

THE EXPERIENCES OF CHINESE VISITORS TO VICTORIA AUSTRALIA

Xin Yu & Betty Weiler

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Abstract

This paper reports on selected methods and results of a year-long study, which sought to describe and explain the experience of Chinese tourists visiting the state of Victoria in Australia. The aims of the paper are to describe the temporal and spatial dimensions of the tourist experience, and to use the factors elicited from visitor responses to explain satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Evidence from multiple sources of data confirmed that visitor satisfaction is explained largely by intangible or “expressive” factors, while dissatisfaction is determined mainly by tangible or “functional” factors. The former provide important implications for marketing, while the latter suggest the need for product development strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

As a result of a steady shift toward an experience economy, enhancing the customer experience is seen as the best way to add value and increase competitiveness of many types of businesses (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Experience, of course, has long been seen as central to the tourism product. Recently, however, tourism researchers and practitioners have expressed a renewed appreciation for understanding the visitor experience, in order to enhance visitor satisfaction and destination sustainability (Vitterso, Vorkinn, Vistad & Vaadland, 2000).

An on-site experience can be influenced both by tangible or functional aspects such as the facilities and services provided, and by intangible or expressive aspects which are influenced in part by the emotional states that visitors bring with them. Most research on satisfaction has taken an instrumental (tangible/functional) perspective (Vitterso, et al., 2000). A number of researchers have questioned this approach and called for a closer consideration of the affective (intangible/expressive) dimensions of the tourist experience when assessing satisfaction. They have argued that meeting visitors' expectations with respect to facilities or services is no longer sufficient. Satisfying customers' affective needs has become increasingly important in the emerging competitive environment (Cameron & Gatewood, 2000; Chhetri, Arrowsmith & Jackson, 2004; Sirakaya, Petrick & Choi, 2004; Duman & Mattila, 2005).

The pioneering work of Herzberg and colleagues (1959) on employee motivation and satisfaction in the workplace found that the motivators (satisfiers) that lead to a positive work experience are quite separate and distinct from the maintenance factors (dissatisfiers) that contribute to a negative experience. In other words, satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not opposite ends of a single continuum, and therefore eliminating dissatisfiers (typically issues to do with functional aspects in the workplace) does not necessary translate into worker satisfaction.

While Herzberg's two-factor model makes intuitive sense for understanding tourist satisfaction, only relatively recently have researchers attempted to apply Herzberg's thinking in a tourism context. Crompton (2003) suggests that Herzberg's two factor theory may contribute to explaining levels of visitor satisfaction with an event. Uysal (2003) notes that expressive attributes tend to dominate in satisfaction ratings, while instrumental attributes dominate in dissatisfaction ratings.

This paper reports on selected methods and results of a year-long study which sought to describe and explain the experience of Chinese tourists visiting the state of Victoria in Australia. The aims of the paper are to describe the temporal and spatial dimensions of the tourist experience, and to use the factors elicited from visitor responses to explain satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

RESEARCH METHODS

The aims of the study demanded that a combined-methods research design be used, allowing for the collection of data from multiple sources and both quantitative and in-depth measures of experience. Past studies on visitor satisfaction with their experience have tended to rely on structured survey methods which tend to be constrained by the language of the researcher and his/her preconceived notions of the visitor experience, thus providing only a limited basis for understanding the factors that contribute to and inhibit satisfaction. Because the conceptual framework of the current research is based on Herzberg's two-factor model, it was important to use a range of methods, to ensure that the intangible or expressive elements of the visitor experience could be captured through tourists' words and actions (Bowen, 2002; Seaton, 2002; Chan & Baum, 2004).

Data were collected over a period of about six months, using a combination of observations, interviews with both visitors and with guides (not reported in this paper), and a visitor self-completed questionnaire in order to obtain data that were complementary and comprehensive. The combined methods also enabled triangulation of the results, enhancing the reliability of the findings.

Sampling and Data Collection

For the visitor survey and visitor interviews, the sample population consisted of Mainland Chinese visitors on pre-booked tours. The total number of Chinese visitor arrivals to Victoria in 2004 was 116,000. The target sample size was set at 400, in order to be able to generalise to the population with a reasonable level of confidence. The questionnaire-based survey was administered at tourism attractions and in Melbourne International Airport departure lounges, using a systematic random sampling process. The interviews were conducted mainly in the departure lounges and the sampling was opportunistic. Given the qualitative nature of the interviews and observations, there was no predetermined sample size, and both the interviews and the observations continued until the researchers felt they had reached a level of saturation, where they were getting no new information.

