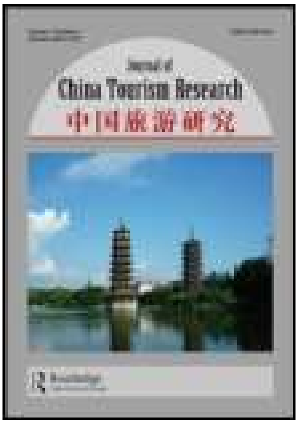

Journal of China Tourism Research

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wctr20

Chinese Perceptions of Seven Long-Haul Holiday Destinations: Focusing on Activities, Knowledge, and Interest

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Available online: 07 Dec 2011

To cite this article: Dongkoo Yun & Marion Joppe (2011): Chinese Perceptions of Seven Long-Haul Holiday Destinations: Focusing on Activities, Knowledge, and Interest, Journal of China Tourism Research, 7:4, 459-489

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19388160.2011.627029

Journal of China Tourism Research, 7: 459–489, 2011

ISSN: 1938-8160 print / 1938-8179 online
DOI: 10.1080/19388160.2011.627029

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Chinese Perceptions of Seven Long-Haul Holiday Destinations: Focusing on Activities, Knowledge, and Interest

中国人就活动、知识性和趣味性看七个长途度假目的地

DONGKOO YUN
MARION JOPPE

This study analyzes Chinese views of seven selected long-haul holiday destinations using secondary data from the 2008 China survey of the Global Tourism Watch market research program commissioned by the Canadian Tourism Commission. Results indicate that Mainland Chinese travelers considered "culture" and "nature" the most important activity/experience factors when considering taking a long-haul holiday trip. Further, findings indicate that there are significant differences in Mainland Chinese travelers' perceptions toward the long-haul holiday destinations regarding the best travel activities/experiences, knowledge about holiday opportunities, and interest in visiting each of the destinations in the next two years. This study demonstrates the competitiveness of the seven destinations and suggests destination or product differentiation strategies to increase consumer awareness and attract more Mainland Chinese travelers.

KEYWORDS. Chinese outbound tourism, long-haul holiday destinations, perceptions of motivational activities/experiences, destination knowledge, interest in visiting

本研究运用二零零八年加拿大旅游局的市场研究项目-全球旅游观察-调查所得的次级数据，分析中国人对七个长途度假目的地的看法。结果发现，在考虑长途度假旅程时，中国内地旅客视"文化"和"自然"为最重要的活动/经验因素。此外，结果显示中国内地旅客对长途度假目的地的看法有显著差异，包括目的地的最佳旅游活动/经验，度假机会的了解，以及在往后两年访问该目的地的兴趣。本文展示了七个目的地的竞争力，并建议目的地或产品差异战略以增加消费意识和吸引更多中国内地旅客。

关键词: 中国出境旅游，长途度假目的地，对激励活动/经验的看法，目的地知识，访问的兴趣

Introduction

Since the advent of economic reforms in 1978 and implementation of the open-door policy in 1982, the Chinese government has started to recognize tourism as a means of economic development and modernization (Lim & Wang, 2008). Although

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international travel by Chinese citizens for leisure purposes was not permitted immediately after the implementation of the open-door policy, the government has been gradually liberalizing outbound travel regulations. According to a number of studies on Chinese outbound tourism development (W. Guo & Turner, 2001; Y. Guo, Kim, & Timothy, 2007; Keating & Kriz, 2008; Lim & Wang; Pan, 2003; Travel and Tourism Intelligence, 2004; Tse & Hobson, 2008; Wang & Sheldon, 1995; World Tourism Organization [WTO], 2003; H. Q. Zhang & Heung, 2001), there is a general consensus that outbound tourism from Mainland China (officially, People's Republic of China) started in the early 1980s and has gone through three stages. These include travel to Hong Kong and Macao, travel to the border regions and intra-Asia countries, and travel to foreign countries beyond Asia.

Subsequently, departures from Mainland China have responded by growing at an average rate of 20% per year since 1991. Though the absolute number of outbound Chinese tourists is impressive, the percentage of Chinese people traveling abroad relative to their population is still small. Along with strong economic growth—the lowest gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 5.7% was registered in 2001 (Canadian Tourism Commission [CTC], 2009a)—and an expanding middle class, the Chinese outbound tourism market has been increasing tremendously. As estimated by the WTO (1999), China will be the fourth largest tourism-generating market in the world by 2020, with over 100 million Chinese outbound tourists per year, accounting for 6.2% of the world's international arrivals, following Germany, Japan, and the United States. For many countries, China represents an attractive, relatively untapped tourism source market with huge potential.

Although growing steadily since the beginning of the 1990s, Chinese outbound tourism jumped tremendously between 1997 and 1998 (Table 1) because the passport restriction policy was relaxed and the number of destination choices increased (Y. Zhang & Lew, 1997). By 2000, the total outbound departures from Mainland China reached 10.5 million and by 2009, the number was 47.7 million, an increase of 355.1%. Though the growth rate of global tourism declined 4.0% in 2009 compared to 2008, Chinese outbound travel has maintained a growth rate of 4.0%. More than 57 million Chinese tourists are expected to travel abroad in 2011, spending US$55 billion, according to the China Tourism Academy (as cited in China Daily, 2011).

Table 2 shows the number of arrivals from Mainland China to the seven selected long-haul holiday destinations from 2005 to 2009. Though Mainland Chinese arrivals in Canada, the United States, and Australia slightly increased in 2009, at 0.2, 6.5, and 2.8%, respectively, arrivals for the other four countries showed a significant decrease, ranging from 8.7 to 25.4%. As a result, the total long-haul arrivals[1] from Mainland China decreased 9.1% over this 5-year period but remained 20.9% higher than in 2000.

Given the significance of the Chinese outbound market, it is clear that tourism marketers have a strong vested interest in identifying the image, impression, preference, and perception of the destination and its products and services that are important in the minds of Chinese tourists in planning their international short- or long-haul trips. Familiarity with these factors is critical for making decisions about tourism policies or marketing strategies. The development of marketing strategies to promote a destination depends on identifying how consumers perceive the destination and how the travel products and services are designed to satisfy the needs and wants of the target markets. Generally, destinations are marketed to be a recognized choice, to be competitive, and to increase visitation market share (Baloglu, 1997; Woodside, 1982). However, promoting a destination has never been an easy task and remains a difficult marketing

Table 1. Number of Mainland Chinese Outbound Tourists (1991–2009).

Year	Number of Mainland Chinese Outbound Tourists	Growth Rate (%)
1991	2,130,000	
1992	2,930,000	37.6
1993	3,740,000	27.6
1994	3,733,600	–0.2
1995	4,520,500	21.1
1996	5,060,700	12.0
1997	5,323,900	5.2
1998	8,425,600	58.3
1999	9,232,400	9.6
2000	10,472,600	13.4
2001	12,133,100	15.9
2002	16,602,300	36.8
2003	20,222,000	21.8
2004	28,850,000	42.7
2005	31,026,000	7.5
2006	34,524,000	11.3
2007	40,954,000	18.6
2008	45,840,000	11.9
2009	47,660,000	4.0

Note. From *The Yearbook of China Tourism Statistics 2010*, by the China National Tourism Administration, 2010, Beijing, China, National Tourism Administration of the People's Republic of China.

Table 2. Number of Mainland Chinese Arrivals to the Seven Long-Haul Destinations.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	% Change 2009–2008
Canada	120,313	147,853	155,753	165,823	166,192	0.2
United States	270,272	320,450	397,405	492,958	524,817	6.5
Australia	285,031	308,484	357,557	356,428	366,362	2.8
New Zealand	87,850	105,716	120,804	112,398	102,259	–9.0
France	554,000	805,000	832,000	778,000	580,000	–25.4
Germany	418,235	441,495	462,293	421,452	384,576	–8.7
United Kingdom	95,000	107,276	143,353	107,860	89,187	–17.3
Total	1,830,701	2,236,274	2,469,165	2,434,919	2,213,393	–9.1
% Change		22.2	10.4	–1.4	–9.1	
Market share (%)	5.9	6.5	6.0	5.3	4.6	

Note. From *Yearbook of Tourism Statistics* (Online database accessed on 11 January 2011), by the World Tourism Organization, 2010, Madrid, Spain: Author; *International Travel: Advance Information*, by Statistics Canada, 2005–2009, Ottawa, Canada: Author; *U.S. Travel and Tourism Industries: A Year in Review 2009*, by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Travel and Tourism Industries, 2010,http://tinet.ita.doc.gov/pdf/2009-year-in-review.pdf; and *Overseas Arrivals and Departures*, by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005–2009, http://www.abs.gov.au/.

challenge. Tourism marketers need to know more about the nature of in-destination and out-of-destination visitor characteristics and how actual and potential visitors perceive local destinations. Therefore, the analysis of current or potential travelers' perceptions or traits helps identify factors contributing to the success or failure of a marketing strategy. Consequently, this allows a destination's travel planners to improve its product image or attractiveness in the target markets (Crompton, Fakeye, & Lue, 1992; Gartner, 1989; Milman & Pizam, 1995).

