or in the case of tourism, tourist satisfaction is the overall experience tourists have with the given destination (Cugno, Grimmer, & Viassone, 2012).

Knowing the dissimilarities between first visit and repeat visit tourists and the factors that influence the dissimilarities between both groups is important for destination management, because their needs and wants are different (Oppermann, 2000). Studies showed that purpose of a first visit tourist is to become familiar with the destination, which may lead to future visit (Patwary & Rashid, 2016; Guntoro & Hui, 2013). First visit tourists will try to discover many locations within a destination, however repeat visit tourists tended to focus on fewer places (Oppermann, 1996). Repeat visit tourists were more aware of social opportunities and attractions available at the destination than first visit tourists (Kim & Lee, 2015). Both groups differed in their evaluation of destination performance and overall satisfaction due to having different purposes, needs and expectations from the destination (Baloglu et al., 2003). Hence, in order for Ningxia Tourism Bureau to market the destination effectively, they need to understand the differences between these two groups for this is critical for the continued success of Ningxia tourism.

METHODOLOGY

Research design of any study provides a structure for data collection as well as analysis, and it reveals type of research and the priorities of researcher (Creswell, 2014). Selecting an appropriate research approach plays significant role to ensure a successful research work, besides that research design must be given great attention when developing the research objectives of the study (Yin, 2017). In this study, the researcher used the quantitative research methods. Therefore, self-administered questionnaires were used to collect the responses from domestic tourists who had visited Ningxia during the study period, that is December 2017. The venue where this exit-visit survey was conducted was the Yinchuan International Airport. Sample size this has been decided as 384 which would be adequate of the population of over million. As stated in the sampling table of Krejcie and Morgan, (1970). By using 384 as the target sample size, the true percentage in the whole population could fall within a positive or negative 5% range of the percentage obtained from the sample (Riddick & Russell, 1999). For this study, the researcher had targeted a final usable returned questionnaire of at least 384 questionnaires and therefore, the researcher distributed 500 questionnaires, to provide for a

wider margin in cases of incomplete response from the respondents. The researcher used convenient sampling to collect the data. Researcher received 438 questionnaires completed questionnaires. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. Part 1 on demographic information, Part 2 on the Ningxia's tourism destination attributes evaluation, Part 3 overall satisfaction of their visit and Part 4 on their future behavioural intention.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Data screening is used to make sure that the nature of data may not negatively affect the result of the analysis. It involves some steps such as missing data, detecting outlier, linearity, normality, homoscedasticity and multicollinearity test. In the past studies, missing data were treated in many ways such as by deleting them, distributing them, and replacing them (Kline, 1998; Tsiriktsis, 2005). In data screening process, detecting missing data is the first important step. Usually, missing data occur as respondents may not be willing to answer personal questions relating to their income, age or other confidential matters or they do not know a specific topic. This study found 15 missing data and those were deleted as there was enough number of data to analyse and final usable questionnaires were 423.

In order to fulfil the assumptions of analysis outliers, the residuals' independence was checked. Initially outliers were examined in the first before proceeding for further analysis. The case-wise diagnosis indicates the existence of no outlier. Tolerance value of less than .10 or a VIF value of over 10 indicates the presence of multicollinearity (Hair et al, 2010; Pallant, 2007).

Table 2 shows the demographic profiles of the 423 respondents. Of the total, 34.3% of them were male and 65.75 were female. Of the first-time respondents, 34.7% were male and 65.3% were female. For the repeat visit respondents, 33% were male and 67% were female. The majority of first visit were between 18 and 34 years old and had completed tertiary level education. In terms of age group, majority of the repeaters (49.5%) were aged 25-34 followed by 18-24 (24.7%). Majority of the repeat visit respondents had good education, with 60.8% holding a bachelor's degree or higher. Of repeat visit respondents, slightly more than one-third mentioned that this was their second or third visit. Almost half of the respondents were private sector employees.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristic of Respondents