Primary Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Forty observations were conducted at a total of eight key tourism attractions in Victoria to examine the spatial and temporal patterns of Chinese visitors' behaviour, their responses to and their behaviours at the places visited. An observation-recording sheet was used to record data including basic profile information about the group, sites visited at the attraction, activities participated in, and visitors' verbal and non-verbal responses to the experience.

A visitor survey was carried out resulting in a total of 401 completed questionnaires. The self-completed questionnaire was informed by previous studies, with input from an industry reference group and meetings with tour operators and marketing staff at some tourism attractions. A number of closed questions addressed visitors' satisfaction levels and their socio-demographic and trip characteristics. In addition, using the theoretical lens of Herzberg's two-factor model, visitors were asked to write free-responses about the best/most satisfactory and worst/least satisfactory things about their visit and the reasons for their responses. This part of the instrument was based on Chan and Baum (2004), and the remainder of the questionnaire was informed by previous satisfaction research together with previous findings on the Chinese outbound travel market. The survey thus obtained both quantitative information (particularly with respect to satisfaction levels and visitor/trip profiles) as well as rich qualitative data, giving insight into the reasons for visitors' responses, particularly with respect to elements affecting visitors' satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Using a set of semi-structured interview questions and again influenced by Herzberg and Chan and Baum (2004), 27 interviews with Chinese visitors were conducted. The open-ended elements of the interviews sought to capture the "voice" of the visitor about the types of experiences they were seeking, their best/most satisfactory and worst/least satisfactory things about their visit and how they felt about these. Respondents were asked to think about whether any particular incident or experience they had particularly stood out as being special and, if so, what made this special or memorable for them.

All instruments were in Chinese and all data collection was conducted in Chinese. Responses were coded and entered into SPSS or, in the case of the qualitative responses, transcribed and translated into English.

Data Analysis and Limitations

Descriptive statistics and one-way frequency distributions were produced for responses to the closed questions of the visitor survey. Content analysis was undertaken on the visitors' free

responses to open-ended questions, the transcripts from the visitor interviews, and the observation field notes. For a number of the open-ended questions in the visitor survey, additional coders were employed and intercoder reliability was checked to increase the reliability of the coding and categories. Several additional steps were taken to increase the reliability and validity of the findings, for example, multiple questions measuring satisfaction and dissatisfaction were used in both the interview survey and the questionnaire-based survey.

The data used by this paper were collected from Mainland Chinese tourists while visiting Victoria on pre-booked tours, and thus pre-trip expectations and post-trip reflections could not be measured. Further research is needed to determine the experiences of other types of visitors and other market segments from China.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following discussion of results draws on the data collected from the multiple data sources and methods described in the previous section. If not stated, the quantitative results are based on the 401 visitors who completed the self-administered questionnaire.

Temporal and Spatial Dimensions of the Visitor Experience

One of the most notable results is that the findings confirm that Chinese visitors spend an extraordinarily short time in Victoria, with 79% spending either 1 or 2 nights. Nearly all of the visitors who stay for two nights visit one major attraction outside Melbourne, typically Phillip Island (penguin parade), the Great Ocean Road or Sovereign Hill (historic site). Particularly in the case of the first two attractions, this involves several hours of coach travel viewing the scenery, with some commentary particularly on the way to the attraction. The experience is variable, depending on the quality of the tour guiding and other factors.

Quotes from two visitor interviews are used here to illustrate a range of visitor perspectives on the temporal and spatial dimensions of their visits:

“We arrived at 11 pm in Melbourne on Saturday. On Sunday we did city sightseeing in the morning, and in the afternoon we went to Phillip Island. Today we got up very early to catch the early flight back to China.”

“We visited St Patrick’s Cathedral, Fitzroy Gardens, Royal Botanic Gardens, the Casino and the South Bank along the Yarra River. We also visited Port Phillip Bay, an orchard and a winery.”

The first example provides a visitor’s perspective on the limited experiences included in one group’s 30 hour visit to Victoria, with a lot of time spent in just traveling between attractions. The second example illustrates a more considered itinerary which provides a great deal more variety but still with very little time in the state, and thus the visitor’s recounting of the experience as just a list of “been there, done that”.

In spite of the intense and inflexible nature of the tourists’ itineraries, however, some visitors do manage to engage with the destination, as evidenced by the following description provided by one of the interview respondents:

“We stayed in Melbourne for two nights and did city sightseeing, went to the seaside, and visited a winery, a very relaxed itinerary. In Melbourne, I feel the air is fresh and the city is very tranquil and elegant with good public security and a good social welfare system. From my observations in the Royal Botanic Gardens, the local people looked very relaxed. We hardly see policemen – to me, this is a symbol of a developed country with high living standards and high quality people – a low crime rate.”