This study analyzes Chinese views of long-haul holiday destinations in terms of motivational travel activities/experiences for a long-haul holiday trip, destination knowledge, and interest in visiting. Thus, the primary purpose of this study is to explore the competitiveness of key destination countries to which potential Chinese might consider making a long-haul holiday trip in the future. The study pursues three major objectives:

1. To explore the importance of motivational activities/experiences for a long-haul holiday trip;
2. To identify perceived differences for the best activities/experiences in the seven selected long-haul holiday destinations; and
3. To identify differences in destination knowledge, specifically holiday or vacation opportunities at the destinations, and interest in visiting them in the next 2 years.

In this study, the seven long-haul destinations include Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. All are Canada's key competitors for Mainland Chinese long-haul travelers as identified by the CTC.

Review of Related Literature

Destination Perceptions

Mayo and Jarvis (1981) argued that perception is one of the most important psychological factors in understanding all types of travel behavior because the decision to travel arises from a perception in the first instance. Thus, the ability of perception to initiate behavioral activities has a major implication in tourism (Wang & Davidson, 2010). In general terms, *perception* is the process through which people make sense of the world around them (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1987). Consumer and marketing researchers have commonly used the term perception defined as "the process by which an individual receives, selects, organizes, and interprets information to create a meaningful picture of the world" (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 1996, p. 196; Mayo & Jarvis, p. 67; Sheth, Mittal, & Newman, 1999, p. 298). In the marketing literature, perception has been articulated and examined in the scope of information processing, which is a series of activities by which stimuli are perceived, transformed into information, and stored (Hawkins, Best, & Coney, 1998; Wilkie, 1990). A useful information processing model has five major steps: exposure, attention, interpretation, acceptance, and memory (Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1993; Hawkins et al.; Sheth et al.; Wernerfelt, 1996). The first three of these constitute perception. With regard to the tourism product, perception is the process of sorting and filtering the vast array of information about a particular destination (Sussmann & Ünel, 1999).

Many factors contribute to how a destination is perceived. According to Decrop (1999), they are highly interrelated with or influenced by a multitude of variables, which are not only extensive and complex but are also not yet known (Mayo & Jarvis, 1981). These factors that are known to influence destination perceptions can be divided into three categories: travel stimuli (marketing communication, travel literature, word of mouth, and travel trade suggestions and recommendations), personal and social determinants of travel behavior (socioeconomic status, personality features, social influences, and attitudes and values), and external variables (confidence, image of destination, past travel experience, assessment of objective/subjective risks, and constraints of time, cost, etc.). Selected papers supporting these findings include Decrop (2006), Mathieson and Wall (1982), Mayo and Jarvis, Middleton (1988), Moutinho (1987), Reisinger and Mavondo (2005), Reisinger and Turner (2002a), Schmoll (1977), Sussmann and Ünel (1999), Um and Crompton (1990), Woodside and Lysonski (1989), and Woodside and MacDonald (1994).

Perceptions and their meanings are extremely selective and subjective. Further, perception can be created without experience and knowledge of the object. This is often the case when travelers develop perceptions of a destination prior to visiting it (Moutinho, 1987). Not only can people have different perceptions of the same object, but they can also have different interpretations of the object in question. This poses a potential problem for marketers. For example, the same advertising message may be interpreted differently by different audiences or even individual members of the same audiences. Marketers require an understanding of the concept of perceptual bias; that is, the distortion of information that results from the way in which it is perceived by the receiver (Decrop, 1999; Engel et al., 1993; Mayo & Jarvis, 1981). In relation to the tourism product, no amount of positive coverage will render a destination attractive to a market segment looking for a completely different set of attributes (Sussmann & Ünel, 1999). In this sense, the objective reality of a product matters little; what matters is the customer's perception of a product or brand (Lewis & Chambers, 2000). Although a distinction exists between what specific attributes are provided (a real world of objective events) and what or how potential travelers may perceive them (a subjective world of events), for the customer, perception may be more than reality. Thus, Um and Crompton (1990, p. 433) suggested that these perceptions are "likely to be critical elements in the destination choice process, irrespective of whether or not they are true representations of what the destination has to offer." Thus, the dictum "perception is reality" can also be applied to products and destinations.

In tourism studies, perception of a particular destination or multiple destinations has been one of the major research topics in the past few decades because it is a fundamental yet critical subject to understand travel behavior affecting the development of marketing strategies and product delivery. Tourism scholars have extensively examined how holiday destinations are perceived, evaluated, and chosen. These three aspects are in line with the classical distinction between cognitive, affective, and conative consumer responses in decision-making models (Decrop, 2006). In measuring destination perceptions, adaptations have mostly dealt with the attribute perspective, which focuses on the characteristics or features of the destinations that are used to form judgements and decisions (Driscoll, Lawson, & Niven, 1994; Goodrich, 1977; H. B. Kim, 1998; Pike & Ryan, 2004).

Assael (1993) defined *image* as an overall perception of an object formed from information and the consumers' past experiences, leading tourism researchers to investigate perceived images of the destinations from the attribute perspective (Chen & Hsu, 2000; Chon, 1990; Crompton, 1979; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Gartner, 1996; Goodrich, 1978; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Joppe, Martin, & Waalen, 2001; S. Lee, Scott, & Kim, 2008; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Pearce, 1982; Um & Crompton, 1990; Vogt & Andereck, 2003; Wang & Davidson, 2010). Ultimately, destination image—a mixture of positive and negative perceptions of different aspects of a destination—represents tourism reality. Other popular topics in tourism research related to destination perception include, among others, its role in determining travelers' decision-making processes or purchasing behaviors, evaluation of (satisfaction with) destination attributes, destination positioning, and relationships between destination perceptions and behavioral intentions.

In this study, travel activities/experiences were included in examining Chinese perceptions of the seven holiday destinations rather than general attributes of a destination such as climate, ecology, natural resources, and so on. Although a destination itself is a travel product, specific activity items used in this study represent perceived travel products.

Chinese Perceptions of International Destinations

Due to the enormous potential of Mainland China's outbound tourism demand, a large number of studies have been undertaken on this subject. A review of the literature shows that consumer-based studies on Chinese outbound tourism include the following foci: visitor characteristics (Cai, Boger, & O'Leary, 1999; Qu & Li, 1997); perceptions of attributes or important selection attributes (Qu & Li; Ryan & Mo, 2002); motivations (Hsu, Cai, & Li, 2010; Huang & Hsu, 2005, 2009; H. Q. Zhang & Lam, 1999); cultural values (Mok & DeFranco, 1999); cultural differences (Reisinger & Turner, 2002b); satisfaction (Heung, 2000; J. W. J. Li & Carr, 2004; Qu & Li); leisure behavior (Yu & Weiler, 2001); tour operators (Pan & Laws, 2002); comparison of visiting friends and relatives (VFR) with business travelers (Jang, Yu, & Pearson, 2003); preference and positioning analysis (Y. Guo, Zhang, Song, & Chen, 2005; S. Kim, Guo, & Agrusa, 2005); shopping behavior (Heung & Cheng, 2000; Lin & Lin, 2006); reference group influence (Hsu, Kang, & Lam, 2006); images (X. Li & Stepchenkova, 2010; Zou, 2007); attitudes, constraints and use of information sources (Sparks & Pan, 2009); and expectations (Hsu et al., 2010; X. Li, Lai, Harrill, Kline, & Wang, 2011). This review of literature focuses on Chinese outbound travelers' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, including visitor characteristics, travel motivation, images of a destination, performance (satisfaction or evaluation), spending or shopping behaviors, behavioral intentions (intentions to revisit, complaints, etc.), and visitor relationships with destinations.

With regard to destination perceptions, early Chinese outbound tourism studies focused more on short-haul destinations such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. Qu and Li (1997) found that Chinese visitors to Hong Kong perceived "accessibility," "safety," and "ease of applying for visa" as the most important selection attributes, followed by "scenery"and "cost," and they were quite satisfied with all aspects of their journey, except for the price.

