

A Focus on Far Eastern Tourists – Tour Operator Selection Criteria

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Abstract

Tour operators are becoming more important in the long haul destination market. Identifying tour operator selection criteria is crucial to orientate marketing strategies. The aim of the study was to determine the tour operation selection criteria of a package holiday maker visiting Turkey from the Far East according to the nationality. Data was drawn up and analyzed from tourists who came from three of these countries namely: Japan, South Korea, and China between February and April 2013 in Cappadocia. Quantitative methodology employing One-way ANOVA analysis was used. Deduction was made by analysing the tour operator selection criteria data that nationality was not a meaningful differentiation for a tourist in their assessment of the “Service Quality” and “Opportunity to interact with other people” items referred to in the survey questionnaire. Other items from the resulting data gave meaningful differences in cross-cultural behaviour. Results from the study provide important cues for tour operator managers to consider developing different promotional strategy initiatives to engage and attract more Japanese, South Korean, and Chinese tourists to Turkey.

Keywords: Tour Operator Selection Criteria, Cross-Cultural Tourist Behaviour, Far Eastern Tourism Market.

Introduction

Tour operators supply international tourist flow to many destinations all over the World i.e. they play a significant part in the movement as well as the volume of global tourism) (Cavlek, 2002). Tour operators operate as intermediaries in the tourism distribution system connecting producers and consumers (Gartner and Bachri, 1994). According to The World Tourism Organization’s estimates, tour operators nowadays have a share of about 25% of the total international tourism market (Cavlek, 2002). Kotler, Bowen and Makens (1996: 483) outlined the meaning of the distribution channel concept as: “A set of interdependent organizations involved in the process of making a product or service available for use or consumption by the consumer or business user”. Within the stages of this distribution process, tour operators can be defined as the wholesalers of the travel industry i.e. purchasing their package holidays from its principals and reselling them through its retailers (Yale, 1995).

For many years, tour operators have traditionally produced what we now commonly refer to as package holidays. In other words they have arranged vacations that include transport, accommodation, ground arrangements and the services of a tour operator's representative for an all-in-price holiday deal (Horner, 1996: 174). A tourist's motivation for participating on any given package tour are numerous but they commonly include a desire for: a change of scenery, adventure, escapism, an educational experience, a pleasant climate, a chance to meet new people, visiting friends and relatives, shopping and cultural experiences (Reilly, 1982:3).

This research is aimed at statistically analysing the way that Japanese, South Korean and Chinese cultural package holiday makers select tour operators and the research also reveals the relationship between tour operator selection criteria and tourist satisfaction. Convenience sampling, which is a non-probability sampling method was used with qualitative methodology. Zhang's (2008) questions relating to hotel selection criteria were adapted for testing the tour operator industry and they were sent in the form of a questionnaire to 10 tour operator managers in Cappadocia for their professional comment. A pilot test was made with a 150 far eastern tourists from Japan, South Korea and China who used tour operators for their package holiday. Cronbach's Alpha was assessed at a figure of 0.865 within the main survey which was completed by 707 of the Far Eastern tourists.

Cultural Behaviour of the Far East Tourist Market - Literature Review

Cross-cultural consumer behavioural studies have become an important subject in recent years. Halls (1969) separated the cultures into high and low contextual, cultural traits. Trompenaars (1994) researched culture by making various comparatives such as: Universalist versus particularistic cultures, individualist versus collectivist cultures, neutralist versus effective cultures, specificity versus diffusive cultures, achievement-oriented versus ascription-oriented cultures, sequential versus synchronic cultures, and internal control versus cultural classification external control. Hofstede (1991) provided a noteworthy cultural classification database. He categorized cultural behaviour into five dimensions: a power distance dimension, individualism versus collectivism dimension, a masculinity versus femininity dimension, an uncertainty avoidance dimension and a long-term orientation dimension.

There have only been a few published research articles in tourism literature on cross-cultural behaviour. Woodside and Lawrence's (1985) study deduced that Canadians, Americans and Japanese had different perceptions of the benefits they experienced from their tours. Sheldon and Fox (1988) showed that in contrast with American and Canadian tourists, food services were one of the more significant features that effected the Japanese tourist's choice of destination. Pizam and Sussman's (1995) examination of British tour guides opinions on Japanese, French, Italian and American tourists, discovered that Japanese tourists were seen as being the most distinctive in their choice of 20 behavioural characteristics. Moreover in reviewing cross- cultural behaviour, Pizam and Jeong (1996) deduced that American tourists were the most distinctive nationality in comparison with Japanese, and Korean tourists according to the Korean tour guides.