What visitors said in the interviews was consistent with the findings from the observation data. Of particular note from both the interviews and the observations were the inflexible nature of the itineraries and the almost complete absence of free time for visitors, the limited opportunities for visitors to interact with local people, and the lack of opportunities to participate in local recreation activities.

Satisfiers and Dissatisfiers

The visitor self-completed survey and the face-to-face interviews with visitors both included open-ended questions, inviting respondents to list what they liked most and least about their visit to Victoria and the reasons why. These were analysed and categorised and are shown in Table 1 and Table 2 based on frequency of responses, from most frequent to least frequent.

Table 1: Most Satisfactory Things about My Visit to Victoria

Satisfiers (Multiple responses, n=298 for the visitor survey)	Visitor Survey	% of Responses	Visitor Interview	
Quality of natural environment	95	21.7	16	
Quality of specific tourism attractions	84	19.2	6	F
Beautiful scenery	72	16.5	9	
Experiencing Australian lifestyle/culture	52	11.9	4	
Quality of built/urban environment	50	11.4	11	
Quality of tourism infrastructure including accom/food	35	8.0	2	F
Quality of tour guiding	25	5.7	11	
Warm/friendly local people	24	5.5	11	
Total responses	437	100		

F = functional/tangible item vs. expressive/intangible item

As shown in Table 1, eight categories of satisfiers were identified. *Quality of the natural environment* includes mention of elements such as fresh air, greenness, the pleasant climate, and feelings of comfort, relaxation and contentment that go along with these attributes. Responses were coded to *quality of specific tourism attractions* when mention was made of commercial or public attractions such as Phillip Island and Royal Botanic Gardens. *Beautiful scenery*, although closely related to the quality of the natural environment, was coded separately, as there were numerous specific mentions of the scenery and its positive impact on the experience. Visitors also frequently mentioned that they liked *experiencing Australian lifestyle*. This included the opportunity to learn about Australian culture and society, to gain insight into Australians' love of and respect for nature, and to experience their love of sport. In relation to *quality of the built/urban environment*, respondents commented on Melbourne's beautiful park and gardens, the quality of the landscaping throughout the city, the architecture, cleanliness, and good public security. The *quality of the tourism infrastructure* included the airport, hotels, restaurants and transportation and the capabilities of the staff. The *quality of the tour guiding* was mentioned frequently enough to be included as a separate category. Finally, *warm, friendly people* was frequently mentioned and therefore coded as a separate category. These same eight categories also emerged from the visitor interviews but with a different rank order.

Nine categories of dissatisfiers emerged. At the top of the list is *tour/itinerary management*, which parallels some of the problems observed and touched on in the previous section. It is also noteworthy that some elements mentioned as satisfactory for some respondents contributed to dissatisfaction in others as shown in Table 2, including the following: poor quality or poor location of *accommodation*; poor quality *food/service*; poor quality of some *public facilities* (this included

noise, traffic congestion, urban pollution, unhygienic toilets and flies); lack of quality of particular *tourism attractions*; poor quality product or service in some parts of the transportation infrastructure, (mainly the *airport, customs, and duty free shops*), and poor quality *tour guiding* (including some unethical practices). Again, the same categories emerged from the visitor interviews with a slightly different rank order.

Table 2: Most Dissatisfactory Things about My Visit to Victoria

Dissatisfiers (Multiple responses, n=223 for the visitor survey)	Visitor Survey	% of Responses	Visitor Interview	
Poor tour/itinerary management	52	20.2	9	F
Poor quality/location of accommodation	42	16.3	5	F
Poor quality of food/restaurants	37	14.3	6	F
Poor urban/public facilities & service hours	37	14.3	4	F
Poor quality/quantity of tourism attractions	28	10.9	5	F
Poor quality service by airport/customs	20	7.8	4	
Poor quality tour guiding	16	6.2	5	
Issues relating to duty free shops	14	5.4	8	F
Insufficient information in Chinese language	12	4.7	3	F
Total responses	258	100		

F = functional/tangible item vs. expressive/intangible item

Examining the data through Herzberg's two-factor model, it is evident that the *tangible/functional* elements (i.e. facilities and tourism product) are mentioned far less frequently as satisfiers (27% of responses refer to functional elements) than as dissatisfiers (86% of responses refer to functional elements). This is also very evident in the interview responses. Moreover, a number of functional factors contributing to dissatisfaction were not evident in the responses regarding satisfaction, for example: limited hours of operation (especially for shops) was mentioned frequently; poor quality of the tour and/or the itinerary (this was at the top of the list of dissatisfiers, and included many specific references to inappropriate schedules, lack of options, and lack of evening activities); the various quality, pricing and ethical issues surrounding duty free shops; and the lack of information in Chinese language (signs, TV programs, written and oral presentations at attractions).