Huang and Hsu (2005) found that Mainland Chinese residents perceived Hong Kong mainly as a shopping destination. In addition to time and money as the most salient perceived behavioral inhibitors, language, complexity of obtaining travel documents, and improper accommodation supplies were perceived as inhibiting factors. With respect to Mainland Chinese visitors to Taiwan, Lin and Lin's study (2006) went a step further by identifying the satisfaction attributes of shopping and assessing their relative importance in affecting the overall level of satisfaction with the activity. The results indicated that Chinese visitors were most satisfied with the attribute of "providing home delivery service" and were least satisfied with the attributes "commemoration of the product," "uniqueness of the product," and "price of product." Cai et al. (1999) compared Chinese travelers who visited Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand with two groups of Chinese tourists bound for other Asia-Pacific and outside Asia-Pacific (long-haul) destinations. Results indicated that "shops" appeared to be the most popular place visited in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. Except for restaurants, the second most frequented places were historical sites, followed by theme parks, museums, places of worship, theaters, river cruises, and national parks. Night clubs and sports events were the least popular places.

Looking at Chinese perceptions of long-haul destinations, the research conducted by Yu and Weiler (2001) investigated the leisure travel behaviors of Chinese pleasure travelers to Australia. The findings of this study identified several key benefits determined to be the most attractive to Chinese, including "scenic beauty," "safety," "famous attractions," and "different culture." The study also revealed that the most sought after-leisure activities were "going to the beach," "visiting national parks or nature reserves," "visiting historic sites," "visiting Aboriginal communities," and "visiting city parks or gardens." Wang and Davidson (2010), in their research focusing on pre- and posttrip image perceptions about Australia as a holiday destination, found that "natural scenery" and "agreeable environment" were identified as Australia's advantages, whereas museums, accessibility, shopping, and entertainment-related areas were the disadvantages. The study also revealed significant improvement in the perception of destination attributes through the travel experience itself. Based on qualitative in-depth interviews with a sample of key senior managers of tour operators in Australia, Pan and Laws (2002) discussed the opportunities for Australian inbound tour operators to improve the service they provide to visiting Chinese groups organized by Chinese travel agencies and noted some problems that require attention. Cultural differences and language may not deter Chinese tourists from visiting Australia because the Western culture is a significant priority for Chinese tourists choosing Australia or other international destinations. Furthermore, group tourists are accompanied by a tour escort who can speak both Chinese and English. However, some potential problem areas related to this market are different hotel criteria used to rate hotels in China, tour packages with similar itineraries, low standards of service provided by Chinese tour groups, a lack of clarity of the image of Australia for Chinese tourists, and the necessity of a strong relationship with designated Chinese travel agencies.

Research on other long-haul destinations for Chinese travelers includes New Zealand (Ryan & Mo, 2002), the United States (Jang et al., 2003; X. Li & Stepchenkova, 2010), and Canada (Zou, 2007). Ryan and Mo identified the sociodemographics of Chinese visitors to New Zealand and examined their perceptions of the country as a travel destination. The main motive of their holidays was to see new places previously not visited, with general holiday motives tending to dominate, whereas New Zealand–specific issues played a subsidiary role. This study also found five clusters of Chinese visitors to New Zealand based on motivation or reason-to-visit scales. They are "sightseers in new places," "investment seekers," "package holidaymakers," "low scorers," and "New Zealand enthusiasts." Jang et al. analyzed the sociodemographics, trip-related characteristics, and travel behaviors of Chinese tourists to the United States, comparing the segments of doing business and visiting friends and relatives. They found that business travelers were more likely to spend more, largely by staying in lodging facilities, than those visiting friends and relatives. Shopping was a dominant activity enjoyed by both types of travelers, followed by dining in restaurants and sight seeing in cities. In searching for travel information on the United States, both business travelers and those visiting friends and relatives tended to rely heavily on travel agencies, airlines, and word of mouth, though the former were more likely to obtain information from their corporate travel department that assists with airline reservations. X. Li and Stepchenkova studied the destination image of the United States as perceived by Chinese outbound tourists. The authors developed and presented three perceptual maps (based on stereotypical, affective, and uniqueness images) to visualize the United States as a travel destination in the collective mind of Chinese travelers using unstructured, qualitative data. Results of this study indicated that Chinese outbound tourists' perceptions of America included highly urban, featuring advanced economic development, an open and democratic system, high levels of technology usage, and big cities. However, the country's leisure, cultural, and natural attractions are not fully recognized by Chinese tourists. Zou explored Canada as a potential destination for Mainland Chinese. The objective of the research was to assess the coherence and/or differences between the perceived destination images of Canada and the marketing position of Canada by the CTC. Using the importance and performance analysis, the author found that the destination brand showed good performance in general, but there were gaps between perceived and promoted images, such as the presence of a Chinese, Mandarin-speaking environment and cold weather, both of which should be deemphasized.

S. Kim et al. (2005) explored the preference and positioning analyses of overseas destinations of Mainland Chinese outbound pleasure tourists by applying multidimensional scaling techniques (Kruskal-Young-Shepard-Torgerson [KYST] scaling and alternating least-square scaling [ALSCAL] programs). According to the analysis of the importance of a destination's attributes, Mainland Chinese respondents considered safety and beautiful scenery to be the most important attributes. On the basis of KYST analysis, respondents perceived that the country pairs of Singapore and Thailand, Japan and South Korea, and Egypt and Germany showed a similar image. Results of the ALSCAL analysis provided information on the relationship of competing countries to destination attributes. The study demonstrated the competitiveness of destination countries and suggested strategies for destination markets to attract more Mainland Chinese tourists. Sparks and Pan (2009) explored potential Chinese outbound tourists' values in terms of destination attributes, as well as attitudes toward international travel drawing upon the theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1985). Five destination attributes were rated as most important by this potential group of tourists, which included "natural beauty and icons of a destination," "quality infrastructure," "autonomy," "inspirational motives," and "social self-enhancement." In terms of predicting the intentions to travel, social normative influences and perceived levels of personal control constraints were the most influential (based on TPB). Regarding the use of information sources, television programs were an important source used by Chinese people to learn about target destinations. The Internet was also shown to be a substantial information source and stands to have a stronger impact over time. The research conducted by X. Li et al. (2011) examined Chinese tourists' expectations of outbound travel products. A series of focus groups was conducted in 11 Chinese cities, and various issues, concerns, and problems related to Chinese outbound tourists' expectations of accommodations, food and restaurants, tour guides and itineraries, entertainment and activities, and transportation were identified. The focus group results showed that though Chinese outbound tourists share many of the same fundamental needs and desires of all tourists, this group has particular expectations in terms of amenities and service standards. The study suggests that understanding these expectations may help Western service providers better serve this market.

As seen from the overall review of literature of prior studies on Chinese travelers' perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes toward the destinations or attributes, a variety of scopes and topics in this field of traveling consumer or market research have been examined. In spite of the enormous number of studies from the consumer or destination perspective, only a few exist that address Chinese travelers' perceptions of or attitudes toward multiple or potential competitive destinations (Y. Guo et al., 2005; S. Kim et al., 2005). Thus, addressing this gap should help marketers in creating effective marketing strategies and plans.

Methodology

Data Source and Sampling

The CTC initiated a global tourism watch (GTW) tracking program in 2007 to expand consumer-based intelligence in its eight core markets, including the United States, Mexico, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Australia, Japan, and South Korea. The GTW program was designed to monitor and report on key market indicators for Canada, track brand performance, and examine Canada's market positioning over time, and across core and emerging markets, in a consistent way. The 2008 GTW China survey data was used in this study to identify perceptions of the seven specific long-haul holiday destinations (CTC, 2009b).

The target population of the survey consisted of residents aged 18 and older, who had taken a long-haul pleasure trip where they stayed at least one night in paid accommodation in the past 3 years or who planned to take such a trip in the next 2 years. In China, this methodology was modified to face-to-face recruitment with online completion to ensure a more representative sample of long-haul travelers. Fieldwork was conducted in October 2008. The sample was restricted to cities where Canada is permitted to market to travelers under approved destination status (ADS)[2] stipulations—Beijing (sample $n = 384$), Shanghai ($n = 380$), Guangzhou ($n = 378$), and Shenzhen ($n = 378$)—with the sample almost evenly split across the four cities. A total of 1,520 Chinese respondents completed the online survey.

Measurement

Twenty-one items were used to measure the motivational travel activities/experiences for taking a long-haul holiday trip. Responses to the items were measured on a 4-point Likert-type scale where 1= *never important*, 2 = *sometimes important*, 3 = *often important*, and 4 = *always important*. The respondents were also asked to select three destinations from the seven specified destinations that they felt were best for each item. Categorical data of these up-to-three multiple responses were rescaled as ratios for each destination. Knowledge of holiday opportunities in the seven long-haul destinations was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *poor*, 2 = *fair*, 3 = *good*, 4 = *very good*, 5 = *excellent*) and interest in taking long-haul holiday trips to the destinations was measured on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all interested*, 2 = *not very interested*, 3 = *somewhat interested*, 4 = *very interested*).