Japan, China and South Korea tourists are the three most important far eastern countries buying into the Turkish tourism market (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2012). The Japanese market is growing at the fastest and it has important potential for the global tourism market (Surman, 2009: 193; Ahmed & Krohn, 1992: 73). The

Japanese market is made up of a collectivist and homogeneous cultural community structure. As a whole the Japanese have familiar tastes and life styles (Mak, 2004: 39 cited Varley, 2000) and the general touristic behaviour of the Japanese is that they: give high importance to the quality of a touristic product, generally have limited time periods for their vacations, have a foreign language handicap and low levels of trust.

Chinese now make up one quarter of the global tourism market and have huge purchasing power (Mok & DeFranco, 1999: 99). A conceptual framework of the dominant Chinese cultural values are that they are: respectful of authority, inter-dependent, group orientated, harmonious. All-inclusive package holidays are mostly chosen by Hong Kong tourists (Luk, 1993; Mok & Armstrong, 1995). For Hong Kong tourists' the most important criterion in their selection of a package holiday is the level of safety of the tour. Other prominent criteria include: the accuracy of departure dates and the service quality of travel agencies in general (Wong & Kwong, 2004).

Korean tourists have both orientalist and western community cultural traits. However, according to Pizam & Jeong, (1996: 278) Koreans can also be described as being at variance with western cultural travel. They have a tendency to have an unwavering loyalty to their socio-cultural identity and are unwilling to accept anything that is alien to the Korean life style. They insist on going to Korean restaurants while abroad, are fond of travelling to Asian countries that are based on Confucian Philosophy like in Korea and they prefer to travel in groups rather than individually. They usually feel comfortable with cash in hand and tend to show off their cash and spend freely.

Methodology

The aim of this study was to determine the Far Eastern Tourism Market Selection Criteria of Tour Operator and to show the differentiation of the same by nationality and cultural traits. Further the study reveals the relationship between tour operator selection criteria and tour satisfaction.

To do this a measurement of the aesthetic value of tour operators' touristic products was essentially required. The Aesthetic Value Scale was used to measure: a souvenir shop, museum, hotel, restaurant and the transportation used within the tour operators' package tour. This was performed as a one day evaluation.

Table 1: Tourist arrivals to Turkey Between 2003-2012 from Japan, South Korea and China

Years	Japan	South Korea	China
2003	67 874	46 405	27 557
2004	64 318	56 926	35 339
2005	116 969	91 597	44 077
2006	125 755	108 140	56 323
2007	168 852	135 124	68 252
2008	149 731	119 500	61 882
2009	147 641	89 148	69 336
2010	195 404	123 315	77 142
2011	188 312	149 943	96 701
2012	203 592	159 084	114 582

Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2013.

The universe of the study was a group of Far East tourists who visited Turkey. In 2012 the Ministry of Culture and Tourism reported that Japan, South Korea, China, Indonesia, India, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Bangladesh, and Pakistan were the most prominent Far Eastern countries that visited Turkey. The chosen sample of the study was limited to Japanese, South Korean and Chinese tourists as these countries were recorded as being the ones that visited the Cappadocia Region the most between February and April 2013. The aim of selecting the Far Eastern Tourist was to measure their aesthetic value behavioural trends because: (1) Cappadocia is one of the most popular destinations of the Japanese, South Korean and Chinese tourist (2) An increasing number of Far Eastern tourists have visited Turkey for their cultural vocational tour (3) The Far Eastern Market especially China is estimated to become one of the largest tourism markets in the World (4) The Far Eastern culture behaviour as a general rule chooses tour operators as their desired method of touring (5) Similarly, tour operators target them from a marketing strategy stand point because of the fact that they possess this form of touristic behaviour (6) The Far Eastern Geographical distance to Turkey dictates that tourists within these countries almost without exception use tour operators. According to Table 1 referred to above, the official tourist arrival numbers collated by the Cultural and Tourism Ministry Report were as follows: 203,592 Japanese, 159,084 South Korean and 114,582 Chinese tourists. Sekaran's Sampling Table specifies that after 100,000 tourists have been recorded, 384 samples must be completed. In this research 707 Japanese, South Korean and Chinese tourists came to Turkey using tour operators between February and April and 2013. That number is sufficient to enable the Sekarans' Sampling Tablet to be used. Convenience sampling, which is a non-probability sampling method was used. The study design included a qualitative methodology. Zhang's (2008) questions were adapted for use with tour operators and the questions were scrutinized and approved by 10 tour operator managers in Cappadocia. The questionnaire was translated into the Japanese, Chinese and Korean languages. A pilot test was employed on 150 Far East tourists who travelled using tour operators. Cronbach's Alpha assessment was found to be 0.865 within the main survey conducted using the 707 Far Eastern tourists. The research had 8 hypotheses which are set out below:

H₁: There is a meaningful difference between the tour operator selection criteria "Tour Operator's Product Design" and nationality.