Variables	Total (n=423)	First Visit Tourists (n=336)	Repeat Visit Tourists (n=97)
Gender			
Male	145 (34.3%)	113 (34.7%)	32(33.0%)
Female	278 (65.7%)	213 (65.3%)	65(67.0%)
Age			
18–24	117(27.7%)	93 (28.5%)	24 (24.7%)
25–34	189 (44.7%)	141 (43.3%)	48 (49.5%)
35–44	100 (23.6%)	23.6 (12%)	23 (23.7%)
45–54	17 (4.0 %)	15 (4.6%)	2 (2.1%)
Education			
Primary School	4 (.9%)	23 (23%)	2 (2.1%)
High School	56 (13.2%)	9 (9%)	11 (11.3%)
Vocational/Technical			
Colleges	80 (18.9%)	49 (49%)	19 (19.6%)
University	272 (64.3%)	20 (20%)	59 (60.8)
Other	11 (2.6%)	5(1.5%)	6 (6.2%)
Occupation			
Government Sector	29 (6.9%)	23 (7.1%)	6 (6.2%)
Student	104 (24.6%)	82 (25.2%)	22 (22.7%)
Private Sector	217 (51.3%)	163 (50%)	54 (55.7%)
Housewife	30 (7.1%)	28 (8.6%)	2 (2.1%)
Own Business	28 (6.6%)	21 (6.4%)	7 (7.2%)
Other	12 (2.8%)	9 (2.8%)	3 (3.1%)

Table 3 shows the breakdown of sources of information used by first visit and repeat visit tourists. Both groups of respondents turned to internet as the most often used source of information about Ningxia. For the first visit tourists, second most important sources of information was published sources, while the repeat tourists were travel agencies and own experiences. The least used source of information by the first visit tourists was travel agencies, while for the repeat visit tourists was the Ningxia Tourism Bureau promotions.

In terms of travel companion, for the first-time tourists, most of the respondents likely to travel with relatives followed by travelling alone and travelling with friends. Likewise, for the repeat tourists also most of the respondents visit with their friends and relatives. Travelling using own car was the main transportation for repeat visit respondents and taxi were for first visit.

Table 3. Information Sources, Travel Companion, and Main Transportation

Sources of Information	First Time	Rank	Repeat Tourists	Rank
Own experience/ past visits	29 (8.9%)	5	21(21.6%)	2 Tied
Travel Agencies	11 (3.4%)	7	21(21.6%)	2 Tied
Published Resources	84 (25.8%)	2	15(15.5%)	4 Tied
Ningxia Tourism Bureau				
Promotions	21(6.4%)	6	12(12.4%)	5
Internet	200(61.3%)	1	36 (37.1%)	1
Friends or Relatives	59 (18.1%)	3	15(15.5%)	4 Tied
Others	31 (9.5%)	4	16(16.5%)	3
Travel Companion				
Travel Alone	104(31.9%)	2	18(18.6%)	3
Travel with Friends	95 (29.1%)	3	36(37.1%)	1
Travel with Husband/Wife	11 (3.4%)	4 Tied	2(2.1%)	6
Travel with Tour Group	7 (2.1%)	5	4(4.1%)	5
Travel with Relatives	118(36.2%)	1	30 (30.9%)	2
Travel with Others	11(3.4%)	4 Tied	16(16.5%)	4
Transport Used				
Own Car	40 (12.3%)	5 Tied	30(30.9%)	1
Taxi	154 (47.2%)	1	17(17.5%)	2 Tied
Bus	50 (15.3%)	4	17(17.5%)	2 Tied
Public Bus	59(18.1%)	2	15(15.5%)	3
Rented Car	35(10.7)	5 Tied	13(13.4%)	5
Train	40(12.3%)	3	14(14.4%)	4

Table 4 shows the ranking of evaluation of destination attributes. First visit tourists rated “cultural attractions” as top ranked attribute followed by “heritage attractions”, “scenery and natural landscape”, “friendliness of local residents” and “family-oriented destination”. Repeaters rated “directions and signage” to attractions as top ranked attribute followed by “cultural attractions”, “financial service facilities”, “services provided by tourist guides” “friendliness of local residents” and “scenery and natural landscape”. Both group of respondents rated “entrance fees at attraction sites” as the lowest rank. An independent t-test were used to determine the mean differences in tourist destination attributes evaluations by the two groups of tourists. There are a-5% significant differences in terms of destination attributes evaluation by two groups on “scenery and natural landscape” and “helpfulness of service providers”, and a-

1% significant difference on “heritage attractions”, “condition of lodging facilities”, “a family-oriented destination”, “entrance fees at attractions”, and “internet WiFi services”.