Weighting the Sample

The online survey sample was weighted by region, age, and gender to align it with the long-haul traveler population in each market. Two types of element weights are commonly encountered in the analysis of survey data: (a) the expansion weight, which is the reciprocal of the selection probability, and (b) the relative weight, which is obtained by scaling down the expansion weight to reflect the sample size (E. S. Lee, Forthofer, & Lorimor, 1989). In this survey data set, the relative weighting factors were used on the basis of data collected through a random telephone omnibus (CTC, 2007). Furthermore, results from Canada's International Travel Survey (ITS; Statistics Canada, 2008) were used to weight specific small survey groups such as the subset of recent travelers to Canada to generate accurate age by gender distributions. As a result, Shanghai respondents were given a weight of 51.9% (789 out of 1,520 respondents), whereas Beijing was weighted 22.1%, Guangzhou 17.5%, and Shenzhen 8.5%.

Data Analysis

First, descriptive statistics were performed for all items of motivational activities/experiences, choices of best travel activities/experiences for the seven selected long-haul holiday destinations, destination knowledge, and interest in visiting the destinations to provide characteristics of the sample and offer general information regarding the variables. Second, factor analysis for the motivational travel activities/experiences scale was performed to identify the underlying dimensions. Next, simple correlation analyses with reliability tests (Cronbach's alpha) for extracted domains were computed to measure the internal consistency among items. Finally, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted on best travel activities/experiences, destination knowledge, and interest in visiting the destinations to determine whether variables differed among the seven long-haul destinations. In addition, when significant differences were found, Duncan's posthoc multiple comparison tests (SAS Institute Inc., 1990) were used to examine the source of differences across the long-haul holiday destinations.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 3 summarizes the demographic profile of the sample. Slightly more respondents were male (51.8%) than female (48.2%). Just over half (53.1%) of the respondents were between ages 25 and 44, and only 3.6% were 65 and over. More than two thirds (67.5%) were married or living with someone. Fifty-five percent of the respondents indicated that they were college/university students or graduates. A large proportion (70.1%) of the respondents worked fulltime. Occupations were diverse but slightly more than half (51.1%) were company employees having professional careers as top managers (chief executive officer [CEO], president, director, chief financial officer [CFO], manager, supervisor, etc.) and other skilled or unskilled white-collar workers. Respondents varied widely in gross monthly household income. However, more than one third (38.8%) of the respondents earned less than 8,000 Chinese RMB yuan per month (approximately C$1,170 or US$1,379 at the time of the survey).

Table 3. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (Total $N = 1{,}520$).

	N	%
City of Residence		
Shanghai	789	51.9
Beijing	335	22.0
Guangzhou	266	17.5
Shenzhen	130	8.6
Gender		
Male	788	51.8
Female	732	48.2
Age		
18–24	257	16.9
25–34	450	29.6
35–44	358	23.5
45–54	200	13.2
55–64	200	13.2
65 and over	55	3.6
Marital Status		
Married/living with someone	1,025	67.4
Single	402	26.5
Separated/divorced	48	3.2
Widowed	34	2.2
Prefer not to answer	11	0.7
Education Level		
No qualification	2	0.1
Primary school or below	38	2.5
(F1–F3) Junior secondary school/middle school/junior high school	127	8.4
(F4–F5) Senior secondary school/senior high school	318	20.9
Technical/vocational training	106	7.0
College	371	24.4
University	471	31.0
Postgraduate or above	82	5.4
Other	3	0.2
Prefer not to answer	2	0.1
Employment Status		
Working fulltime (30+ hours per week)	1,065	70.1
Working parttime (8–29 hours per week)	55	3.6
Working in home/housewife/husband	113	7.4
Retired	185	12.2
Unemployed	5	0.3
Student	69	4.5
Other	18	1.2
Prefer not to answer	10	0.7
Occupation of the Main Income Earner in the Household		
CEO/chairman/managing director/president	4	0.3
Director/general manager/vice president	71	4.7

(*Continued*)

Table 3. Continued.

	N	%
CFO/treasurer/company secretary/controller	76	5.0
Owner/partner	227	14.9
Manager/executive/supervisor/officer	342	22.5
Other skilled white collar	194	12.8
Unskilled white collar	90	5.9
Skilled blue collar	202	13.3
Unskilled blue collar	55	3.6
Other	210	13.8
Prefer not to answer	49	3.2
Monthly Household Income before Taxes in 2007		
1,000–3,999 RMB	44	2.9
4,000–5,999 RMB	175	11.5
6,000–7,999 RMB	385	25.3
8,000–9,999 RMB	299	19.7
10,000–14,999 RMB	327	21.5
15,000–19,999 RMB	108	7.1
20,000–29,999 RMB	65	4.3
30,000 RMB or above	95	6.3
Prefer not to answer	22	1.4

Note. All results in this study were based on the relative weighting values.

Factor Structure of Motivational Travel Activities/Experiences for a Long-Haul Holiday Trip

The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with a principal component method of the 21 travel activity/experience items identified five underlying domains that explained 55.89% of the total variance (Table 4). The appropriateness of factor analysis determined by examining Kaiser's measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) was .83 (critical value of .60 according to Tabachnick & Fidel, 1989). All attributes had factor loadings higher than .50, indicating a reasonably high correlation between the delineated factors and their individual items (Hattie, 1985). Three factors out of five had relatively high reliability coefficients (Cronbach, 1951; Nunnally, 1979). These dimensions were labeled (a) "outdoor recreational sports activities," (b) "experiencing culture," (c) "nature-based activities," (d) "luxury and entertainment,"and (e) "touring type."

The first dimension of outdoor recreational sports activities included four motivational activity items: kayaking, canoeing, sailing, or cruising; playing golf; skiing or snowboarding; and fishing/hunting. According to the mean values of the factor, Chinese travelers considered this domain to be of least importance ($M = 2.48$) compared to the other dimensions. The second dimension of experiencing culture consisted of seven activity items, representing culture-related activities/experiences. This domain is likely to be the most important ($M = 3.07$) for Chinese travelers to take part in at long-haul holiday destinations. The third dimension of nature-based activities contained four items, related to seeing scenery (rivers, waterfalls, glaziers, or coastal scenery); viewing beautiful landscapes; visiting parks, protected areas, or heritage

Table 4. Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis for Motivational Travel Activities and Experiences for a Long-Haul Holiday Trip.

	Factor Loadings	Communalities	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained	Reliability Coefficient	Factor Means[a]	Item Means[a]
F1: Outdoor recreational sports activities			4.61	21.95	0.79	2.48	
Kayaking, canoeing, sailing, or cruising	0.80	0.67					2.49
Playing golf	0.79	0.67					2.44
Skiing or snowboarding	0.74	0.61					2.54
Fishing/hunting	0.66	0.49					2.45
F2: Experiencing culture			3.56	15.98	0.78	3.07	
Attending major events	0.70	0.57					2.95
Experiencing a country's unique character and local lifestyles	0.65	0.54					3.10
Participating in hands-on learning activities	0.64	0.47					2.87
Experiencing aboriginal culture and attractions	0.58	0.38					3.06
Sampling local flavors	0.54	0.53					3.18
Seeing historical and cultural attractions	0.54	0.51					3.15
Exploring vibrant cities that are in close proximity to nature	0.51	0.51					3.15
F3: Nature-based activities			1.47	7.02	0.71	3.04	
Seeing rivers, waterfalls, glaciers, or coastal scenery	0.81	0.71					3.08
Viewing beautiful landscapes	0.80	0.69					3.11
Visiting national/provincial/state parks, protected areas, or heritage sites	0.58	0.47					3.08
Observing wildlife in their natural habitats	0.53	0.50					2.87
F4: Luxury and entertainment			1.25	5.95	0.63	2.70	
Staying at a luxury resort	0.78	0.66					2.77
Spa and wellness experiences	0.75	0.60					2.76
Entertainment experiences	0.50	0.49					2.58

(*Continued*)

Table 4. Continued.

	Factor Loadings	Communalities	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained	Reliability Coefficient	Factor Means[a]	Item Means[a]
F5: Touring type			1.05	4.99	0.51	2.92	
Touring on your own by car, train, bike, or boat	0.76	0.60					2.88
Taking a guided group tour	0.65	0.55					2.96
Hiking or trekking in a nature area	0.57	0.51					2.93

Note. For exploratory factor analysis (EFA), principal component analysis (PCA) with varimax (orthogonal) rotation was employed and Kaiser normalization was also used to decide the number of factors to be retained for rotation (all factors with eigenvalues greater than one, total $N = 1{,}517$); total variance explained = 55.89%; overall MSA = 0.83.