H₂: There is a meaningful difference between the tour operator selection criteria "Sense of "Get Away"" and nationality.

H₃: There is a meaningful difference between the tour operator selection criteria "Opportunity to have fun" and nationality.

H₄: There is a meaningful difference between the tour operator selection criteria "Service Quality" and nationality.

H₅: There is a meaningful difference between the tour operator selection criteria "Opportunity to interact with other people" and nationality.

H₆: There is a meaningful difference between the tour operator selection criteria "Prestige" and nationality.

H₇: There is a meaningful difference between the tour operator selection criteria “Price” and nationality.

H₈: There is a meaningful difference between the tour operator selection criteria “Loyalty Program” and nationality.

Findings of the study

It can be clearly seen from the results of table 2 that 48.4 % (342) of the responses to the questionnaire were from males whereas 51.2% (362) of the responses were from females. The nationality data revealed that: 28.8% (204) were Japanese, 36.5 % (258) were South Korean, 34.7% (245) were Chinese tourists. According to the income data the tourists who gave the highest response to the questionnaires (148) had an income of between €60,000 to €79,999 .On the other hand the tourists who gave the least response (53) had an income of less than € 20,000. Furthermore, the Age data revealed that: 31 (4.3%) of the tourists responding to the questionnaire were younger than 21 ; 115 (16.3%) were between 21-30; 108 (15.3%) were between 31-40; 134 (19.0%) were between 41-50; 194 (27.4%) were between 51-60 and 125 (17.7%) were over 60 years of age. The Education part of Table 2 shows that 22 of the tourists responding to the questionnaire were educated to a standard lower than High School levels. However the highest response 204 (28.9%) came from those tourists who were college graduates.

Table 2: Demographic Results of the Respondents (n=707)

	f	%		f	%
Gender			Age		
Male	342	48.4	Less than 21	31	4.3
Female	362	51.2	21-30	115	16.3
Missing data	3	0.4	31-40	108	15.3
Nationality			41-50	134	19.0
Japan	204	28.8	51-60	194	27.4
South Korea	258	36.5	Over 60	125	17.7
Chinese	245	34.7			
Income			Education		
Less than € 20,000	53	7.5	Less than high school	22	3.1
€20,000 to €39,999	102	14.4	High School	130	18.4
€40,000 to €59,999	136	19.2	Some college-two years	80	11.3
€60,000 to €79,999	148	20.9	College degree	204	28.9
€80,000 to €99,999	91	12.9	Graduate degree	176	24.9
Over €100,000	130	18.4	Postgraduate degree	88	12.4
Missing data	47	6.6			

Table 3 shows the main attractions that motivated the Japanese, Chinese and South Korean tourists to come to Turkey for a vacation. The most important motivational purpose for the Japanese tourists was “visiting the underground city” (21.73%) whereas “trekking” (1.53%) attracted the least percentage. The most important motivational purpose for the Chinese tourist was “Leisure” (16.88%) again contrary to this “trekking” (1.86%) attracted the least percentage. For the South Korean tourists “Culture” was the top attraction (21.10%) whereas “trekking” (2.88%) was the most unpopular. Reviewing the result as a whole “visiting the underground city” attracted the most percentage points (18,10%) but “trekking” was considered the least popular with a markedly small percentage (2,10%).

