

# Shopping Attracts Female Chinese Tourists to Hong Kong

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Female Chinese tourists are mainly motivated by shopping and the quality of product, when visiting Hong Kong according to the SHTM's Mimi Li and co-authors in a recently published research paper. Examining the travel motivations and behaviour of Chinese women, the researchers identify Hong Kong's allure as a "shopping paradise". They also show that mainland women visit Hong Kong to increase their knowledge of the city, enhance their own prestige and enjoy the city's modern image. Given that mainland Chinese women constitute an increasingly important sector of the travel market in Hong Kong, the researchers' findings have important implications for the local tourism industry.

## Female Chinese Tourists

China's outbound tourism market will see considerable growth over the coming years, promoted by the country's economic development and the liberalisation of its tourism policy. Female travellers have been an increasingly large proportion of this market over the last 20 years and they have become the primary target for many travel businesses. This increase "echoes the global trend", suggest the researchers, with females representing "over 50% of the world's travel population". Women around the world now have more time and money for travelling, have strong purchasing power and tend to make the decisions about whether and where to travel.

Yet the figure of the tourist – the hypothetical traveller – is still portrayed in masculine terms, with a focus on adventure and the allure of the exotic. In contrast, and despite all evidence, femininity is marked by signs of domesticity with its lack of individual action. Perhaps this is why there has been little research interest shown in the travel motivations and behaviour female tourists, even though women "hold dramatically different values than men regarding travel". To compound the problem, remark the researchers, what little is known about the topic has been derived almost exclusively from Western societies.

It is important to increase our understanding of this area, because "the world is looking at Chinese outbound tourism

as a lucrative market" of which Chinese female tourists represent a huge potential segment. As the researchers note, because women "often dominate spending decisions in their family, investigation of their behaviour will certainly have implications for both academia and industry".

## Female Chinese Tourists Surveyed

To investigate the behaviour and motivations of female Chinese travellers, the researchers conducted a survey at major tourist locations in Hong Kong. The questionnaire measured the respondents' travel motivations and covered topics such as the length of stay, travel companions and expenses.

Of the 204 women who completed the questionnaire, the majority (75.5%) were aged below 35 and the rest were aged 36-55. More than half of the respondents were single, 35% were travelling with relatives and 31.5% with friends. Around 85% had chosen to travel independently rather than with a package tour and the primary purpose of their visit was either sightseeing or shopping. Half of the tourists were visiting Hong Kong as a "stopover or secondary destination". Almost all had allocated a budget of between RMB1,001 and RMB 5,000 for shopping. Although 40% were visiting Hong Kong for the first time, over 30% visited once a year.

The researchers analysed the respondents' replies to the questionnaire to identify the underlying 'push' and 'pull' motivations of their travel. They identified four separate 'push' factors that led to the women wanting to travel outside of mainland China: 'knowledge and prestige', 'enhancement of social relationships', 'rest and relaxation' and 'adventure and excitement'. The five 'pull' factors that attracted the women to Hong Kong were 'modern image', 'natural environment and attractions', 'safety and cleanliness', 'ease of tour arrangement' and 'shopping'.

## Shopping in Hong Kong

The top two motivations for visiting Hong Kong were shopping and the quality of goods. According to the researchers, shopping is not only an "especially significant factor in considering women's travel needs", but it also

tends to generate repeat visits. Furthermore, Hong Kong is known as “a shopping paradise” that has long been popular for its “favourable prices and the high quality of its products”. The researchers point out that Chinese women are independent and tend to control the finances of their families and dominate most of the decisions. They increasingly “seek to spend their cash to make themselves more feminine and to pamper and spoil themselves”. Thus, Hong Kong should “do its best to provide unique and exclusive shopping experiences”.

Knowledge and prestige were also found to be strong ‘push’ factors for Chinese female travellers. A trip to Hong Kong, write the researchers, offers an opportunity for Chinese women to see something different, increase their knowledge of a foreign destination and experience a different lifestyle. It is also something “they can talk about with their friends and relatives”. Hong Kong should thus put “more effort into promoting other types of attractions” rather than focusing solely on shopping.

Enjoying the modern image of Hong Kong was also an important motivation, and confirms Hong Kong’s image as a “showcase of Western culture and lifestyle”. However, the increasing competition in the region and the high number of respondents who were visiting Hong Kong as a secondary destination suggest that to remain competitive, it should “develop more modern-themed attractions and activities”.

### **Influence of ‘Situational’ Factors**

Age and income had little effect on how respondents rated the importance of these different motivations. However, those with lower educational levels were more likely to be attracted by the natural environment and attractions of Hong Kong. Marital status had the greatest effect on the respondents’ motivations. For instance, knowledge and prestige were important motivations for married women, whereas single women were more attracted by Hong Kong’s “modern image, natural environment and attractions, safety and cleanliness and ease of tour arrangement”.

Visitors who were staying for 4-6 days were more motivated by rest and relaxation and by Hong Kong’s natural environment and attractions than were visitors who were staying for 7-10 days, for whom the city’s safety and cleanliness were the most appealing feature.

### **Targeting an important emerging market**

By providing insights into the travel motivations of female Chinese tourists, the researchers indicate how the travel industry could be targeting this “promising market” more effectively. Hong Kong should continue to focus on providing high quality shopping, whilst also promoting its other attractions and developing new ones. Marketing strategies could be targeted to appeal to the different sections of the female Chinese tourist market, to better serve the needs of an increasingly important segment of visitors.

#### **Points to Note**

- Female travellers are increasingly important to the global travel market.
- Mainland Chinese women are attracted to Hong Kong because of its high quality shopping and modern image.
- Hong Kong could further develop “modern-themed attractions and activities” to attract more such women.
- Different sections of the female Chinese travel market segment will require targeted marketing activities.

Li, Mimi, Wen, Tong and Leung, Ariel. (2011). “An Exploratory Study of the Motivation of Chinese Female Outbound Tourists”. *Journal of China Tourism Research*, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 411-424.