[a]Mean values were based on a 4-point Likert-type scale where 1 = *never important*, 2 = *sometimes important*, 3 = *often important*, and 4 = *always important*.

sites; and observing wildlife in natural habitats. This domain was also rated highly ($M = 3.04$). The fourth dimension of luxury and entertainment was comprised of three items related to staying at a luxury resort, spa and wellness, and entertainment experiences. This domain was perceived to be relatively less important ($M = 2.70$). The final dimension of touring type encompassed three items: touring on your own by car, train, bike or boat; taking a guided group tour; and hiking or trekking in a nature area. This factor received the third highest importance rating ($M = 2.92$).

Looking at each motivational activity/experience item, it is clear that sampling local flavors ($M = 3.18$), seeing historical and cultural attractions ($M = 3.15$), and exploring vibrant cities that are in close proximity to nature ($M = 3.15$) were the three highest rated motivational activities based on the level of importance. The next highest rated activities were viewing beautiful landscapes ($M = 3.11$); experiencing a country's unique character and local lifestyles ($M = 3.10$); seeing rivers, waterfalls, glaciers or coastal scenery ($M = 3.08$); visiting national/provincial/state parks, protected areas, or heritage sites ($M = 3.08$); and experiencing aboriginal culture and attractions ($M = 3.06$). At the opposite end, Chinese travelers were least likely to be engaged in playing golf ($M = 2.44$), fishing/hunting ($M = 2.45$), and kayaking, canoeing, sailing, or cruising ($M = 2.49$).

Perceived Best Travel Activities/Experiences in the Seven Long-Haul Holiday Destinations

The differences in the perceived best travel activities/experiences in the seven long-haul holiday destinations were identified using one-way ANOVA tests and are presented in Table 5. The ANOVA tests found that all perceived best travel activity/experience factors and individual items demonstrated significant differences between each long-haul destination. When significant differences were found, Duncan's posthoc multiple comparison tests were performed to examine the source of the differences across the seven selected long-haul holiday destinations.

With regard to the differences in the five dimensions for best activities/experiences among the seven long-haul holiday destinations, Canada (32.0%) was most likely to be perceived by Mainland Chinese travelers as the best destination for outdoor activities, followed by Australia (29.1%), the United States (26.9%), and New Zealand (25.7%). Indeed, Canada ranked the highest in three out of the four activities, with the exception of golf, which is seen as the U.S.'s greatest strength in this dimension. At the other end of the spectrum, France (23.6%), Germany (23.6%), and the UK (25.3%) were perceived as the least favorable destinations in terms of outdoor activities. Chinese travelers perceived that Canada (29.2%), France (28.5%), Australia (28.7%), and the United States (27.8%) were the strongest for the experiencing culture factor, whereas Germany (24.6%), New Zealand (26.1%), and the UK (27.4%) had weaknesses in this factor.

Canada (32.3%) and Australia (31.7%) were perceived as the most appropriate long-haul holiday destinations in regard to nature-based activities. New Zealand (27.0%) and the United States (26.9%) ranked quite a bit lower, with France (23.4%), Germany (23.5%), and the UK (23.6%) perceived as the least favorable destinations for this dimension. Regarding the luxury and entertainment dimension, the United States (31.9%) had the most positive perceptions, followed by Australia (28.1%), Canada (27.9%), France (27.8%), and the UK (26.4%). New Zealand (21.8%) and Germany (23.4%) had the least positive perceptions for this factor. Australia (32.0%) was perceived by Chinese travelers as the best destination in terms of the touring type factor,

Table 5. Results of One-Way ANOVA on Best Travel Activities and Experiences atthe Seven Long-Haul Holiday Destinations.

	Canada	United States	Australia	New Zealand	France	Germany	United Kingdom	*F*-Value
F1: Outdoor recreational sports activities	*32.0a*	*26.9c*	*29.1b*	*25.7c*	*23.6d*	*23.6d*	*25.3cd*	*24.1****
Kayaking, canoeing, sailing, or cruising	33.4a	22.4c	30.4a	26.7b	25.4bc	25.3bc	23.7bc	11.6***
Playing golf	27.9b	35.1a	27.6b	23.6cd	22.2d	23.3cd	26.1bc	15.0***
Skiing or snowboarding	35.1a	26.2bc	28.1b	24.2c	24.1c	23.5c	25.0bc	13.0***
Fishing/hunting	31.7a	23.9de	30.1ab	28.4bc	22.6e	22.2e	26.3cd	11.0***
F2: Experiencing culture	*29.2a*	*27.8bc*	*28.7ab*	*26.1c*	*28.5ab*	*24.6d*	*27.4bc*	*9.1****
Attending major events	30.4b	35.1a	23.3c	22.2c	27.9b	24.0c	30.3b	16.9***
Experiencing a country's unique character and local lifestyles	27.8ab	27.5ab	30.8a	25.4b	28.8ab	29.2a	28.1ab	2.1*
Participating in hands-on learning activities	26.2cd	33.1a	28.2bc	24.0de	25.1cd	21.6e	30.8ab	12.5***
Experiencing aboriginal culture and attractions	29.1a	25.1b	32.2a	30.3a	25.5b	20.5c	24.6b	12.5***
Sampling local flavors	30.6b	22.9d	26.6c	27.1c	36.8a	26.3c	22.7d	18.2***
Seeing historical and cultural attractions	29.6a	24.6b	25.4b	24.2b	29.4a	29.0a	31.6a	6.4***
Exploring vibrant cities that are in close proximity to nature	30.7b	26.3cd	34.2a	29.4bc	26.0d	21.4e	23.8de	14.4***
F3: Nature-based activities	*32.3a*	*26.9b*	*31.7a*	*27.0b*	*23.4c*	*23.5c*	*23.6c*	*36.6****
Seeing rivers, waterfalls, glaciers, or coastal scenery	34.7a	27.4bc	28.2b	25.5bc	22.5d	24.7cd	22.5d	14.0***
Viewing beautiful landscapes	34.2a	27.2b	34.9a	26.8b	25.4bc	19.9d	23.0cd	23.5***

Visiting national/provincial/state parks, protected areas, or heritage sites	28.6a	28.9a	26.6ab	25.8ab	23.7b	24.8b	26.8ab	2.8*
Observing wildlife in their natural habitats	31.8b	24.0c	36.9a	29.8b	22.2c	24.5c	22.1c	24.4***
F4: Luxury and entertainment	*27.9b*	*31.9a*	*28.1b*	*21.8c*	*27.8b*	*23.4c*	*26.4b*	*22.8****
Staying at a luxury resort	27.5b	31.4a	30.0ab	20.5d	30.8a	21.5d	25.5bc	15.4***
Spa and wellness experiences	32.4a	26.9bc	29.9ab	24.5c	26.9bc	25.6c	24.3c	6.8***
Entertainment experiences	23.7cd	37.5a	24.3c	20.5d	25.8c	23.1cd	29.4b	25.1***
F5: Touring type	*28.7b*	*27.3bc*	*32.0a*	*25.9cd*	*25.4cd*	*24.6de*	*23.1e*	*17.3****
Touring on your own by car, train, bike, or boat	32.0a	25.8c	30.1ab	20.9d	27.1bc	24.2cd	24.1cd	11.3***
Taking a guided group tour	27.1b	28.2b	33.2a	27.4b	25.0bc	25.5bc	22.9c	8.1***
Hiking or trekking in a nature area	27.2bc	27.8b	32.7a	29.4b	24.0cd	24.0cd	22.1d	10.3***

Note. Numbers for each item or factorin each destination indicate percentages based on the top three destination selections that were the best for each item (total N in each destination = 1,520); a, b, c, d, and e indicate the results from the Duncan's posthoc multiple comparison tests (a > b > c> d > e).

$^*p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.

followed by Canada (28.7%) and the United States (27.3%), whereas the UK (23.1%) was perceived as the least preferable destination for this factor.

Focusing on individual motivational experience items across the seven selected long-haul holiday destinations, Canada was more likely to be perceived by the Chinese as the strongest destination for specific travel activities such as skiing or snowboarding (35.1%); seeing rivers, waterfalls, glaciers, or coastal scenery (34.7%); viewing beautiful landscapes (34.2%); kayaking, canoeing, sailing, cruising (33.4%); spa and wellness experiences (32.4%); touring on your own by car, train, bike, or boat (32.0%); fishing/hunting (31.7%); seeing historical and cultural attractions (29.6%); experiencing aboriginal culture and attractions (29.1%); and visiting national and provincial parks, protected areas, or heritage sites (28.6%), compared to other competitive destinations. Canada was considered as the least positive destination in terms of entertainment experiences (23.7%) and participating in hands-on learning activities (26.2%).

