

Exploring Chinese Tourists' Constraints and Facilitators of Traveling to Pacific SIDS

Tourism features in the national development plans of most Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Tourism plays an important role in the development of Pacific SIDS economies due to their peculiar characteristics including limited resources, remoteness, susceptibility to natural disasters, vulnerability to external shocks, excessive dependence on international trade, and fragile environments (United Nation, 2015). While China has increasing presence in the Pacific SIDS in investment, Pacific SIDS destinations are trying to find ways to attract this lucrative market. Information deficiencies make it difficult to understand the Chinese market's willingness and hesitation toward traveling to Pacific SIDS.

China is the largest outbound travel market of the world, spending US\$165 billion globally in 2014 (UNWTO, 2015). Similar to most destinations, tourism planners of Pacific SIDS have made an all-out effort to attract the big Chinese spenders, for instance, providing visa-on-arrival (Palau and Vanuatu) or visa-free policies to Chinese tourists (Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu). However, due to the lack of sufficient information of Chinese tourist, it is difficult to understand this emerging market, and hence even harder for the destination tourism operators and planners to make effective strategies to attract the Chinese market. To bridge those gaps, the current study aims to explore Chinese tourists' information channels, motivations, facilitators and constraints to travel to Pacific SIDS.

The topics of tourism constraints and facilitators have been explored in the tourism field to some extents, including those in wine tourism (Bonn, Cho, Lee & Kim, 2016), cruise travel (Hung & Petrick, 2010), medical tourism (Dalstrom, 2013), festival tourism (Kim, 2015) and others. Nonetheless, limited research has focused on the constraints and facilitators for island destinations. Due to its unique characteristics, it is necessary to explore SIDS destinations' travel constraints and facilitators, especially for emerging source markets. A research gap presents in exploring Chinese international tourists' information channels, motivations, facilitators and constraints to travel to Pacific SIDS.

With the exploratory nature of the study, a qualitative approach was adopted. Focus group is an effective method to provide open insights and to stimulate panellists' opinions. Implications and suggestions were provided accordingly to destination operators and related

government officials. Four focus groups, including 45 individuals were conducted between November 2016 and January 2017. All the information collected was analyzed by the software Nvivo 11 with thematic analysis.

Results reflected that the Internet is the most frequent used information channel for Chinese tourists. In terms of searching device, mobile phone is the most popular one, followed by desktop and laptop. In addition, some traditional channels, such as newspapers, magazine, and TV programs are also preferred by Chinese tourists. Recommendations from relatives and travel agents are also mentioned.

Travel motivations, constraints and facilitators for Pacific SIDS destinations are also revealed. As mentioned in the focus groups, Chinese tourists would like to enjoy family time, explore other cultures, relax, enjoy friend time, enrich experiences, learn and shop when traveling in Pacific SIDS. Several travel constraints were identified for Chinese tourists. The poor accessibility, high travel expenses, insufficient holidays, safety concerns, lack of travel information, lack of resource uniqueness, being far away, competitors from short haul island destinations and culture shock are recognized to be the main travel constraints for Chinese tourists. Meanwhile, travel facilitators, such as rich tourism resources, safety, comfortable climate, destination popularity, cultural experiences, reasonable expenses and influences by friends and relatives were found to boost their willingness to travel to Pacific SIDS. A contradictory point to note, attributes such as tourism resources, safety, cultural difference and expenses are mentioned in both travel constraints and facilitators. It may be a reflection of the insufficiency of travel information of those destinations.

Based on the abovementioned findings, suggestions are provided to tourism planners and operators. It is suggested that, more promotions should be carried out in Chinese market. Specifically, destinations can cooperate with local travel agents and online travel agents, professional organizations and Chinese investors in destinations to jointly promote the destinations and enhance the destination awareness in the Chinese market. Meanwhile, inviting representatives to experience and ask them to share their experiences will be an effective way to promote a destination in China. In addition, inviting Chinese movies and TV shows to the destinations can also achieve an ideal marketing effect in attracting the Chinese market.

References

- Bonn, M. A., Cho, M., Lee, J. J., & Kim, J. H. (2016). A multilevel analysis of the effects of wine destination attributes on travel constraints and revisit intention. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 28(11): 2399-2421.
- Dalstrom, M. (2013). Medical travel facilitators: connecting patients and providers in a globalized world. *Anthropology & Medicine* 20(1): 24-35.
- Hung, K., & Petrick, J. F. (2010). Developing a measurement scale for constraints to cruising. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 37(1), 206-228.
- Kim, B. (2015). What Facilitates a Festival Tourist? Investigating Tourists' Experiences at a Local Community Festival. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research* 20(9): 1005-1020.
- United Nation. (2015). *Small Island Developing States. Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform*. Retrieved 26 December, 2015, from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/sids>
- UNWTO. (2015). China: Country-specific: Outbound tourism 2010 - 2014. In *Tourism Statistics* Oct 2015 Num 3 (Ed.).

Keywords: Pacific SIDS, Information Channels, Motivations, Facilitators, Constraints, Chinese