It is noticeable that factors identified as satisfiers in both the visitor survey and the interview results are largely *intangible/expressive* elements (73% of responses in the visitor survey). Further support for this notion was found when analysing the reasons visitors gave for the things they liked best, with frequent mention of intangible and affective notions such as "it made me feel relaxed", "I felt more in control" and "it helped make it enjoyable". The factors that visitors identify as "dissatisfiers" are nearly all tangible or functional characteristics – only service quality and the quality of the tour guiding fall into the category of intangible. Further examination of the reasons visitors gave reveals that much of the dissatisfaction stems from facilities and services that are perceived to be substandard.

Satisfaction Compared with Other Experiences in Australia

Visitors were asked how satisfied they were with their Victorian experience compared with their experiences in other parts of Australia. Half (50%) of the respondents indicated that overall they were as satisfied with their experience in the state of Victoria as they were with their experiences elsewhere in Australia; a third (33%) said they were more satisfied, and just sixteen percent said they were less satisfied.

When asked what they meant by this, 188 responses were given, which were coded and categorised with respect to whether they were associated with tangible/functional factors (e.g. bad

food, poor accommodation, rushed itinerary), intangible/expressive factors (e.g. beautiful scenery, quality urban environment, good weather), or neither (e.g. each place is different, not enough time to compare, depends on individual taste).

As shown in Table 3, visitors cited tangible/functional factors about as frequently as they cited intangible/expressive factors (76 vs. 84 comments), but for those who were “less satisfied” with their Victorian experience compared to other states, two-thirds (66%) cited tangible/functional factors as their reason(s) for being less satisfied. Those who were “more satisfied” with their Victorian experience tended to cite intangible/expressive factors (55% compared to 36% who cited tangible/functional factors).

Table 3: Reasons Given for Satisfaction Compared to Other Places Visited in Australia

	Tangible/ functional factors	Intangible/ expressive factors	Other reasons	Total number of comments
Less satisfying compared to other places in Australia.	31 (66%)	16 (34%)	0 (-)	47 (100%)
The same (equally as satisfying as other places)	25 (40%)	15 (24%)	23 (36%)	63 (100%)
More satisfying compared to other places in Australia.	28 (36%)	43 (55%)	7 (9%)	78 (100%)
Totals	76 (40%)	84 (44%)	30 (16%)	N=188 (100%)

CONCLUSION

Distinguishing between satisfiers and dissatisfiers has significant managerial and marketing implications. The dissatisfiers identified in this paper are the areas that need to be addressed by tourism managers or in some cases by government policy and regulation, to ‘reduce the probability of a negative experience’ (Crompton, 2003). Important here are issues to do with the very short time and the inflexible nature of the time spent in Victoria, making the need for better itinerary management and quality control critical. In addition, visitors’ concerns regarding substandard facilities and services both within and outside the tourism industry need to be addressed, although much of this may be driven by the price-cutting practices that are rampant and highly problematic in this market segment. Nonetheless, to reduce negative word-of-mouth, it is critical that these dissatisfiers be addressed.

Factors that contribute to satisfaction (satisfiers) make positive memories and positive word-of-mouth advertising. These include elements such as the quality of Victoria’s natural and built/urban environment, its outstanding scenery, the quality of selected tourism attractions, and opportunities to experience Australian culture and lifestyle and interact with local people. These represent Victoria’s product strengths and competitive advantage, and should be harnessed for marketing. In particular, the affective/expressive dimensions that respondents articulated as being associated with these satisfiers should be captured in advertising material, as illustrated by the words of two satisfied visitors:

“The quietness makes me feel very relaxed. When I am comfortable and relaxed, it puts me in a good mood and I am happy.”

“Victoria’s wonderful natural environment makes me feel pleasant and happy to be here.”

In summary this study has described the temporal and spatial dimensions of the experience of Chinese visitors in Victoria and highlighted some issues, particularly with respect to itinerary design and management. It has also identified the elements that contribute to satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the visitor experience. Evidence from multiple sources of data confirms that visitor satisfaction is explained largely by intangible/expressive attributes, while dissatisfaction is determined mainly by tangible/functional attributes. The results are consistent with previous findings but much more research is needed in other tourism contexts into the dual or multi-dimensional nature of the tourist experience.

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