The United States appeared to be the most favorable destination for entertainment experiences (37.5%), playing golf (35.1%), attending major events (35.1%), participating in hands-on learning activities (33.1%), staying at a luxury resort (31.4%), and visiting national and state parks, protected areas, or heritage sites (28.9%), compared to other long-haul holiday destinations. In contrast, the United States was perceived as the least favorable destination in terms of kayaking, canoeing, sailing, or cruising (22.4%); sampling local flavors (22.9%); and observing wildlife in their natural habitats (24.0%).

Australia was perceived by Chinese travelers as the most appropriate destination for specific activities such as observing wildlife in their natural habitats (36.9%), viewing beautiful landscapes (34.9%), exploring vibrant cities that are in close proximity to nature (34.2%), taking a guided group tour (33.2%), hiking or trekking in a natural area (32.7%), experiencing aboriginal culture and attractions (32.2%), experiencing a country's unique character and local lifestyles (30.8%), and kayaking, canoeing, sailing, or cruising (30.4%), compared to other long-haul holiday destinations. However, Chinese travelers perceived Australia as the least appropriate destination regarding attending major events (23.3%), entertainment experiences (24.3%), and sampling local flavors (26.6%).

New Zealand was perceived as the most positive destination only for experiencing aboriginal culture and attractions (30.3%) but as the least positive destination regarding entertainment experiences (20.5%); staying at a luxury hotel (20.5%); touring on your own by car, train, bike, or boat (20.9%); attending major events (22.2%); seeing historical and cultural attractions (24.2%); skiing or snowboarding (24.2%); and sampling local flavors (27.1%).

As expected, the three European countries were commonly most likely to be viewed by Chinese travelers as the most preferable destinations for seeing historical and cultural attractions (29.0–31.6%). Other than this item, France also showed some strength as the most favorable destination for sampling local flavors (36.8%), staying at a luxury resort (30.8%), and experiencing a country's unique character and local lifestyles (28.8%). In contrast, France was also perceived as the least favorable destination with respect to observing wildlife in their natural habitats (22.2%); playing golf (22.2%); seeing rivers, waterfalls, glaciers, or coastal scenery (22.5%); fishing/hunting (22.6%); and skiing or snowboarding.

No individual activity was ranked highest for Germany but, in general, this country was perceived as having strength as a destination for experiencing a country's unique character and local lifestyles (29.2%). Viewing beautiful landscapes (19.9%), experiencing aboriginal culture and attractions (20.5%), exploring vibrant cities that are in close proximity to nature (21.4%), staying at a luxury resort (21.5%), participating in hands-on learning activities (21.6%), fishing/hunting (22.2%), skiing or snowboarding (23.5%), attending major events (24.0%), observing wildlife in their natural habitats (24.5%), and spa and wellness experiences (25.6%) were all perceived as least preferable for Germany, compared to other competitive destinations.

The UK was perceived by Chinese travelers as the strongest destination for seeing historical and cultural attractions (31.6%) and strong for participating in hands-on learning activities (30.8%), attending major events (30.3%), entertainment experiences (29.4%), experiencing a country's unique character and local lifestyles (28.1%), and visiting national parks, protected areas, or heritage sites (26.8%) but as the least preferable destination in terms of observing wildlife in their natural habitats (22.1%); hiking or trekking in a nature area (22.1%); seeing rivers, waterfalls, glaciers, or coastal scenery (22.5%); sampling local flavors (22.7%); taking a guided group tour (22.9%); and spa and wellness experiences (24.3%).

Destination Knowledge

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of knowledge about holiday or vacation opportunities in the seven selected long-haul holiday destinations. Figure 1 shows that destination knowledge was less than 50% for all the seven destinations, reflecting the fact that China is still an emerging market for long-haul travel. Among the competitive set, Australia (48.5%; $M = 3.36$) and the United States (43.2%; $M = 3.23$) ranked the highest for destination knowledge. France followed closely, with 42.7% of travelers indicating their knowledge of the country to be either excellent or very good ($M = 3.16$). Although not very high, it is notable that the UK (38.4%; $M = 3.09$), New Zealand (37.9%; $M = 3.07$), and Canada (37.3%; $M = 3.08$) fared relatively well within the competitive set, placing third, ahead of Germany (32.6%; $M = 2.95$).

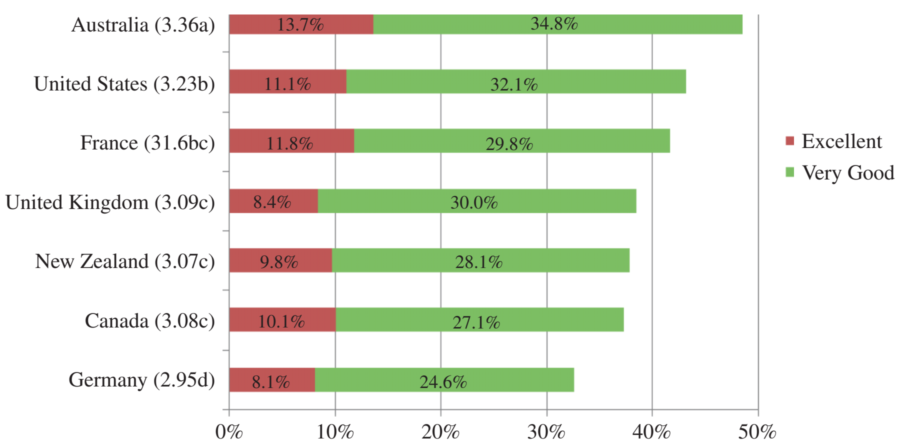

Figure 1. Level of knowledge about holiday opportunities in the destinations (color figure available online). *Note.* Total N in each destination = 1,520. Numbers in parentheses in each destination indicate mean values based on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *poor*, 2 = *fair*, 3 = *good*, 4 = *very good*, 5 = *excellent*) and a, b, c, and d indicate the result from the Duncan's posthoc multiple comparison test (a > b > c > d); F-value = 21.83 ($p < .001$) in one-way ANOVA.

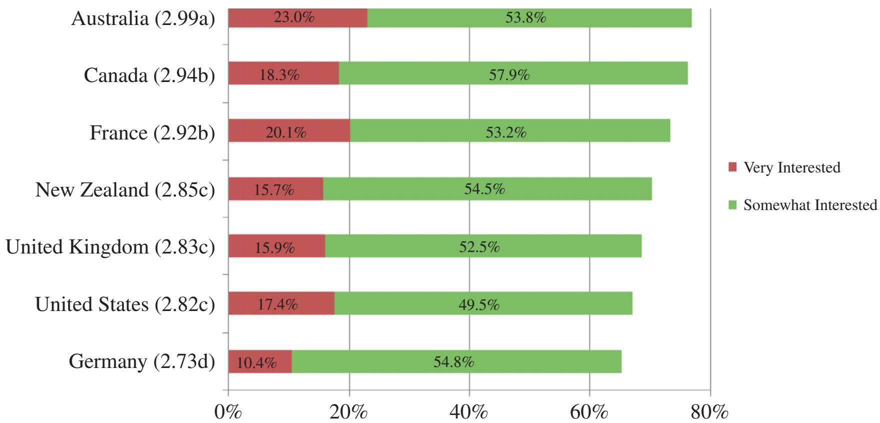

Figure 2. Interest in taking a holiday trip to the destinations in the next 2 years (color figure available online). *Note.* Total N in each destination = 1,520. Numbers in parentheses in each destination indicate mean values based on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all interested*, 2 = *not very interested*, 3 = *somewhat interested*, 4 = *very interested*) and a, b, c, and d indicate the result from the Duncan's posthoc multiple comparison test (a > b > c > d); F-value = 23.11 ($p < .001$) in one-way ANOVA.

Interest in Visiting the Destinations in the Next Two Years

Australia was the top destination of interest among Chinese travelers, with interest being both widespread at 76.8% in total ($M = 2.99$) and relatively strong (23.0% were very interested; Figure 2) compared to other competitive destinations. Canada's general appeal in this market was fairly healthy in second place (at 76.2%; $M = 2.94$), only slightly behind Australia but ahead of France and New Zealand (73.3%; $M = 2.92$ and 73.3%; $M = 2.85$, respectively) with close to three quarters of the market interested in visiting. Among the remaining destinations, the UK placed a strong fourth, at 68.4% ($M = 2.83$), followed by the United States in the fifth spot at 66.9% ($M = 2.82$). Interest was slightly lower for Germany (65.1%; $M = 2.73$).

Discussion

The objectives of this study were to explore the importance of motivational activities/experiences for a long-haul holiday trip by Chinese travelers, to identify perceived differences for the best activities/experiences in the seven selected long-haul holiday destinations, and to identify differences in destination knowledge, specifically holiday or vacation opportunities at the destinations and the interest in visiting them in the next two years. In this study, the seven long-haul holiday destinations consisted of Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom—all Canada's key competitors for Mainland Chinese long-haul travelers as determined by the CTC.