Table 4. A Comparison between First and Repeat Visit Tourists’ Evaluations of Destination Attributes

Attributes	First Time	Rank	Repeat Tourists		t-Test	Sig-t
	Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)	Rank		
Scenery and natural landscape.	3.67 (.760)	3	3.74 (.927)	5	.07	.028*
Cultural attractions.	3.69 (.821)	1	3.81 (.858)	2	.12	.992
Heritage attractions.	3.68 (.830)	2	3.56 (1.022)	8	.11	.002**
Weather condition	3.05 (.997)	22	3.30 (1.062)	18	.24	.129
Physical activities at attractions.	3.30 (.802)	17 Tied	3.31 (.872)	17	.01	.204
Choices of recreational activities at attractions.	3.35 (.798)	13 Tied	3.39 (.870)	16	.03	.416
Condition of lodging facilities	3.23 (.803)	19	3.47 (.996)	14	.24	.002**
Food and services at the restaurants.	3.30 (.883)	17 Tied	3.53 (.977)	11	.22	.103
Transportation system.	3.32 (.929)	16	3.42 (.854)	15	.09	.468
A family-oriented destination.	3.49 (.760)	5	3.47 (1.085)	14	.02	.000**
Entrance fees at attraction sites.	3.15 (.898)	21	3.28 (1.052)	19	.13	.004*
Learn about the Hui Muslim way of life.	3.34 (.921)	14 Tied	3.53 (.940)	11	.19	.657
Able to rest and relax.	3.34 (.890)	14 Tied	3.64 (1.020)	7	.30	.056
Western standard and cleanliness of toilets	3.22 (.956)	20	3.53 (.894)	11	.30	.739
Financial service facilities (e.g., ATM)	3.33 (.878)	15	3.80 (.918)	3	.46	.877
Directions/signage to attractions	3.44 (.814)	7	3.83 (1.038)	1	.39	.104
Obtaining updated tourism information	3.43 (.817)	8	3.51 (.933)	12	.07	.111
Internet/Wi-Fi facilities	3.26 (.904)	18	3.51 (1.184)	12	.24	.000**

Knowledge and skills of service providers	3.40 (.838)	11	3.54 (.914)	10	.13	.239	Table 4...
Helpfulness of service providers	3.45 (.847)	6	3.55 (1.014)	9	.09	.014*	
Services provided by tourist guides	3.42 (.869)	9	3.80 (.946)	3	.37	.459	
Preservation of Ningxia's ecological environment	3.39 (.877)	12	3.47 (.973)	14	.07	.184	
Friendliness of local residents	3.57 (.931)	4	3.79 (.989)	4	.22	.993	
Value for money	3.41 (.857)	10	3.50 (.940)	13	.09	.254	
Safety	3.35 (.864)	13 Tied	3.69 (.799)	6	.33	.208	

Table 5 shows the ranking of tourist overall satisfaction. First-time and repeat tourists shared similarities on the first three aspects of satisfaction. Respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction level in terms of “rate your visit to Ningxia”, “my choice to visit Ningxia is a wise one” and “tourism experience in Ningxia”. Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction level by using 5-point Likert scale, of 1=very not satisfied to 5= very satisfied.

Table 5. A Comparison between First-time and Repeat Tourists' Overall Satisfaction

Overall Satisfaction	First Time Mean (SD)	Rank	Repeat Visitors Mean (SD)	Rank
Rate your visit to Ningxia	3.19 (.691)	1	3.68 (.927)	1
My choice to visit Ningxia is a wise one	3.05 (.878)	2	3.67 (.858)	2
Tourism experience in Ningxia	2.83 (.830)	3	3.42 (1.022)	3

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results revealed that first visit tourists differed from repeat visit tourists in terms of gender, age, education and occupation; both groups used internet as their main source of information, they differed in their evaluation of the destination attributes but similar in their overall satisfaction. However, there are several limitations to this study; firstly, the respondents should be interviewed at other exit points, such as train station and bus station. Because of the distinctiveness of the first visit and repeat visit tourists, these two groups may have different demands and requirements regarding the products and services offered by Ningxia. In addition, marketing efforts directed primarily at enticing new visitors to a destination may be entirely inappropriate for encouraging previous visitors to return. Therefore, it is necessary to develop

different marketing strategies and tourism activities tailored to the needs of novice and experienced travellers. The implementation of effective promotional and functional activities targeted at first visit and repeat visit tourists requires a sound understanding of these two dissimilar groups. Qualitative study may provide insight into specific reasons why people choose or do not choose to visit Ningxia. Future studies should also focus on the impact of future marketing efforts and monitor the changes in tourist perceptions of destination image. Since tourism has increased over the past few years, future studies should also measure tourist intentions to return and explore reasons why some tourists revisit and some do not revisit Ningxia.

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