Table 3: Findings of travel characteristic to Cappadocia (n=707)

	Nationality						Total	
	Japan		China		South Korea			
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Visiting purpose								
Underground City	156	2.73	109	13.52	149	19.53	414	18.10
Open Air Museum	126	17.55	88	10.92	88	11.53	302	13.21
Religious	30	4.18	29	3.60	68	8.91	127	5.55
Trekking	11	1.53	15	1.86	22	2.88	48	2.10
Ballooning	96	13.37	103	12.78	82	10.75	281	12.29
Adventure	24	3.34	38	4.71	21	2.75	83	3.63
Pleasure	51	7.10	98	12.16	24	3.15	173	7.56
Culture	92	12.81	119	14.76	161	21.10	372	16.27
Leisure	64	8.92	136	16.88	48	6.29	248	10.84
Educational	14	1.95	21	2.61	33	4.33	68	2.97
Local Food&Beverage	54	7.52	50	6.20	67	8.78	171	7.48

As can be seen from table 45.25% of the Far Eastern tourists package holidays were booked in 5 stars hotels and only 0.7 % in pensions. 13.5% were booked in boutique hotel showing a growing popularity for this type of hotel by the Far Eastern tourism market in Cappadocia. Also within the scope of our research it was found that a high proportion of Far Eastern tourists preferred to visit Cappadocia with their “family” (45.8%) and there was a low preference level for “organized group travel” (11.7%).

Table 4: Findings of package tour components of Far Eastern Tourists (n=707)

	f	%		f	%
Accommodation			Duration of Tour		
5 Stars Hotel	371	52.5	Daily	4	0.6
4 Stars Hotel	158	22.3	2 Days	20	2.8
3 Stars Hotel	55	7.8	3 Days	29	4.1
Boutique Hotel	94	13.3	4 Days	19	2.7
Cave Hotel	17	2.4	One week	148	20.9
Pension	5	0.7	More than 7 Days	487	68.9
Missing Value	7	1			
Travel with			Hear about tour operator		
Only myself	30	4.2	Past Experience	217	30.7
With family	324	45.8	Internet	200	28.3
With friends	178	25.2	Friends' recommendation	101	14.3
With colleagues	88	12.4	Corporate contact	103	14.6
Organized Group Travel	83	11.7	Visitor centre's brochures	65	9.2
Missing Value	4	0.6			

It can also be seen that a significantly high percentage of Far Eastern tourists visited Cappadocia for more than 7 days (68.9%) and only a very small percentage did a day trip excursion (0.6%). The last question concerning how the tourists came to “hear about the tour” (allowing for more than one answer) produced interesting percentage findings 30.7% said from past experience which was the most prominent selection by the Far Eastern tourists. Whereas the “Visitor Centre’s Brochures” was found to be the least prominent selection.

Table 5: Result of one-way ANOVA on mean difference of tour operator selection by the nationality (n=707)

Items ^a	Group	n	$\bar{X} \pm S_x$	F	p
Tour Operator's Product Design	Japanese	203	4,38** \pm 0,05	11,267	,000
	South Korean	258	4,00 \pm 0,06		
	Chinese	245	4,17 \pm 0,04		
Sense of "Get Away"	Japanese	200	3,20 * \pm 0,08	44,632	,000
	South Korean	258	3,90 \pm 0,05		
	Chinese	246	3,98 \pm 0,04		
Opportunity to have fun	Japanese	197	3,53 \pm 0,08	37,624	,000
	South Korean	258	4,02 \pm 0,05		
	Chinese	246	4,28 \pm 0,04		
Service Quality	Japanese	201	4,26 \pm 0,05	1,443	,237
	South Korean	256	4,20 \pm 0,05		
	Chinese	246	4,33 \pm 0,04		
Opportunity to interact with other people	Japanese	200	3,55 \pm 0,06	3,654	0,26
	South Korean	256	3,59 \pm 0,06		
	Chinese	246	3,77 \pm 0,05		
Prestige	Japanese	198	3,63 \pm 0,08	6,811	,001
	South Korean	254	3,52 \pm 0,06		
	Chinese	246	3,85 \pm 0,05		
Price	Japanese	203	4,18 \pm 0,05	3,270	,039
	South Korean	254	3,98 \pm 0,05		
	Chinese	246	4,08 \pm 0,05		
Loyalty Program	Japanese	203	4,24 \pm 0,05	11,601	,000
	South Korean	250	4,30 \pm 0,05		
	Chinese	246	3,95 \pm 0,05		

**0.005 significance level

^a Remark: Five-point Likert scale was used for rating the importance of each criteria, ranging from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important)

*The lowest mean among criteria.