According to the factor analysis, five domains were identified based on Mainland Chinese travelers' considerations of the 21 motivational activity/experience items that are important when planning an international long-haul holiday trip: (a) outdoor recreational sports activities, (b) experiencing culture, (c) nature-based activities, (d) luxury and entertainment, and (e) touring type. With regard to the relative level of importance ratings of the five motivational activity factors, Mainland Chinese travelers considered experiencing culture and nature-based activities to be the most important activity/experience factors, whereas outdoor recreational sports activities and luxury and entertainment were regarded as the least important factors. The results of this study indicate that potential Mainland Chinese travelers prefer destinations that offer culture-related attractions and products such as aboriginal culture, local cuisine, historical attractions, and festivals and events and also provide beautiful scenery and landscapes, including water-related scenery, national/provincial/state parks, and protected areas or heritage sites. The findings reaffirmed other studies demonstrating the importance of activities or destination attributes perceived by Chinese travelers (Y. Guo et al., 2005; S. Kim et al., 2005; Sparks & Pan, 2009).

However, it is interesting to note that Chinese travelers reported that they do not place relative importance on outdoor recreational sports activities compared to other motivational activity factors. This result may be related to a predominant use of holiday package tours, which are facilitated by ADS, when Mainland Chinese travelers consider visiting a long-haul holiday destination. In general, itineraries in many tour package products offer limited free time and are comprised of visiting famous sites or landmarks. However, the result should be interpreted with caution. For example, younger Chinese travelers may want more autonomy during their travel, possibly having more free time to explore the destination and participating in more specific outdoor recreational sports or adventurous activities at holiday destinations (see Sparks & Pan, 2009).

Results of the ANOVA tests for the differences in perceived best travel activities or experiences across the seven long-haul holiday destinations provide useful and insightful information on the relationship of competing long-haul holiday destinations to travel products. Furthermore, findings indicate that there are significant differences among Mainland Chinese travelers' perceptions toward the long-haul holiday destinations based on the best destination in terms of travel products relating to activities/ experiences. This is an important observation and reaffirms that travel destinations, specifically the seven selected long-haul destinations, must be prepared to differentiate their range of experiences and services to appeal and attract more specific markets like China in this study. The following discussion highlights the significance of the findings based on the destinations' product strengths and weaknesses.

Mainland Chinese travelers indicated that outdoor recreational sports activities are Canada's greatest strengths and most unique products, including winter-related sports activities such as skiing or snow boarding; water-related sports activities such as kayaking, canoeing, sailing, or cruising; and fishing/hunting, compared to other competitive destinations. Australia ranked the second highest in these activities, followed by the United States and New Zealand. Among the outdoor activities, golfing appeared to be the U.S.'s strongest product. On the contrary, outdoor products are the primary weaknesses for France, Germany, and the UK. This result is understandable because these three European countries are better known as cultural destinations rather than outdoor activity centered. However, it should be noted that outdoor recreational sports activities were perceived by Chinese travelers as the least important activity factors when considering visiting a long-haul holiday destination. As a result, Mainland Chinese who travel to Canada, Australia, the United States, or New Zealand for the primary purpose of participating in outdoor recreational sports activities may be small groups of travelers. Thus, outdoor products can be regarded as niche product strengths for these destinations and should be developed and targeted to potential Mainland Chinese travelers.

Focusing on experiencing culture, Canada, surprisingly, was positioned toward the top of the competitive set. It has been noted in the past and in other related research results that culture may be more of a challenge or a relative weakness, because Canada typically trails most other destinations. Of these culture-related products, exploring cities close to nature, sampling local flavors, major events, historical and cultural attractions, and aboriginal culture and attractions are the top-rated ones and emerge as strengths. Unique to China, however, is the fact that major events were viewed as a strong point for Canada, which may be related to the relatively high awareness of Canada's role as host of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games at the time of the survey. Australia, France, and the United States ranked second highest in the set for this dimension. Culture-related products such as a country's unique character and local lifestyles, aboriginal culture and attractions, and exploring cities close to nature are the most favorable products for Australia, whereas major events and hands-on learning activities are the most positive products for the United States.

In contrast, Germany, the UK, and New Zealand were perceived as the least favorable destinations in terms of experiencing culture. These results may be in contradiction to a general reputation or knowledge about the countries (see S. Kim et al., 2005). For example, the UK—like France—is known as a cultural destination due to its abundant museums, art galleries, historic/heritage sites, and other cultural attractions, even more so than Germany. Looking at the individual items, the three European countries, as might be expected, were perceived by Chinese travelers as the most suitable destinations for seeing historical and cultural attractions. Experiencing a country's unique character and local lifestyles is also favorably viewed for these countries. Sampling local flavors is viewed as France's strongest product. Hands-on learning activities and major events are viewed as strong points for the UK. These results suggest that long-haul holiday destinations should do more to shore up awareness of their cultural strengths and to position the diversity and distinctiveness of the countries' lifestyles as a point of interest for Mainland Chinese travelers because it was identified that experiencing culture is the most important activity/experience factor when considering visiting a long-haul holiday destination. This may be a good indicator in forecasting demand; thus, the demand of Mainland Chinese outbound travelers to the destinations that offer a variety of culture-related products could be expected to increase.

With respect to nature-based activities, Canada and Australia were perceived to be the best destinations. New Zealand and the United States ranked the second highest for these products, whereas France, Germany, and the UK were perceived as the least positive destinations. Nature is Canada's product strength, with water-related scenery, beautiful landscapes, national/provincial parks, and protected areas or heritage sites particularly well perceived. Wildlife in natural habitats and beautiful landscapes are considered as the product strengths for Australia,and national/state parks, protected areas, or heritage sites are strengths for the United States. As discussed earlier, Chinese travelers indicated that nature-based activities are the second most important activity/experience factor when considering visiting a long-haul holiday destination. Therefore, travel to Canada, Australia, the United States, or New Zealand for this purpose will likely see an increased demand from Mainland Chinese outbound travelers.

Among Mainland Chinese travelers, the United States is seen as having the strongest luxury and entertainment product. However, Australia, France, Canada, and the UK are also favorably viewed in this regard. In contrast, New Zealand and Germany have weaknesses with the luxury/pampering products, including resorts, spa and wellness, and entertainment. The U.S.'s products of staying at a luxury resort and entertainment experiences are toprated and emerge as strengths. France's luxury resorts are favorably viewed. Both luxury resorts and spa and wellness products are strong products for Australia. Canada is seen as having the greatest strength for spa and wellness products. However, luxury and entertainment should be considered as niche products that appeal to smaller groups of travelers and represent potential niche markets to be developed or targeted because Chinese travelers perceived luxury and entertainment as one of the least important activity factors when considering visiting a long-haul holiday destination.

Australia appeared to be the most appropriate destination regarding touring type, with guided tours, hiking or trekking in a natural area, and self-touring. Canada is also very favorably viewed for self-touring but not for its group tour offerings. The UK, Germany, France, and New Zealand are unfavorably rated for touring type. This result suggests that all long-haul holiday destinations wishing to attract more Mainland Chinese travelers should actively promote products pertinent to self-touring and guided tours, develop a variety of travel packages, and promote these products in China in light of the current Mainland Chinese destination choice behaviors.

In terms of level of knowledge about holiday opportunities in the seven selected long-haul holiday destinations, Australia ranked the highest, followed by the United States and France. The UK, New Zealand, Canada, and Germany ranked relatively low in terms of destination knowledge. Overall, Mainland Chinese travelers' knowledge about or awareness of all seven long-haul destinations was lower than 50%, confirming that China represents a huge potential tourism source but also suggesting that tourism marketers or operators in the seven long-haul holiday destinations should make efforts to enhance consumer awareness of their destinations. Realistically, to gain share at this point may require a higher level of investment in awareness building. Of even greater concern is the fact that these destinations have lost top-of-mind awareness since 2008 among potential Chinese visitors (CTC, 2011).

Mainland Chinese were most interested in taking a holiday trip to Australia in the next 2 years. Interest in visiting Canada and France was fairly healthy in second place. New Zealand, the UK, and the United States ranked third highest in terms of interest in visiting the destination. Interest was not quite as keen for Germany. On the whole, the selected destinations' general appeal in this market is actually fairly healthy, but tourism marketers or operators may need to invest more heavily to raise brand awareness and close the gap between "interested" and "considering" while building consumer awareness in a way that solidly differentiates a particular destination from its competitors.

