

Overcoming Constraints on Cruise Tourism

Overcoming perceived travel constraints is the key to boosting cruise tourism, according to the SHTM's Kam Hung and a co-author. In a recently published article focused on the US cruise industry, the researchers point to intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural factors that inhibit tourists from committing to cruise vacations. Yet these constraints, they argue, can be overcome by tailor-made marketing that addresses the concerns of potential cruise tourists who are currently lost to the industry.

What Stops People from Taking Cruises?

Cruise tourism, the researchers note, is growing at a healthy pace around the world but still lags far behind land-based tourism in its share of the overall tourism market. Less than ten percent of all tourist arrivals are by sea, even though a majority of adults in the United States – to take just one example – are “interested in taking a cruise vacation”. How, then, has this situation come about?

The researchers suggest that certain factors could be constraining potential cruisers from actually committing to a cruise. Three broad classes of constraints emerge from the researchers' analysis: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints. Intrapersonal constraints are the “psychological conditions of an individual including their personality, interest and attitude” towards cruising. Interpersonal constraints, in contrast, relate to the interaction between a potential cruise tourist “and others, such as their family and friends”. Structural constraints are “external factors in the environment, such as lack of facilities” that can frustrate potential cruisers.

All three types of constraint, argue the researchers, are potentially negotiable in the sense that the individual actively considers and makes decisions about them, following the intrapersonal, interpersonal, structural sequence, deciding at each stage whether certain

constraints are insurmountable or not. This essentially means that a decision not to take a cruise is not the only conceivable outcome of encountering a constraint. Rather, there could be a range of outcomes depending on how significant certain constraints are considered to be, in relation to all others.

Focus on the US Cruise Industry

Focusing on the mature US market, the researchers first conducted in-depth interviews with cruise passengers in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, a major cruise embarkation point. Having spoken to the 53 interviewees, the researchers then developed a questionnaire to capture the three types of constraints, and pilot tested it on a sample of 293 undergraduate students. The final result was an online survey aimed at the target market for cruise tourism: people older than 25 years with annual household incomes of US\$25,000 or more.

With 897 responses from non-cruisers and cruisers alike, the online survey was aimed at developing a scale on which to measure the significance of various constraints. Of more immediate consequence here are the findings from the pilot study, which will most certainly be of benefit to cruise industry marketers.

Cruisers and Non-Cruisers Have Different Concerns

Not surprisingly, the interviewed cruisers indicated that structural constraints were most significant to them. For instance, they might not have had enough time off work to enjoy a cruise or at best may only have been able to take a cruise once a year. In contrast, the “non-cruisers reported more intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints than cruisers”. This, the researchers write, is significant because “the presence of intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints may frustrate people's intention to cruise even before attempting to surmount structural constraints.

Consider this sequence. If a person were to consider the intrapersonal constraint that they might worry about security on the cruise ship but manage to negotiate their way around that obstacle, they might stop considering the scenario when they have the interpersonal realisation that they don't socialise well with strangers. These considerations, taken together, might also be enough to make the person decide against a cruise, even before they consider whether they can overcome the structural constraint of actually having enough time to take a vacation.

This apparent hierarchy of constraints should have some bearing on how marketers approach people who have never taken a cruise, with more emphasis needed on addressing what could be described as concerns arising from a lack of knowledge about what a cruise can offer. From a broader perspective, the researchers note that the specific constraints mentioned by the interviewees "shed some light on why only a small portion of North Americans go on a cruise even though most of them are interested in cruising".

Constraints Can be Overcome

A key point to remember about constraints on any form of tourism is that they can be overcome, although not always in the most obvious ways. Some of the interviewees, for instance, mentioned that "they did not go on a cruise because of a lack of a companion". One direct remedy for this would be to offer incentives for potential cruisers to bring along their friends or family. The researchers also suggest the viability of redirecting focus from individuals to "promoting cruise vacations to organisations, interest clubs, or retirement communities to generate group travel interest".

Another significant concern was that work responsibilities reduced the likelihood of taking a cruise. The researchers suggest that cruise lines could overcome this by offering Internet access onboard, allowing those with ongoing responsibilities to work as they cruise. Again from an alternative perspective, marketers could promote cruising to corporations as "a reward for employees' hard work and/or improving their work efficiency". A

further possibility is the promotion of cruise ships as venues for "conferences, business meetings, celebrations and weddings", which would encompass both personal and business-related constraints.

Ultimately, the researchers suggest that promoting cruises in these ways will help people overcome the constraints they currently perceive. It will certainly give non-cruisers the incentive to move past intra- and interpersonal constraints, and focus more on the possibilities to be found onboard. The objective should always be to explore untapped market segments, in both North America and around the world.

Points to Note

- The cruise industry is growing worldwide but its potential is yet to be achieved.
- Intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural factors constrain potential cruise tourists.
- In the US, non-cruisers are mainly constrained by intrapersonal and interpersonal factors.
- Marketers can either overcome these constraints or redirect their efforts to explore new market segments.

Hung, Kam and Petrick, James F. (2009). Developing a measurement scale for constraints to cruising. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp. 206-228.