**The highest mean among criteria.

One way ANOVA analysis was used to accurately assess the differentiation of the tour operator selection criteria by nationality. The results of the one way ANOVA analysis for 6 of the selection criteria showed some differential between nationalities and the other 2 selection criteria showed only minimal differentiation. Among the tour operator selection criteria by nationality there was no significant difference with "Service Quality" and "Opportunity to interact with other people". However "Tour Operator's Product Design", "Sense of "Get Away", "Opportunity to have fun", "Prestige", "Price" and "Loyalty Program" items showed some meaningful differential between nationalities. For example: **H₁**, "Tour Operator's Product Design" (Japanese: 4.38 , South Korean: 4.00 and Chinese: 4.17) **H₂** "Sense of "Get Away" (Japanese: 3.20, South Korean:3.90 and Chinese:3.98) , **H₃** "Opportunity to have fun" (Japanese:3.53, South Korean;4.02 and Chinese;4.28), **H₆** "Prestige" (Japanese;3.63, South Korean;3.52 and Chinese:3.85), **H₇** "Price" (Japanese:4.18, South Korean:3.98 and Chinese:4.08), **H₈** "Loyalty Program" (Japanese;4.24, South Korean; 4.30 and Chinese;3.95) are accepted; **H₄** "Service Quality" (Japanese 4.26: South Korean: 4.20 and Chinese: 4.33), **H₅** "Opportunity to interact with other people" (Japanese 3.55: South Korean 3.59: Chinese 3.77) hypotheses were rejected under nationality ($p < 0.005$).

Research Limitations

Research was conducted with only a limited part of the Far Eastern tourism market i.e. Japan, South Korea and China. Further useful research could be conducted utilising the rest of the Far Eastern market for example Indonesia, India, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. Different market segments within Europe and America could also add to important statistical data and useful findings for the tourism industry. Furthermore only six tour operator selection criteria were used to determine the results and the design and number of the criteria could usefully be increased.

Conclusion

Looking at the results generally it can be said that the Japanese are more product design orientated than Chinese and South Korean tourists. Also The Chinese have a greater “sense of get away” orientation than the South Korean and Japanese. The Chinese show a greater need for “Opportunity to have fun” orientation than the South Korean and Japanese. Similarly, the Chinese are more “Prestige” orientated than the Japanese and South Korean. Interestingly, the Japanese are more “price” orientated than the Chinese and South Korean tourists. As a separate finding, The South Korean are more “Loyalty Program” orientated than the Japanese and South Korean.

We can also conclude from this study that “Service quality” is the most important criteria for all three nationalities. As a result of this tour operators should give more importance to tour service quality. It would also be advisable for package tours to provide more quality transportation services, quality hotel services and quality food and beverage services.

By way of contrast, the “Opportunity to interact with other people” criteria had the least dominance amongst the three nationalities. Far Eastern tourists don’t, as a rule, need to socialize to any great degree on a tour it is for this reason that they generally choose cultural tours. Also they prefer to participate more on package tours with their family. So tour operators give less importance to the promotion of socialising in brochures and promotional videos for Far Eastern tourists.

Tour operators product design is given high importance by the Japanese but low importance by Koreans; Sense of “Get Away” is given high importance by Chinese but low importance by Japanese; Opportunity to have fun” is given high importance by Chinese but low importance by Japanese. However all respondents gave high importance to service quality but moderate importance to Opportunity to interact with other people. All the nationalities gave moderate importance to Prestige but high importance to price; Korean and Japanese tourists gave high importance to loyalty programs.

The resulting data revealed that the Far Eastern tourist market shows similarities in tour operator selection criteria they commonly give importance to service quality and price. They also give importance to loyalty programs and tour operator product design.

Thus we can advise tour operator managers, with some certainty, that need to focus on: product design, service quality, price and loyalty programs. On the other hand, from the results of this study, it would appear that it would be prudent for them to give less importance commercially to prestige and group interaction.

In conclusion, from the mean scores taken from the Japanese, Chinese and South Korean tourists' tour operator selection criteria, we are able to say with some confidence that the Far Eastern market has similar behavioural results to the current literature (Woodside & Lawrence, 1985; Sheldon & Fox, 1998; Pizam & Sussman, 1995; Pizam & Jeong, 1996) leading on from this we can also say that the Korean tourist has very few different behavioural patterns from the Japanese and Chinese. Oral & Çelik (2013) found meaningful correlation between Far Eastern tourists' aesthetic value experiences of tourism product and customer satisfaction. Çelik (2013) found meaningful correlation between Far Eastern tourists' experiential value experiences of tour operator with customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Turkey is a heritage destination therefore the Turkish tourism market of the future should essentially be focusing commercially on the Far Eastern market because the attractions within Turkey are deeply seated in history and culture which are at one with the main needs and interests of the Far Eastern tourist. This study will therefore assist Far Eastern focused tour operators to shape their strategic marketing management.

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