Conclusions

Mainland Chinese long-haul travel is becoming more accessible and is witnessing rapid growth, fueled by the booming economy, a growing middle class, increasing disposable incomes, more leisure time, and the relaxation of travel restrictions. China is likely to offer boundless opportunities for many destinations that want to increase their Chinese visitation and also holds unquestionable opportunities for many countries' economic growth. However, some destinations may face fundamental challenges in fulfilling this potential, such as the restriction on group travel and inability to advertise directly to Chinese consumers due to ADS stipulations, or encounter formidable competition from other destinations. As a result, it is expected that a fierce marketing battle will occur in China among competing travel destinations. To overcome this type of marketing challenge and succeed, analysis of current or potential travelers' perceptions or traits should be the first step for building marketing fundamentals because this enables identification of factors contributing to the success or failure of a marketing strategy.

This study analyzed the secondary data from the 2008 GTW China survey commissioned by the CTC to identify Mainland Chinese residents' perceptions of the seven specific long-haul holiday destinations with respect to the level of importance of motivational activities/experiences for a long-haul holiday trip and differences in best activities/experiences for the destinations, destination knowledge, and interest in visiting the destinations in the next 2 years. To summarize the findings, Mainland Chinese travelers considered culture and nature as the most important activity/experience factors when considering taking a long-haul holiday trip, whereas outdoor, luxury, and entertainment were perceived as the least important. These results imply that destinations that wish to attract more Mainland Chinese travelers need to appeal to their top influencers and stress the availability or distinctiveness of cultural and natural resources (attractions and products), and emphasize the destination's cultural differences from China with beautiful scenery or landscapes.

Further, findings indicate that there are significant differences in how Mainland Chinese travelers perceive the various long-haul holiday destinations. From a broad perspective, though nature and outdoor are Canada's forte, luxury, entertainment, and touring type are relatively weak. Surprisingly, culture emerged as a product strength, in particular, sampling local flavors and experiencing aboriginal culture and attractions. This is good news for Canada, which has been slowly shifting the focus from one that was almost exclusively nature to one that also incorporates its culture. Similar to Canada, Australia's strengths include nature-based products, but its weaknesses consist of luxury and entertainment products. Here, too, the positioning now goes beyond nature to include city experiences. New Zealand appears to be the most positive destination for aboriginal culture and attractions, which is hardly surprising considering that it has been running campaigns in China since 1999 focusing on its "100% pure" image as the youngest country in the world, highlighting aboriginal stories regarding New Zealand's creation. The U.S.'s strongest products are related to luxury and entertainment. As expected, France, the UK, and Germany are well perceived as favorable destinations for historical and cultural attractions. The ways in which each destination portrays itself in this regard varies quite a bit: France focuses on "authenticity" (including its history, heritage and culture); the UK considers itself "timeless" (to capture its heritage and history but also its contemporary culture); and Germany features its culture as something to be experienced. In spite of these positionings, it is interesting to note that the three European destinations were not perceived as particularly favorable destinations for all culture-based activities because the culture factor may include diverse cultural aspects such as major events, aboriginal culture, and so on.

Overall, these findings suggest that competing destinations should elaborate strategies to differentiate themselves in terms of product development and marketing implementation in the China market. For example, because Canada and Australia share many of the same strengths according to potential Chinese travelers (e.g., nature, outdoors, touring, cities, spa and wellness), Canada could emphasize its distinctive nature products (e.g., mountains, tundra, aurora borealis, whale watching, polar bears, moose, etc.) and build on its unique cultural and heritage offerings (e.g., Inuit and indigenous peoples, Acadian and French-Canadian culture, lifestyles in Atlantic fishing towns, western communities, etc.). Culture is a big part of the holiday experience for Chinese travelers. Thus, Canada may need to emphasize opportunities to see its unique combination of spectacular nature and diverse culture first-hand.

In addition, it is important to note that tourism marketers need to consider what products are the most preferred by Mainland Chinese travelers beyond the competing destinations when developing new products or differentiating products from others. Though certain distinctive, strong products could be solicited by only small groups of Chinese travelers (niche), other products could appeal to a large number (mass). Thus, some investment may also be required to ensure these products are market-ready and to better package and market them to potential Mainland Chinese travelers.

Moreover, the results of this study indicate that there are significant differences between Mainland Chinese travelers' knowledge about holiday opportunities at the destinations and interest in visiting them in the next 2 years. The findings suggest that tourism marketers in the seven long-haul holiday destinations first need to build general awareness of their destinations or products and also invest more heavily on multiform advertising campaigns through marketing distribution channels or public media sources such as TV, radio, magazines, books, and the Internet (websites) to convert potential Chinese travelers' interests in visiting to consideration to visit.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the competitiveness of the seven selected long-haul holiday destinations and suggests destination or product differentiation strategies to increase consumer awareness and attract more Mainland Chinese travelers. The findings in this study have significant implications for destination competitiveness and the type of product development and marketing that should be undertaken to attract more travelers from high-potential tourism-generating countries such as China. According to a destination choice model suggested by Woodside and Lysonski (1989), travelers decide on a destination using their level of destination awareness and their positive perceptions of the destination. Thus, if destinations fail to sufficiently understand current or potential travelers' perceptions of or attitudes toward the destination, including its images, motivations, awareness, intentions, and knowledge, that stimulate interest in or consideration of visiting them, they will lose their benefits from potential travelers to other destinations. Once a destination has identified a high level of awareness and the product strengths in the specific market, the destination will be in a far stronger position to develop appropriate travel products and to market these products. Thus, it is hoped that the findings from this study may help the seven destinations and their tourism practitioners obtain a competitive advantage and expedite the advancement of marketing and product development strategies that will ensure the attraction of Mainland Chinese long-haul travelers.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite the pragmatic implications and insights into building fundamentals or marketing strategies for the seven long-haul travel destinations provided by the findings of this study, undeniable limitations still remain. First, the study is based on secondary data. Though the survey data were provided by a respected independent third party (the CTC) with a reliable long research track record, it is derived from a survey that was not developed by the researchers. Accordingly, some findings provided in this article may not be consistent with the results reported by the CTC because the authors used only selected questions or variables of the survey for this study. This combination may limit the applicability of the results.

Second, though analysis of the data in this study was mainly based on the variables of perceived motivational activities/experiences, the variables used may be insufficient when identifying product strengths or weaknesses for specific long-haul holiday destinations. There may be more useful variables or approaches for identifying competitive advantages of destinations. For instance, applying destination images and preferences of destinations' attributes has been well recognized in this field of research over the past decades. In addition and as suggested by Ritchie and Crouch (2003) as well as Enright and Newton (2005), the competitive analysis for each competing destination clearly reflects each of its uniqueness. For example, the inclusion of elements of both destination (tourism) attributes and industry-level competitiveness may be a strong approach for systematically comparing a variety of attributes of competing destinations, drawing attention to the need for comparisons across competitors. Further, advanced analytical techniques, such as multidimensional scaling (MDS) analysis (see S. Kim et al., 2005) or a mixed model that is a combination of importance–performance–impression analysis, may provide better insights into beneficial implications for the destinations. Therefore, further research should consider more related variables and be designed for other approaches or advanced statistical analyses.

Finally, at the time the survey was conducted, Canada was the only country out of the seven studied that did not have ADS status. Nevertheless, the results of this study may include a bias toward this destination because the survey was conducted by the CTC. In effect, the survey included many questions referring to Canada only. This may lead to a skew with a halo effect on Canada regarding Chinese attitudes toward the seven long-haul holiday destinations. On the other hand, the issues regarding a bias toward Canada as a long-haul travel destination might not arise during the survey process because this type of improper effect in answering the questions could be controlled technically in an online survey by restricting the ability to go backwards after answering a question. However, there could be cross-cultural misunderstandings that might lead to a gap between the Chinese respondents' and the surveyor's different cultural backgrounds regarding the content of the questionnaire even though the survey was written in Chinese. The authors are concerned that the survey might be mainly comprised of questions or instruments from the Western perspective, and in particular from the Canadian perspective, but not from that of the Chinese. This restriction may result in a failure of marketing performance due to the distortion of reality. Thus, future research may be needed to revise the market survey reflecting the cultural differences between the market and the marketers. The results of this study should also be substantiated by further research.

Acknowledgment

The authors thank the Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC), and especially its Executive Director of Research, for providing data for this study.

Notes

1. In this study, long-haul destinations are those outside East Asia (e.g., China, Hong Kong, Macau, Japan, and South Korea).

2. Chinese outbound tourism has been managed and regulated by the ADS system, which is based on bilateral tourism agreement between China and overseas destinations. The ADS system restricts the overseas destinations that Chinese nationals can travel to, monitors the travel balance account, and also restricts which foreign tour company is allowed to operate in the Chinese market to protect the national tourism sector (WTO, 2003). By August 2010, 110 countries/regions had been granted ADS by the China National Tourism Administration, with Canada and Serbia being the most recent countries to join the ADS system.

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